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## Diaspora as Nation: Examining the Transnational Mobility of Syrian Armenians during Wartime

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# Diaspora as Nation:

Examining the Transnational Mobility of Syrian Armenians during Wartime

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
Sosi Segal Lepejian

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
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## Introduction

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A young Syrian recently told me, “We always welcomed refugees; we never thought it would be us.” This sentiment refers to Syria’s history of welcoming refugees from conflicts throughout the region. She mentioned Palestinians arriving during the Nakba and Iraqis fleeing war in their own country. Like most of us, Syrians never thought they would be forced to flee their country. This conversation brought me back to where I began this project – wondering about these groups that have sought refuge in Syria over the years.

As an Armenian American, I never thought I would end up writing this project about Armenians. In truth, I was uncomfortable with the idea because I felt that we Armenians were always writing about our own situation. However, during a migration class I became interested in the idea of diaspora and transnationality and how they might affect the experiences of diasporic communities faced with forced migration. Given the immense international focus on the Syrian Refugee Crisis, my interest in diaspora led me to want to explore the experiences of diasporic communities in Syria. I thought immediately of the Armenians and the Palestinians who, now driven from Syria by war, arrived under similar circumstances.

These communities now become twice-displaced populations, as they already comprised what Robin Cohen (2008) calls “victim diasporas.” A victim diaspora is created by a “dispersal following a traumatic event in the homeland, to two or more foreign destinations” (Cohen 2008, 2). Khachig Tölölyan (1996) describes diaspora similarly, writing, “The paradigmatic diaspora forms due to coercion that leads to the uprooting and resettlement outside the boundaries of the homeland of large numbers of people, often of entire communities’ (12). The Palestinian diaspora formed relatively recently, following the Nakba in 1948, and then the Palestinians suffered further displacements in the exodus following the 1967 War. Armenians, on the other

hand, have existed in diaspora for more than a thousand years, though their “traumatic event” is generally considered to be the Armenian Genocide, which began in 1915 and fundamentally altered the situation and identity of diasporic Armenians.

Initially, I hoped to write comparatively about Syrian Armenians and Syrian Palestinians, given their shared but dramatically different experiences as diasporic communities in Syria. Whereas Armenians enjoy the legal privileges of citizenship and economic status, Palestinians have remained relatively marginal, in part due to the expectation of a return to Palestine. Additionally, Armenians today have access to a diasporic center through their relationship with the Republic of Armenia, while Palestinians remain exiled from their homeland. It became clear, however, that such a comparative study would prove too expansive for this yearlong project, and thus the subject of the project became the Armenians. Through this endeavor, I have grown appreciative of the Armenian (and non-Armenian) scholars who have undertaken the task of documenting the experiences of the Armenian people. I have realized that if we did not record our own history, no one would, and thus we would not exist.

As I have previously stated, we often focus on the Armenian Genocide as the founding moment of the Armenian diaspora, but the origins of the diaspora can be traced as far back as the sixth century AD to large-scale deportations by the Byzantine emperor (Cohen 2008, 49). Since then, diaspora has become the permanent state of the Armenian nation, even prior to the deportations and massacres of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In conceiving of geographically isolated Armenian communities around the world as forming a nation, I refer to these communities’ and individuals’ self-identification with a national group. In declaring their Armenianness, these diasporic Armenians claim membership of the Armenian nation, “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited

and sovereign” (Anderson 2006, 6). In fact, though the geographic isolation creates greater physical distance between members of the transnation, this does not create a situation unique to the deterritorialized nation. Benedict Anderson (2006) writes that the nation “is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). This characterization is equally true of the nation-state as of the transnation. When I refer to the Armenian nation as a transnation, I emphasize the fact that “Armenia” exists within a transnational space, transcending the spatial limitations of nation-state borders.

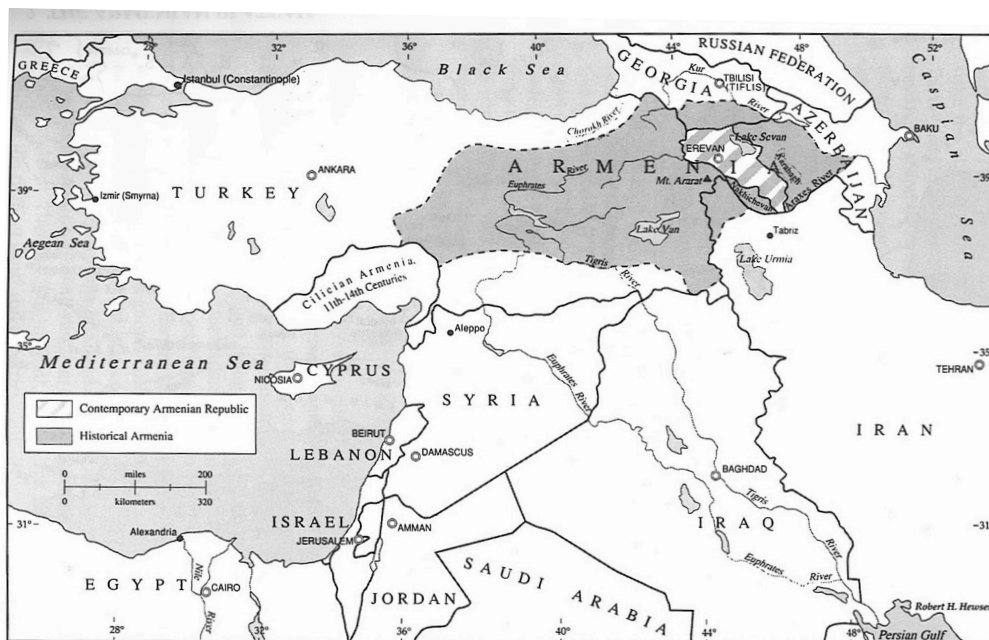
Like any nation, the Armenian transnation is a diverse body divided by strong political differences. The politics of the global Armenian community are complicated by the simultaneous existence of strong nationalistic sentiment and these deep and divisive political differences. It is critical to acknowledge that, “the transnation’s different segments, though temporarily united by crisis, do not share the same political goals and principles” (Tölölyan 2000, 123).

Nonetheless, since the Armenian Genocide, the Armenian transnation seems to be in a protracted state of crisis, uniting differing factions in the fight for the recognition of the Armenians’ long-denied trauma and survival. Now, with the violence of war once again threatening the Armenians in Syria, it would seem that Armenian communities are faced with yet another crisis around which to unite and mobilize. How will belonging to this nation unbounded by geographic space affect the mobility of Syrian Armenians when confronted with war at home in Syria? Will they move primarily within transnational Armenian spaces or will their movement be delineated by traditionally defined national boundaries?

In my first chapter, I outline the organizing institutions and networks within the Armenian diaspora and discuss the diaspora’s links to the Republic of Armenia. We must note



that, while the diaspora refers to Armenian communities outside of Armenia, the transnation “includes all diasporic communities *and* the homeland... Thus the populations of the diaspora, of the Republic of Armenia, and of the Republic of (Nagorno- or Nagorny-) Karabagh<sup>1</sup>... are together considered the Armenian transnation” (Tölölyan 2000, 130-31, note 4). I begin my study of transnational Armenian institutions by examining the organization of Armenian communities under Ottoman dominion. Though Armenians in the Ottoman Empire lived within their historic homeland in Western Armenia,<sup>2</sup> I characterize them as part of the Armenian diaspora as they had long existed as a minority under foreign rule. This understanding of Ottoman Armenian communities allows me to trace the evolution and persistence of Armenian diasporic institutions, beginning during a time when Armenians had no politically recognized



homeland.<sup>3</sup>

Fig. 1. (Hewsen 1997:3; Panossian 2006:xviii)

<sup>1</sup> Nagorno-Karabagh is the disputed territory between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The territory is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan, but a majority of the population is Armenian.

<sup>2</sup> Fig. 1 shows the historic Armenian homeland and the small portion that remains the Republic of Armenia. Western Armenia refers to the land in what is now eastern Turkey, to the west of the Republic of Armenia.

<sup>3</sup> While Western Armenia was ruled by the Ottoman Empire, Eastern Armenians fell within the Russian Empire.

My second chapter contextualizes the Armenian presence in Syria, particularly in Aleppo. Syrian Armenians are primarily the descendants of Ottoman Armenian refugees who fled the Armenian Genocide during World War I. In this chapter, I highlight some of the institutions discussed in Chapter I and how they persisted and were reestablished after the near destruction of the Armenian community. The construction of a post-genocide Armenian community in Syria serves as a case study of the institutional and organizational strength of the Armenian diaspora. Additionally, tracing the diasporic organizations that settled and developed in Syria with the Armenian refugees allows us to examine the transnational reach and participation of ordinary Syrian Armenians today. This inquiry into participation in transnational organizations then suggests how Syrian Armenians could move within transnational Armenian spaces as they attempt to flee the war in Syria.

The third chapter brings me to the fundamental questions in this project. Having discussed the institutional structure and individual social networks within the Armenian transnation and having provided evidence of their role in ensuring Armenian survival in Syria, I seek to understand if and how these networks are mobilized today in the case of displaced Syrian Armenians. This chapter primarily relates the experiences of Syrian Armenian refugees who I have interviewed throughout the past year in an attempt to understand in what ways their experiences of war and migration have been shaped by diaspora and transnationality.

I hope this project can shed some light more generally on the experience of diaspora and how the existential threat of exile and assimilation may be met with institutional organization and resistance. We may ask what came first – whether these institutions emerged in response to such a threat or if they existed already and needed only to be mobilized. In the case of Syria, I will discuss how the community responded to genocide with the construction of an institutionally

organized community. However, these institutions existed in the Ottoman Empire and the wider diaspora prior to the Genocide. Though they were damaged, the blueprint for nationalistic reconstruction existed. Had the Armenians not lived as diasporic, minority communities under Ottoman rule, would they have been equipped to rebuild as they did?

Through the resilience of the Armenian nation, we see how a people can survive as a permanent diaspora – as a deterritorialized nation – maintaining itself through nationalism and strong institutional organization. I will explore whether these means of survival remain intact in today's Armenian diaspora and if they serve to facilitate the forced migration of Syrian Armenians fleeing the war in Syria.

## Chapter I: Transnational Organization

**1915  
NEVER AGAIN**

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Armenian Missionary Association of America  
Armenian Catholic Eparchy of US and Canada  
ACYOA, AGBU YPGNY,  
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JUSTICE  
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EVERY ARMENIAN in the greater New York region needs to be a part of the annual commemoration of the Armenian Genocide in New York City

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THE ARMENIAN  
GENOCIDE**

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Brooklyn, NY (corner of Coney Island Ave. and Brighton Beach Ave.)  
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New Jersey Armenian Churches call Leo Manuelian at  
917.418.3940 (cell) or 201.746.0409 (home)

[WWW.KOFV.ORG/MAIN/APRIL232017](http://WWW.KOFV.ORG/MAIN/APRIL232017)

Fig. 2 (Knights & Daughters of Vartan 2017)

The image above (Fig. 2) was circulating on social media in the week leading up to this year's 102<sup>nd</sup> anniversary commemoration of the Armenian Genocide, observed yearly on April 24th. What first struck me about the flyer was its assertion that “Every Armenian in the greater New York region needs to be a part of the annual commemoration of the Armenian Genocide in

New York City.” The flyer promotes participation in the event as a necessity for any Armenian for whom attendance is physically feasible. It calls on the reader’s identity – their membership of that imagined group that unites all who call themselves “Armenian.” As we see in this flyer, and will see throughout this project in discussions of Armenian philanthropy, national identity and membership carry with them responsibilities and obligations. Despite the contentious and at times violent divisions within Armenian communities, Armenians are expected and compelled to unite over shared trauma and survival. Politically, diasporic Armenians are encouraged to fight until justice is served and our governments recognize the suffering of our nation during the Genocide.

Central to this chapter are the institutions through which these Armenians are expected to make their contributions. This poster represents the union of various spheres of transnational Armenian organization. Looking at the list of sponsors and participating organizations provides a preview of the institutional structure that I will discuss in this chapter. The credited groups include general NGOs, lobbies, political parties, branches of the Church, and social organizations. I will reference many of these groups specifically throughout the course of this chapter, and the organizations will fit more generally into the structures that I outline.

Despite the Armenian and the international communities’ insistence on the Armenian Genocide as a defining national moment, it is important to note that the Armenian diaspora and the displacement to which it alludes far predate the genocide. By the time the Armenian communities of Turkey came under Ottoman rule, they had long been exiled from parts of their historic homeland. Acknowledging this long existing diaspora allows us to examine diasporic Armenian communities prior to the genocide and understand some of the institutional structures that sustained the survival of the Armenian people as a nation. Beginning any discussion of the

Armenian diaspora and its history with the Genocide fails to acknowledge and comprehend some of the very structures through which Armenians have ensured national survival.

Strong institutional organization has been essential to the continued existence of an Armenian transnation. In this chapter, I outline the role and development of key institutions within the Armenian diaspora. Primarily, I discuss the importance of the millet system under the Ottoman Empire, and I highlight the organizational function of the Apostolic Church, political parties, and nongovernmental organizations since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Looking to the history of the Armenian diaspora prior to the twentieth century provides insight into the complex institutional structures that persist within the transnation and that promote the survival of an Armenian national identity. I argue that, prior to the Armenian Genocide, the Armenian diaspora in the Ottoman Empire had strong institutions through the millet system and its parochial structure, providing a solid basis for the formation of institutions that would preserve Armenian nationality in newly formed diasporic communities after 1922. I expect that this tradition of strong institutional organization in the diaspora contributes to the effectiveness of transnational support for Syrian Armenians.

As this chapter develops and addresses the current state of the diaspora, I will discuss the transnational spaces within which diasporic Armenians operate today. In a 2000 article, Khachig Tölölyan lists populations of Armenians in the diaspora as:

Russia (nearly 2 million), the United States (800,000), Georgia (400,000), France (250,000), the Ukraine (150,000), Lebanon (105,000), Iran (ca. 100,000), Syria (70,000), Argentina (60,000), Turkey (60,000), Canada (40,000), and Australia (30,000). There are some twenty other communities with smaller populations, ranging from 25,000 down to 3,000, in Britain, Greece, Germany, Brazil, Sweden, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, the Gulf Emirates, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, Romania, Bulgaria, Venezuela, Hungary, Uzbekistan, and Ethiopia. (107)

In order to understand the context of Syrian Armenian migration during the war, we must consider the organizing principles of the diaspora and the strength of ties between disparate Armenian communities. We must consider to what extent the communities listed engage with the diaspora, with the homeland, and with one another. I posit that, despite threats of extermination and assimilation, Armenians have persisted as a nation through the strength of their local and transnational organization. For this reason, I will begin by discussing the structure of Armenian communities under Ottoman rule.

### The Millet

In the Ottoman Empire, non-Muslim religious communities were organized and allowed a considerable degree of self-governance under the millet system. Through this system, the Armenian patriarchate was granted jurisdiction over Armenian communities<sup>4</sup> in the Ottoman Empire and served as mediator between the community and the Ottoman government (Sanjian 1965, 32). The strong organizational structure within the millet and the millet's constitutionalization present key moments in the Armenian community's transnational organization.

The Ottoman government established the millet around 1461 with the elected patriarch of Istanbul presiding over religious and civil issues (Sanjian 1985, 32-33; Tölölyan 2000, 117). "The patriarch, while subordinate in spiritual matters to the Catholicos of Echmiadzin and the Catholicos of Sis, was the independent head of the civil administration for members of his church in the Ottoman empire" (Davison 1963, 120). As the intermediary between the Ottoman

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<sup>4</sup> The Armenian patriarchate was responsible for Orthodox monophysites, also including Syrian Jacobite, Coptic, and Abyssinian communities (Sanjian 1965: 33).

government and the millet, the patriarch ruled over the different bishoprics of the Armenian Church within the empire, and all Armenians were required to register marriages, births, deaths, and travel with the Ottoman bureaucracy through the patriarch. At this point in time, Armenians were already dispersed throughout the world, but the patriarchate of Istanbul ruled over the largest population of Armenians in the world (Sanjian 1985, 34). The organization of the Armenian millet under the Ottoman Empire, therefore, accounted for a major portion of the Armenian diaspora.

Under the millet system, any civil rights were dependent on enrollment in a recognized community. The organizational structure, therefore, was forced on many members of the community, and the Armenian ruling class could easily oppress the Armenian people. Additionally, the millet's economic commitment to the sultan was not adjusted in the event that the community lost members. Thus, the patriarch strictly monitored the Armenian community in order to secure financial contributions (Sanjian 1965, 34). Within this system, the ecclesiastical hierarchy imposed what Middle East historian Roderic Davison (1963) describes as "legal and financial tyranny" (115). Armenian bankers and administrators conspired with the bureaucratic system to exploit of the Armenian community (Davison 1963, 118).

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, power over the Armenian millet began to shift from the Church to a group of aristocrats – bankers and government officials – who would be called amiras. The amiras wielded power over the patriarchate due to the millet's financial dependence on their wealth. This created a more oligarchic system within the millet (Sanjian 1965, 36; Davison 1963, 120). Armenian historian Avedis Sanjian (1965) writes, "In actual fact, they were more powerful than the officially recognized patriarch himself, who more often than not was their appointee. As



he was often called to office and deposed by the sultan on their recommendation, the patriarch could rarely take any step without their sanction” (36-7).

Sanjian traces the beginning of democratization and constitutionalization of the millet to the patriarchal election of 1764, for which the amiras “[invited] a national assembly – consisting of ecclesiastics, chiefs of the trade guilds, intellectuals, and leaders of the common people of the capital, more than one thousand individuals in all – to ratify their choice” (37). However, Sanjian (1965) claims, “The real challenge to the absolute rule of the amiras began in the late 1830’s” with what became a populist “anti-amira movement” (37-8). This movement marks the beginning of a transition to a more democratic and constitutional system.

Davison (1963) argues that a dispute over the establishment of an Armenian college in 1838 caused a rift within the amiras that allowed an opening for the artisans. The amiras were split, with “the *sarrafs*, or moneylenders, bankers, and great merchant” on one side and “Armenian notables who held such official Ottoman posts as imperial architect, director of the mint, and superintendent of the imperial powder works” on the other (Davison 1963, 120). Siding with the notables, the artisans took advantage of the divided amira class but struggled financially without the support of the bankers (Davison 1963, 120). Through this populist movement, the artisan class was able to secure popular rule through an edict, but failed to effectively govern. Sanjian (1965) writes, “it soon became apparent, however, that the artisans lacked the competence and constitutional powers to make a popular administration effective” (39). Though the artisans gave up their council, the movement had success in disseminating a strong desire for popular rule, leading to a new council formed by the patriarch in 1844, half bankers and half artisans, “to share with the patriarch the administrative and executive functions of the millet” (Sanjian 1965, 39; Davison 1963, 121). In the next few years, further

democratically elected councils were established under the patriarch to handle the administration of different sectors of community life. Sanjian signals the creation of these councils and the increasingly complex governing system as the beginning of constitutional government within the Armenian millet. He writes, “This growing administrative machinery accentuated the need for defining the rights and obligations and the mutual relations of the various bodies; in short, the need was urgently felt for a comprehensive written constitution” (39). However, even before the introduction of a written constitution, the intricacy of the Armenian diaspora’s organization under Ottoman rule is evident.

Between 1860 and 1865, the Tanzimat reforms in the Ottoman Empire led to a reorganization of the millets’ administration and the adoption of constitutions as part of this reorganization process. These reforms led to a move away from religious administration of the non-Muslim communities and toward a more secular system for the millets (Davison 1963, 114). Davison (1963) argues that a most pressing aim of these reforms was to detach the millets from foreign intervention. The minority religious communities found their counterparts in European powers, which were compelled to interfere on behalf of their religious communities. Further, by distancing the millets from their religious allegiances, Davison believes the Tanzimat intended to create unity surrounding Ottoman identity rather than preserving the religious divides previously emphasized by the millet system (115). However, Davison (1963) argues that the reforms ultimately had the opposite effect. Because they focused on reforming the millets, which were fundamentally defined by distinct religious identity, the Tanzimat effectively reinforced divided Ottoman identity rather than unifying. Further, Davison (1963) claims the secular philosophy that made its way into the education system expedited the spread of nationalist sentiment within the millet (132).

Returning specifically to the Armenian context, the Tanzimat drove further constitutionalization of the Armenian millet, which, Sanjian (1965) claims, was the first community to pass its own written constitution utilizing the reforms passed in the Tanzimat (39). In reference to the protests that arose within the artisan class, Davison (1963) writes, “It was in the Armenian millet that the reform movement first spread extensively, and here also that the most significant changes were achieved within the elaboration of a written constitution” (120). After more conservative factions within the community rejected the first two drafts, a diverse assembly approved the constitution on May 24, 1860. However, the Ottoman government did not ratify the constitution, thus putting the laws into effect, until March 1863, after forming its own committee of Armenians to revise the 1860 constitution (Sanjian 1965, 40). Through the constitution, Sanjian (1965) states, “it was emphasized that the foundation of representative government rested on the principle of mutual rights and obligations, on the principle of equity, and that such a government derived its authority from a consensus of the majority” (41).

The sophisticated administrative structure established by the Armenian millet’s constitution is key to my understanding of the Armenian diaspora and its ability to survive through its highly organized institutional structures. “The ninety-nine articles of the constitution established the machinery for a very elaborate system of organization and administration of the millet’s ecclesiastical and civil affairs on the central, provincial, and local levels” (Sanjian 1965, 41). The intricate organizational structure seen in the Armenian millet demonstrates the community’s ability to organize and manage its own affairs under the dominant governing power. In fact, Davison (1963) claims that the Ottoman constitution of 1876 “was directly influenced by the Armenians” (134). Given the complex institutional system established within Armenian communities in the Ottoman Empire, it should not be surprising that the community

was able to organize under new host governments after the dispersal caused by the Armenian Genocide.

On the importance on the constitution, Sanjian (1965) argues, “Without a doubt, the Armenian National Constitution is a document of more than usual historical significance from the standpoint both of the development of the Ottoman millet system and of its truly great impact on the growth of the Armenian social institutions and communities throughout the Turkish dominions” (40). I will go on to discuss various key social institutions within the Armenian diaspora, many of which I believe can be traced to the institutions of Ottoman Armenians.

### The Church<sup>5</sup>

In this discussion of the millet, the Church’s central role in organizing the Armenian community is clear. Even though the Tanzimat significantly secularized the millet, its religious organization remained important. The role of the patriarch, who was the head of both religious and civil administration for the entire millet, diminished after constitutionalization but did not vanish. The structure of the patriarchate and the religious councils remained, though the reorganization left them under the authority of the representative general assembly (Davison 1963, 124). Sanjian (1965) writes:

The constitution of 1863 vested the highest legislative authority in a representative general assembly composed of 140 deputies: twenty ecclesiastics elected by the clergy of the capital, forty lay deputies from the provinces including bishoprics under the spiritual authority of the regional sees, and eighty lay deputies from the parishes of Constantinople and its suburbs. (41).

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<sup>5</sup> Though a majority of Armenians belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church, around which this section revolves, it is important to note that not all Armenians are Apostolic. There are significant minorities of Armenians practicing Catholicism and Protestantism.

Though the Armenian community throughout the Ottoman Empire elected the lay deputies, the governing system was still deeply intertwined with the Apostolic Church, which was represented by ecclesiastics in the assembly. Among other administrative duties, the assembly established through the constitution was responsible for “the election of the patriarchs of Constantinople and Jerusalem” (Sanjian 1965, 41). In addition to the legislative assembly, there were two primary councils to handle the executive authority over Armenian communities on the level of central administration (Sanjian 1965, 42). One of these councils was religious and the other civil, again demonstrating the importance of the Church in the administration of the millet.

Beyond its role in government, however, the Church has its own sophisticated structure and network. The organization and hierarchy within the Church can be seen through its division into various patriarchates, catholicosates, and bishoprics, with the unique jurisdictions of the Catholicosate of Cilicia, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Further describing the Church’s structure today, Khachig Tölölyan (2000) writes:

A transnational organization such as the Armenian Apostolic Church marks the duality of its concerns by a duality of personnel and structures. Its married priests serve local parishes for decades... The celibate priesthood acts as a mobile religious bureaucracy of robed executives; they serve as a transnational cadre, characteristically moving from one post to another. Bishops aspiring to the top positions of the diasporic church must typically serve in communities in both the Middle East and North America. (114)

The structure and hierarchy within the Church are evident. Further, the importance of serving in disparate communities prior to reaching top positions within the Church shows the Church’s emphasis on transnational operation and organization. Though religion has not been the only unifying force for diasporic Armenians, the importance of the Church as an institution within transnational Armenian spaces is clear.

In many diasporic Armenian communities a whole host of elements play into Armenian identity. William Safran (1991) writes, “Armenian ethnicity and the solidarity of the Armenian

community are based on a common religion and language, a collective memory of national independence in a circumscribed territory, and a remembrance of betrayal, persecution, and genocide... most Armenians live outside the ancestral homeland and have developed several external centers of religion and culture” (84). Political activity for Armenians has revolved largely around this issue of “remembrance of... genocide.” However, under circumstances where such political engagement is suppressed, religion takes a more significant role in the Armenian community. Tölölyan (2000) explains, “In host states where Armenian diasporic activity of any sort is forbidden and punished by imprisonment or worse, such as Turkey, diasporic life becomes primarily religious” (128).

The Church’s involvement in Armenian communities throughout the diaspora serves as both an organizing and a unifying force for diasporic Armenians. In many of these communities, religious centers serve also as general cultural centers. For example, as a child I attended Armenian school on Friday nights, where I learned to read and write and engage with Armenian culture. Though Armenian school involved little religious engagement and my immediate family was not religious, I attended these classes in an Armenian Church. Further, because of its joint local and transnational organization, the Church provides a link between isolated Armenian communities and the global Armenian diaspora.

### Political Parties

The political parties that still exist and organize Armenian communities today began as revolutionary parties in the second half of the nineteenth century. Today the primary parties remain the Hunchakian, Ramkavar, and Dashnaktsuthiun Parties. Despite tension between the conflicting political parties, the transnational operation of these parties links Armenians

throughout the diaspora and emphasizes participation in diasporic politics in addition to or instead of local politics. The organization of these parties contributes further to the organizational strength of the diaspora and the preservation of transnational ties.

The first of these revolutionary parties was the Armenakan Party, formed in Van in 1885. The party was founded by students of exiled Armenian educator Mekertitch Portugalian and inspired by his journal *Armenia*, published from France (Nalbandian 1963, 96). The journal would also become an active medium for communicating the party's ideas, as noted in the party's organizing document. This document, called the Program, contained seven detailed sections outlining the group's organization and objectives. The party was organized into districts which were represented in a Central Body and locally had committees representing different groups within the district. The organization also consisted of both active and auxiliary members. "Active members were those who paid dues and complied with the rules and regulations of the party. Auxiliary members were those who gave moral and financial support, but were not obligated to comply with party rules and regulations" (Nalbandian 1963, 98). Of the financial contributions from active members within the Ottoman Empire, 15% was distributed to the Central Body and 15% to District Committees. Members abroad had 40% of their dues designated to the Central Body (Nalbandian 1963, 98).

The Armenakans activities focused largely on preparing for revolution, as "They believed that much preliminary work had to be accomplished for this future revolution and that an immediate revolution was not desirable" (Nalbandian 1963, 99). A large part of this preparation consisted of an educational project emphasizing cultural, political, and particularly military training. Van served as the center for these activities, and the party established branches in

“Moush, Bitlis, Trebizond, and Constantinople. There were other Armenakan organizations in Persia, in Russian Transcaucasia, and in the United States” (Nalbandian 1963, 99).

Thus, we see the transnational impact of Armenian political parties dating back to the first revolutionary party in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With the publication of Armenakan ideas in France and the operation of the organization from the Middle East, to the Russian Empire, to the United States, the party served as a link between diasporic Armenian communities. However, relative to the Hunchakian and the Dashnaktsuthiun Parties, the Armenakan Party’s influence lacked transnational reach. Historian Louise Nalbandian (1963) writes, “Having less contact with the outside world, the leaders of the Armenakan Party were not versed as were the leaders of the other parties, in the socioeconomic theories of the day, nor did they advocate socialist principles. As a party they remained localized and accordingly lacked the broad appeal and the strength” of the other two parties (182). Examining these parties that remain central institutions today allows us to further understand the formal organization of diasporic Armenians.

The Hunchakian Revolutionary Party was founded in Geneva in 1887 by Russian Armenian Marxists who were “personally concerned with the living conditions of their ethnic brothers in Turkish Armenia” (Nalbandian 1963, 104). Like Armenakan, the Hunchakian Party was influenced by the journal *Armenia*, which inspired wealthy Russian Armenian students in Western Europe to come together and found the party. Of the creation of the Hunchakian Party, Nalbandian (1963) writes, “In contrast to the Armenakan Party, the six Armenian students whose headquarters was in Geneva had in mind designs for a large, powerful, active revolutionary party that would encompass the whole territory of Turkish Armenia and would have branches in the Armenian communities abroad” (107). After failing to gain support from Portugalian and thus



*Armenia*, the leaders of the new Hunchakian Party created their own publication, *Hunchak*, to begin the dissemination of their own revolutionary ideas (Nalbandian 1963, 107).

In their program, the Hunchaks outline the party's goals, methods, and organizing principles. Primary objectives for the party included a new system built upon socialism and the independence of Turkish Armenia. Of the former, Nalbandian (1963) writes, "The present state of affairs had to be destroyed by means of a revolution. Then, on the ashes of the old society, a new one might be built, based upon 'economic truths' and 'socialistic justice'" (108) Regarding independence, Nalbandian (1963) writes that the Hunchak program described Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as exploited by "the government, the aristocracy, and the capitalists through high taxes, land seizure, and the deprivation of the fruits of labor. Besides these injustices, the people were shorn of their political rights and were forced to remain silent in their position as slaves of their parasitic overlords" (108). The solution according to the Hunchak program was to guide Turkish Armenians in the fight for socialism and an independent nation. The approach of the Hunchakian Party was clear: revolution. More specifically, "The Hunchaks said that the existing social organization in Turkish Armenia could be changed by violence against the Turkish government and described the following methods: Propaganda, Agitation, Terror, Organization, and Peasant and Worker Activities" (Nalbandian 1963, 110).

Though the Hunchaks' socialist ideology faced resistance from wealthy Armenians in both the Ottoman and Russian Empires, they saw great success as they set out to recruit members from their Turkish headquarters in Constantinople. They recruited 700 members in their first seven months in the city. Membership then quickly grew in Turkey, Russia, and Persia, and the organization gained support in Europe and the United States as well (Nalbandian 1963, 117). An independent Armenia presented a unifying aspiration for many diasporic Armenians. Thus, with

strong communication and organization, revolutionary parties had the opportunity to forge solid transnational networks. These dispersed supporters of the party came together in 1890 when, “the union of the separate groups resulted in the adoption of the party’s official name, the Hunchakian Revolutionary Party” (Nalbandian 1963, 117).

Though the Hunchaks remain active today, the Dashnaktsuthiun Party has remained even more influential. In the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s, a number of revolutionary groups operated on a small scale throughout the Russian Empire. In 1890 these groups came together to form Dashnaktsuthiun, formally the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Nalbandian 1963, 150-51). The Hunchaks also briefly united with the Dashnaks in 1890 (Nalbandian 1963, 130). Like the Hunchaks, the Dashnaktsuthiun Party’s membership can be divided into “nonsocialist nationalist revolutionaries” and “Armenian socialist revolutionaries” (Nalbandian 1963, 152).

Regarding the parties continued influence, Tölölyan (2000) writes, “the largest and second-oldest political organization in the diaspora, the ARF [Dashnaktsuthiun], has branches that work in numerous spheres of quotidian diasporic life and has always had many intellectuals in its leadership and ranks... several past members and one present member of the ARF Bureau, which leads the global organization, have also been writers, and many more have been editors of the newspapers this organization funds” (128). The party sponsored publications to which Tölölyan refers further demonstrate the extensive transnational influence of these diasporic parties. All three of the active political parties today have newspapers, TV channels, and radio stations throughout the transnation. The party publications are mostly based out of the United State, Canada, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, and Armenia.

The third active Armenian party, in addition to Hunchak and Dashnak, formed slightly later. The Ramkavar, or Armenian Democratic Liberal, Party “formed in 1921 by the triple

merger of the Armenakan, of a splinter of the Hunchaks, and the Sahmanadir Ramkavar party founded in Cairo in 1908” (Migliorino 2008, 56).

All three parties were banned from the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, but upon independence in 1991, the Dashnaktsuthiun, Hunchakian, and Ramkavar parties all returned to Armenia and attempted to gain political influence. Tölölyan (2000) writes that, “Funded by the diaspora, these organizations—and especially the ARF [Dashnaktsuthiun]—were able to establish offices, start recruiting members, publish newspapers, and run (initially largely unsuccessful) candidates for public office, competing with the local, post-Soviet leadership” (123). At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these parties remained influential throughout the diaspora. Through the parties, diasporic Armenians engage in transnational diasporic politics and attempt to influence their national center.

Despite the important links that the political parties create between different Armenian communities, it is also important to recognize the strong divisions that the parties create within the transnation. As Tölölyan (2000) notes, “the transnation’s different segments, though temporarily united by crisis, do not share the same political goals and principles” (123). Particularly strong enmity between the parties comes up within the Syrian context; therefore, I will discuss this topic further in the second chapter.

## NGOs

There are a number of Armenian NGOs operating either on the local level within Armenian communities, on the transnational level within the diaspora, or both. The largest Armenian transnational organization is the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU),

founded in 1906, which has an endowment of \$300 million (Tölölyan 2000, 127; AGBU 2017).

The AGBU's mission statement reads:

The Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) is the world's largest non-profit organization devoted to upholding the Armenian heritage through educational, cultural and humanitarian programs. Each year, AGBU is committed to making a difference in the lives of 500,000 people across Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh and the Armenian diaspora...

AGBU currently operates with an annual budget of over \$46 million, made possible by our countless benefactors. Headquartered in New York City, AGBU has an active presence in 31 countries and 74 cities and addresses the needs of Armenians with traditional and progressive programs worldwide—from schools, scouts, camps and support for the arts to internships, virtual learning and young professional networks. (AGBU 2017).

AGBU plays an important role in creating a social and cultural center in Armenian communities throughout the world as well as engaging transnationally in projects for the advancement of Armenians. As mentioned in their mission statement, AGBU has fulltime private schools in Argentina, Australia, Canada, Greece, Uruguay, three in Lebanon, two in Syria, and 3 in the United States (“Schools” 2017). They also have scouting troops throughout the transnation, thus engaging diasporic Armenians in Armenian culture and nationalism.

Homenetmen, officially The Armenian General Athletic Union and Scouts, similarly connects diasporic Armenian youth with Armenianness. The organization was originally established in 1918 in Constantinople, then dispersed in 1922 and reopened in Beirut and Aleppo in 1924 and 1925 (Asbarez 2006). Like AGBU, it now operates chapters around the world. These institutions promote the cultural survival of the Armenian transnation, but also establish a concrete institutional link between isolated Armenian communities. As I will mention in my third chapter, Armenians relocating to distant, seemingly disconnected communities may find themselves engaged in a familiar transnational space through participation in AGBU or Homenetmen, both of which can be traced back to Ottoman Armenians.

In addition to these major transnational organizations, smaller organizations also operate throughout the diaspora. Tölölyan (2000) mentions, for example, the Zoryan Institute, which is based out of Massachusetts and Toronto. He refers to these as “tiny independent organizations active in some region of the transnation, like the Zoryan Institute, whose cultural contributions include the origination of the journal *Diaspora*” (Tölölyan 2000, 127). In addition to cultural organizations, there are many Armenian humanitarian organizations. Some of these will be referenced more specifically in the next section in relation to diasporic humanitarian involvement in post-Soviet Armenia, and I will discuss others in chapter 3 concerning the war in Syria.

A major focus of the transnational Armenian community, however, has been political recognition of the Armenian Genocide. Many Armenian organizations center the Armenian Genocide in their work and in Armenian identity. In the United States, we see the institutional strength of Armenian organization through two primary lobbying organizations. “The Armenian Assembly of America and the Armenian National Committee of America [are] the two successful Armenian-American lobbies operating in Washington, DC” (Tölölyan 2000, 128). These organizations, of course, do not focus solely on genocide recognition, but the emphasis does seem disproportionate. It will be interesting to examine how Armenian lobbies in the United States have responded to the crisis in Syria, where one of the oldest and largest Armenian communities has been threatened by war. Payaslian (2010) writes, “Diasporan organizations, led by the Armenian National Committee of America and the Armenian Assembly, for example, have lobbied extensively since the 1970s for U.S. genocide recognition, and issues concerning the republic were added beginning in 1988” (131). As we will see in the next section, the failing economic and social conditions in the Republic of Armenia provided another crisis around which the global diaspora would unite.

Though some of these organizations are primarily transnational and some are primarily local, even the transnational organizations have major local foci. Tölölyan (2000) writes of the importance of local involvement for transnational institutions, claiming, “In general, and paradoxically, the more successful a transnational diasporic organization is, the more it is likely to have developed local branches and services” (114). AGBU and Homenetmen are first and foremost transnational organizations, but their local engagement is evident. Their schools and youth groups connect Armenians to the transnation, but they are clearly ingrained in their local communities.

### Ties to Armenia

Links between Armenian diaspora communities throughout the world and the Republic of Armenia further demonstrate the structure of the Armenian transnation. In many ways the connection between diasporic Armenians and Yerevan is purely a symbolic, nationalistic bond. However, the institutionalization of this bond through NGOs and government agencies and its concretization through decades of migration transform the Republic of Armenia into a solid center of gravity for the Armenian diaspora. That is to say, concrete connections did not exist between the diaspora and Armenia until people began to act out of nationalism and forge social and economic networks.

Emphasizing the symbolic connection between diasporic Armenians and the Republic of Armenia, Payaslian (2010) writes, “Despite the difficulties, post-Soviet Armenia represents the current ‘spiritual homeland’ for most Armenians, although the historic homeland now in Turkey continues to survive, albeit all too vaguely, in the nation’s collective memory” (133). However, for many Armenians in the diaspora, the connection to the homeland is weakened. Armenia for

many diasporans exists not in the republic but within the transnational space that I have referenced in the previous sections. Payaslian (2010) argues that, for third and fourth generation diasporic Armenians, “The imagined homeland, now rendered foreign, is kept at a comfortable distance, a destination to be visited at leisure and a place to dispatch charity” (134).

However, despite the symbolic nature of Armenia as a homeland, the country also makes up part of a more concrete transnational network. Immigration, or *repatriation*, creates real social and familial ties between the republic and the diaspora. In his Ph.D. dissertation, historian Sevan Yousefian (2011) discusses a 1945 resolution in which the Soviet government in Moscow declares its support for Armenian repatriation. He writes, “Between 1946 and early 1949, tens of thousands of Armenians from the Near East, Europe, and North America would settle in the [Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic]... The majority were refugees who had fled the Ottoman Empire during World War I and their children, and a significant minority came from Armenian-populated villages in towns in Iran” (2).

I came across this period of mass migration during my own interviews with Syrian Armenians, as I tried to understand why these Western Armenians<sup>6</sup>, with no historical geographical ties to Armenia, felt such a connection to the republic. A Syrian Armenian told me that his aunt and her family were persuaded along with many other Armenians to move to the USSR to increase the Armenian population and prevent the USSR from combining Armenians into another, non-Armenian, state. Another Syrian Armenian provided a similar narrative. He explained that Armenians in the USSR faced the threat of becoming an autonomous region rather than a Soviet Republic. He said there was a “call for Armenians to return” and that “they were promised paradise, but many ended up in Siberia.” The sense of Armenian nationalism that

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<sup>6</sup> Refers to Armenians from Western Armenia – now eastern Turkey. For map of the historic Armenian homeland, see Fig. 2 on page 4.

unified diasporic Armenians during the formation of the revolutionary parties comes into play again here. However, this migration that initially just represents Armenian nationalism, a purely abstract relationship between the diaspora and Armenia, creates a concrete kinship connection, as individual families now exist within the transnational space joining diaspora and symbolic homeland.

In the last couple decades, the idea of repatriation has been emphasized in Armenia as a way to connect diasporans to the homeland and to support the economic development of the republic. As the Armenian Parliament discussed possible dual-citizenship laws in 2007, political scientist Anna Ohanyan (2004) considered the possible variants of such a law and what it should accomplish. She writes, “dual citizenship should be considered a mechanism to expand the global reach of Armenian statehood geographically, economically, and politically” (281). This objective suggests not only an emphasis on ‘return’ migration, but also the idea of transnational “statehood.” Ohanyan emphasizes the importance of transnational Armenian participation in the goings on of the homeland.

This transnational engagement in the homeland can be seen in the diaspora’s humanitarian interest and participation in post-Soviet Armenia. Ohanyan (2004) discusses the failures of post-Soviet Armenia to meet the social needs and rights of its citizens, as “rapid economic liberalization and privatization have progressed, producing unemployment and poverty” (282). The other side of this failure once again elicits the nationalism of the diaspora and deepens transnational Armenian networks. Ohanyan (2004) writes:

Parallel to these developments in the Republic of Armenia, the large Armenian Diaspora, both ‘old’ and ‘new,’ is emerging as a stable source of social provision to many communities inside the country. In doing so, and by carrying out on a limited scale social obligations that until recently belonged to the state, the diaspora is becoming a major transnational player affecting state–society relationships in Armenia; its impact is



captured by capital inflows in the form of remittances, diaspora-connected foreign direct investments, and philanthropic contributions. (283)

The diaspora's investment in Armenia that Ohanyan describes also came up in my interviews with Syrian Armenians. A business owner in California informed me that in 1994, when economic conditions in the Republic of Armenia were particularly desperate, he felt obligated to open offices for his company in Armenia as an investment in Armenian development.

Diaspora involvement has been a major contributor to the survival of post-Soviet Armenia. This involvement created a significant tie between the diaspora and the republic beginning in 1988, prior to independence. Military conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan and an earthquake during that year turned the diaspora's engagement towards the homeland (Payaslian 2010, 130). Payaslian (2010) argues, "The rapid and massive response in technical and material aid to the earthquake of December 1988 demonstrated the attachment that diasporan Armenians felt or hoped to feel toward Armenia" (131). The need for diaspora involvement only increased with the subsequent economic failure and need for development that accompanied independence in 1991. As I briefly noted in the previous section, at this point Armenian lobbies in the United States also began to work for economic development and humanitarian aid in the Republic of Armenia (Payaslian 2010, 131). As Ohanyan (2004) states, "Transnational non-state actors, such as international developmental and humanitarian organizations, diaspora NGOs, and individuals, have all been actively involved in Armenia, seeking to develop projects in different sectors, including agricultural development, reforestation, and health care" (283). Financially, Ohanyan (2004) cites reports that in 2003 over 20% of Armenia's GDP came from remittances from the diaspora (283).

American Armenian businessman Kirk Kerkorian and his Lincy Foundation are one example of private diasporic engagement in homeland development. Of Kerkorian's charitable

foundation, Ohanyan (2004) writes, “In 2005, the US-based Lincy Foundation allocated \$60 million for three infrastructure projects... This commitment [followed] Lincy’s successful completion of a \$150-million infrastructure renovation project... In addition, the Lincy Foundation provided \$20 million in loans to small and medium-sized enterprises in Armenia” (283). Though he was born in the United States, Kerkorian has become an important philanthropic figure within the Armenian diaspora. In this case, the Lincy Foundation’s projects in Armenia demonstrate commitment within the diaspora to the symbolic homeland and to both utilize and establish networks between Armenia and the diaspora.

On the other side, the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund was established by the Armenian president in 1992 in order to raise money from the diaspora and support development in Armenia. According to its website, “It is a unique institution whose mission is to unite Armenians in Armenia and overseas to overcome the country’s difficulties and to help establish sustainable development in Armenia and Artsakh” (Hayastan All Armenian Fund 2017). The fund “spent approximately US\$75 million on 138 different infrastructure projects in Armenia and Nagorno Karabagh in the first ten years of its operations” (Ohanyan 2004, 283). Then, further establishing Armenia’s attempt to connect with and benefit from the diaspora, the republic established the Ministry of Diaspora in 2008 in order to support “the Armenia-Diaspora partnership.” The ministry’s mission statement claims:

The main objective of the Armenia-Diaspora partnership is to protect the fundamental rights, liberties and legal interests of Armenians in the historical Homeland or abroad... to defend the qualities of Armenian national identity, that is, preservation of Armenian identity...

The Ministry also contributes to the implementation of educational projects...

The Ministry assists in the participation of Diaspora Armenian entrepreneurs in economic projects in the Republic of Armenia... One of the most significant objectives of the Ministry is to promote the self-organization of the disorganized sector of the Diaspora...

as well as the creation and application of clear and specific procedures for Diaspora Armenians to obtain dual citizenship. (RA Ministry of Diaspora 2016)

Like the Church, NGOs, and political parties, this government institution is concerned with the preservation of Armenianness throughout the world. The Ministry of Diaspora actively works to create links between Armenia and the diaspora, even among those, it seems, who do not strongly identify with Armenia, as the mission also promotes “establishment and radicalization of Armenian identity among [foreign] Armenians” (RA Ministry of Diaspora 2016). Further, the mission statement demonstrates the Armenian government’s interest in an organized diaspora, the importance of which I have been addressing throughout this chapter.

Also referenced in the above mission statement is the focus on “repatriation of Diaspora Armenians.” Though Payaslian (2010) claims that “Only a small number of enterprising adventurers chose to migrate to Armenia” (134), this trend seems to be slowly increasing. In an article in which she discusses this phenomenon of “return” to the homeland and interviews some of these “adventurers,” Sossie Kasbarian (2009) refers to these migrants as sojourners. She writes, “Sojourners embody transnational existence, acting as a bridge between the ‘step-homeland’ and the diaspora, as well as being the physical embodiment of their encounter” (Kasbarian 2009, 376). As I discussed in reference to previous generations of migrants, these diasporic Armenians choose to repatriate and reinforce networks between the republic and the diaspora.

Like the migrants of 1945-1948, current repatriates are motivated by nationalism and have the effects of solidifying transnational bonds. Kasbarian (2009) argues, “The Republic of Armenia is viewed as the seat of contemporary and future Armenianness, and the long-term sojourners are therefore trying, to varying extents, to experience, embrace, align themselves with, and shape this version” (376). However, repatriates experience major cultural differences

between Armenia and their diasporic communities. Yet, from her interviews Kasbarian (2009) concludes, “Some of the sojourners have long-term goals: ‘I may not be completely at home here but I know my children will be’ (Minas, Lebanese Armenian)” (376). This desire to pass on Armenian identity to their children makes up a large part of the nationalism that has kept Armenia alive in diaspora.

Since Kasbarian’s article on “sojourners,” the NGO Repat Armenia has emerged as a major player in the repatriation movement. Repat Armenia was founded in 2012 with the aim to “Inform, initiate and actively champion the return of high-impact (professional, entrepreneurial) individuals and families to Armenia to secure the future development of the Armenian nation” (Repat Armenia Foundation 2016). The group encourages repatriation among diasporic Armenians and supports the integration process for those who decide to immigrate. They claim:

For those who are considering a move to Armenia, we offer one-on-one consultations, networking opportunities during informal monthly events and to connect you to the Armenian Repatriates Network. We also assist you with introducing you to professional services providers that can help you with employment, setting up a business or other aspects of integration. We are here to help you!

With the passage of the dual citizenship law 2007, allowing these repatriates to apply for Armenian citizenship, links between Armenia and the diaspora continue to grow stronger. A few Armenian American repatriates that I spoke to in Yerevan explained the responsibility they felt to support their homeland’s development by moving and working in Armenia. Several of these individuals had come for short-term internships arranged through the Birthright Armenia program and then decided to stay and work.

However, despite the appearance of strengthening networks between the diaspora and Armenia, Payaslian (2010) argues, “The American Armenian community’s inability to address

the problems in Armenia has clearly indicated that the diaspora and the homeland are indeed two separate entities, each with its own, and often conflicting, interests and priorities” (131-32).

He then ends more optimistically, “On the positive side, it is possible that an independent Armenia can re-connect some future generations of diasporan Armenians with the homeland even if in its territorially truncated form” (Payaslian 2010, 134). Despite differences and conflicting objectives within the diaspora and the Republic of Armenia, the history of migration and humanitarian involvement, both by NGOs and individual diasporans, has created a transnational network connecting Armenians across the globe.

All of the institutions outlined in this chapter have created transnational ties between geographically isolated Armenian communities. In the rest of this project, I will explore the role these institutions play in preserving Armenian identity and their effectiveness in uniting the transnation. I will look first at the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide in Syria, and then I will examine the impact of transnationality on current Syrian Armenians as they flee war in Syria.

## Chapter II: Syrian ‘Armenia’

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My interviewees have emphasized to me the importance of the Armenian community in Aleppo as a first major post-genocide Armenian community, *kaghut*. They have explained to me that this diasporic community must be preserved due to its special status, one that it achieved as the first major stop along deportation routes during the Armenian Genocide. I have heard that some diasporic Armenians in Los Angeles have gone so far as to argue that Armenians should not be leaving Syria during the war, though those I interviewed generally disagreed with this stance and recognized the privilege in making such an argument from the comforts of life in the United States.

The development of Armenian communities in Syria post-Genocide provides a case study for my argument in Chapter I and contextualizes the presence of Armenian communities and institutions in Syria for Chapter III. Nicola Migliorino (2006) argues, “throughout the nine decades after the genocide, the Armenian determination to maintain a distinct communal cultural identity has remained one of the key defining traits of their presence in Syria, almost a communal ‘mission’” (para. 8). How did Armenian refugees in Syria after 1915 avoid assimilation in order to preserve national identity, and what role did existing institutions play in reestablishing Armenian culture and community? And, how did present day Armenian communities fit into Syrian society prior to 2011?

### Establishing a Post-Genocide Armenian Community in Mandatory Syria

Like the Syrian Armenians that I interviewed, historian Keith Watenpaugh (2006) references Aleppo’s position along the displacement route, citing a 1923 estimate by the French Mandate government. This evaluation quotes that roughly 200,000 Armenians passed through

Aleppo as they fled Anatolia, with 75,000 settling in the province of Aleppo and 50,000 settling in Aleppo proper (Watenpaugh 2006:281, note 5). Watenpaugh (2006) writes, “The vast bulk of these displaced individuals—more than 50,000—found refuge in and around Aleppo, altering it forever... The ambiguous and vulnerable status of the Armenians in Syria forced community representatives and leaders to mobilize political and cultural resources and to accept governmental and nongovernmental, paternal, albeit often-altruistic aid to survive” (281). I will examine how this Armenian community in Syria managed to reestablish Armenian diasporic life after displacement, tracing the institutions that I discussed in Chapter I and acknowledging the role of the “paternal” aid that Watenpaugh discusses.

Setting up his analysis of the relationship between Armenian refugees in Syria and the French mandate, Watenpaugh (2006) asks questions that have arisen in my own project as well:

How did the Ottoman Armenians, a community with a history of complex objective institutions, including religious hierarchies, political formations of both the Right and Left, middle-class social and philanthropic organizations, and youth movements like the Boy and Girl Scouts, re-create these institutions in a transnational diaspora and colonial context? Moreover, does a parallel exist between the way the Armenian community of Syria sought to build a relationship with the French and the modes of communal cooperation between Armenians and the prewar Ottoman state? (282)

He focuses primarily on the second question and the relationship between Armenian refugees and European powers in Syria. Neglecting to focus on the function of “complex objective [Armenian] institutions,” Watenpaugh argues for the role of Armenian cooperation with the French and with foreign missionaries as a primary reason for national survival. These foreign interests played an important role in supporting the reconstruction of Armenian community life in Syria; therefore, I will briefly discuss their relationship to the Ottoman Armenian refugees. However, my primary interest lies in the Ottoman Armenian institutions that arrived with the refugees and recreated Ottoman Armenian structures in Syria.

Watenpaugh (2006) argues that support for Armenian refugees provided a platform upon which the French Mandate could justify its legitimacy in Syria (286). The French granted Armenians Syrian citizenship in 1923 and then their political status in Syria was further solidified when the Mandate officially recognized Armenians' right to vote in assembly elections in 1928 (Migliorino 2008, 54; Watenpaugh 2006, 287). This extension of citizenship is framed as a humanitarian move given that Armenians were stateless refugees following "the drawing of new boundaries" in the Middle East (Watenpaugh 2006:287). However, additionally explaining this move, the French saw the opportunity with the Armenians to introduce a large Christian population into the voting arena in order to combat the electoral power of the National Bloc, a party that sought Syrian independence from the French (Watenpaugh 2006, 287; Migliorino 2008, 55). The religious leadership within the Armenian community supported the French in their political aims, coming into conflict with the Armenian nationalist parties introduced in Chapter I (Migliorino 2008, 56).

Discussing the involvement of missionaries with the post-genocide Armenian refugees in Syria, Watenpaugh (2006) argues that these European missionaries became invested in the advancement and preservation of a distinct Armenian community, "for racially inflected humanitarian reasons" (285). Because of their status as an ethnically and religiously distinct community in Syria, the international community deemed these Christian Armenian refugees worthy of foreign protection (Watenpaugh 2006, 285). Boldly, Watenpaugh proposes crediting Armenian preservationism to this Western intervention. He writes, "Crucially, it could be argued that this notion of rescuing the community was unprecedented in the Armenian community and only existed as a peculiar feature of missionary paternalism" (Watenpaugh 2006, 285). He claims that at this early state of Armenian settlement in Syria, the Armenian community itself was not



involved in this attempted preservation of the “race.” Armenians who ended up among non-Armenian communities were “rescued” either by missionaries or family members attempting to locate and reunite post-genocide, not due to a larger Armenian movement (285).

Watenpaugh (2006) then further underscores the role of the mandatory government in the survival of Armenianness in Syria. He writes, “The French, drawing upon the support of international organizations, settled the refugees in separate distinct communities” (Watenpaugh 2006, 291). Watenpaugh (2006) suggests that it is this distinction and separation created by the French that established a uniquely Armenian identity within Armenian communities in Syria. He argues:

Had the community been allowed a ‘natural’ process of integration and assimilation, the profile of the Armenian community in the increasingly violent urban politics of Syria would have been significantly reduced. Instead, by navigating the fluid uncertainties of French colonial domination, and later those of the equally perilous independent postwar regimes, the Armenian community *survived*—perhaps the ultimate act of resistance. (Watenpaugh 2006, 287).

Both the missionaries and the French colonial power in Syria contributed to this cultural ‘survival’ that Watenpaugh references. The missionaries and the mandatory government were both invested in the success and cultural isolation of this Christian minority group in order to maintain influence over their colonial project in Syria. Watenpaugh (2006) describes the French approach to refugees as “intended to integrate the Armenians by providing them with property, a trade, or a profession in a way that intensified their linkage with the French state, the local economy, and agriculture” (289). He also discusses the architectural transformation of refugee camps in Aleppo. Under the direction of the French, the camps were converted into connected urban neighborhoods, “planned communities, the very forms of which reflected the intention of their planners to formulate modern, efficient social spaces that would assure the class ascendance of their inhabitance” (Watenpaugh 2006, 290). Through these tactics, Watenpaugh (2006)

argues, colonial forces shaped their survival of Armenian refugee communities in Syria. If we are to understand Armenian survival as a defining feature of post-genocide Armenian identity, Watenpaugh's (2006) argument suggests that Armenian identity is predicated on the external force of colonial design.

On the contrary, however, Migliorino (2008) focuses on the Armenian side of the equation within the French Mandate and claims, "From the very start of their new life as refugees, the Armenians worked hard to reconstruct an Armenian world in the post-Ottoman Levant" (45). This directly opposes the suggestion that the impulse to reconstruct and preserve a distinct identity was externally imposed. Further, the argument that Watenpaugh presents fails to account for the Ottoman Armenian institutional organization that he himself questions but does not return to address. In addition to the organizing function of these institutions, the argument fails to acknowledge the nationalistic purpose of such institutions as discussed in my first chapter, particularly in the context of the revolutionary political parties. Migliorino (2008) then argues, "the determination to reconstruct was stemming from the Armenian strong non-assimilatory communal solidarity, or from the awareness of the fact that the Genocide could have indeed wiped out Armenian culture altogether" (46). His argument that the Armenian community was independently dedicated to national preservation coincides with the nationalistic tendencies that we have observed within Armenian diasporic institutions both before and after 1915. However, if we reject only Watenpaugh's (2006) restricted focus on the role of European powers, we can reconcile these two perspectives and understand the preservation of Armenianness in Syria as a phenomenon stemming from a strong nationalistic drive and transnational institutions, but bolstered by colonial intervention.

Much of the Armenian story in this project has focused on the nationalistic preservationist drive of Armenians, despite the divisive political conflicts between parties, organizations, and the Church. However, Payaslian (2007) notes the lack of solidarity from preexisting Armenian communities in Syria as refugees from the genocide began to settle in Syria. He claims, “The ‘native’ Armenian population... viewed the incoming refugees as a financial burden and as a threat to their privileged position in society” (Payaslian 2007: 103). We must note this tension as a moment of division within the Armenian diaspora, one that even the existential threat of genocide fails to bridge. Whereas we frequently see enmity between different political factions of the diaspora put aside, as Tölölyan (2000) notes, “temporarily united by crisis” (123), “native” Syrian Armenians may present an exception as a community more thoroughly integrated into its host society and thus less transnationally engaged.

All of the Syrian Armenians that I have encountered throughout the course of this project are the children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren of genocide survivors. An interviewee told me, however, that these pre-genocide Syrian Armenians were referred to by the Arabic term *ermen edim*, meaning old Armenians. He believes they primarily spoke Arabic, whereas the much larger post-genocide community spoke Armenian and Turkish. Also differentiating them, for the most part the *ermen edim* did not have the traditional “ian” surname ending. The only *ermen edim* this interviewee knew growing up in Syria were those who were married to the non-*edim* and had thus joined their community. One Syrian Armenian I encountered in the United States had an Arabic last name in Syria because his paternal grandfather was of the *ermen edim*. However, upon migrating the US he added “ian” in order to better identify with his Armenian community.

Within the narrative of Armenian identity constructed around the genocide, this resistant host community emphasizes the varying priorities within any diaspora. Unlike the Armenian refugees and their institutional leaders attempting to rebuild community in refugee camps, the *ermen edim* were already a small but well-established community in Syria. And, unlike diasporic Armenians abroad sending support to refugee communities, they felt their status in Syria threatened by this influx of foreign Armenian refugees. Given the major separation and cultural differences between the *ermen edim* and the Armenian community formed by Ottoman Armenian refugees in Syria, the scope of this study will not cover the recent experiences of Syria's *ermen edim*.

Returning to the role of Armenian institutions, the refugees quickly began to reestablish an Armenian community and institutional structure with the construction of Armenian churches (Migliorino 2008:47). Migliorino (2008) notes, "In the memories of those who lived in person the experience of the refugee camps, the churches are often remembered as the first public buildings erected in the camps together with the schools, the first stones in the construction of a new Armenian world for the refugees" (50). The Church served to underline the refugees' shared religious identity and, as a transnational organization, played a key role in connecting the isolated refugees with their global diasporic identity.

The genocide displaced the Catholicos of Cilicia, who had presided over Apostolic Armenians in Western Armenia. This created a disconnect between Armenian refugees and their transnational religious structure. Migliorino (2008) writes, "For several years the Catholicosate survived as an unsettled refugee institution while, according to the pre-Genocide tradition, the mass refugees settling in Lebanon and Syria fell under the jurisdiction of the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem" (51). However, the Catholicosate of Cilicia eventually settled in Antelias, outside

of Beirut, in 1930 and regained jurisdiction (in 1929) over Armenian communities in Beirut, Damascus and Latakia. This was followed by “the re-establishment of the institutions regulating the internal life of the Apostolic community. These were modeled on the legacy of the Armenian *millet* experience and on the Armenian ‘national constitution’ of 1863” (Migliorino 2008:52).

Though the Church had to recover from exile like the refugees themselves, its institutional importance played a significant part in making this possible. As discussed in chapter one, the institutional strength of the Armenian millet and the various Armenian institutions in the nineteenth century provided a blueprint for the reestablishment and preservation of Armenian cultural life post-genocide.

Discussing the critical role played by religious institutions in the newly forming Syrian Armenian communities, Migliorino (2006) writes:

Historical symbols and sanctuaries of Armenian traditions and cultural distinctiveness, the Armenian Apostolic, Catholic, and Evangelical Churches became, from the early days of the refugee displacements, pivotal institutions in the effort of (re) construction, and landmarks of the new Armenian landscape in Syria. The Churches could also re-establish their role as centres of aggregation and promotion of three, religiously-defined Armenian sub worlds, each endowed with a separate set of social institutions and practices. (para. 12)

Migliorino (2006) highlights the cultural significance of religious life in the Armenian community while also acknowledging existing divides in Armenian identity. Given the continuous significance of the Church in Armenian community life, I asked interviewees about the dividing impact of differing Christian sects. Unlike the role of political parties, Syrian Armenians that I spoke to felt that shared national and Christian identity surpassed the importance of differing Christian churches, which primarily organized social activity within the community, similar to compatriotic organizations. Interviewees who were educated in Syria in

the 1960s and 1970s told me that they attended school with members of the different churches, and they claimed division was limited to mild teasing.

In addition to the churches, Migliorino (2006) notes the construction of schools as a first step toward the institutionalization of Armenian life in Syria (50). The focus on schools as some of the first diasporic institutions constructed in Syria highlights the importance of cultural education and resistance to assimilation for the generations of Armenians that would never know their homeland. The table below, Fig. 3, from Migliorino (2008) demonstrates the post-genocide growth of Armenian education in Syria. 38 Armenian schools in Syria were founded in the first two decades after the arrival the Ottoman Armenian refugees.

**Table 2.5. Year of foundation of 53 Armenian schools in Syria (after Bedian)**

<b>Period</b>	<b>Urban schools</b>	<b>Rural schools</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Before 1920</b>	3	4	7
<b>1920–1929</b>	14	6	20
<b>1930–1939</b>	10	8	18
<b>1940–1949</b>	3	–	3
<b>1950–1960</b>	1	4	5

Fig. 3 (Migliorino  
2008:71, table 2.5)

The need for Armenian education serves also as a response to the lack of unified cultural identity. The genocide presented the necessity of merging dissimilar and disconnected segments of diasporic Armenian life into a cohesive Armenian identity in order to preserve the nation. Migliorino (2006) argues, “The re-establishment of an Armenian world in Syria, as well as in all the post-genocide diasporas, was in fact largely a process of *construction* of a new Armenian cultural identity which was certainly drawing from the past, but which was also inevitably founded upon the immensity of the tragedy of the genocide and driven by the priorities of the refugee communal leadership of the time” (para. 10). This argument addresses questions that have arisen during my research about the relationship between Armenianness and the Armenian

Genocide. Payaslian (2007) similarly refers to the post-genocide “tortuous task of building institutions and constructing a cultural identity” (102). As they both use the word “construction” rather than preservation or reconstruction, we may understand that Armenian cultural identity as we understand it today does not predate 1915. Expressions of Armenian identity today seem overwhelmingly focused on genocide recognition, which unifies an otherwise heterogeneous and divided national group. Migliorino (2006) implies that Armenian identity today is founded in the threat of national and cultural extinction.

Like the other spheres of institutional organization, Armenian political life and the nationalist parties had to recover their role in new diasporic communities post-genocide, but ultimately came to play a key part in this newly defined Armenian transnation. The Dashnak party, “gradually re-establishing itself as a diasporic organisation with a transnational structure and local branches in several countries,” expressed antagonism toward the Church and what Dashnaks believed to be its inappropriate interference in political affairs (Migliorino 2008:56). Though they were comparably positioned regarding Armenian political life in Syria, “the Hunchaks and the Ramkavars sharply opposed the Dashnak party, from which they were divided by widening ideological and tactical visions, in particular concerning Soviet Armenia” (Migliorino 2008:56).

All of this institutional organization fell largely upon the elite leadership among Armenian refugees in Syria. Most Armenians were not involved in political life and “language and poverty were substantial barriers to participation in affairs that were outside the life in the camps or sphere of work” (Migliorino 2008:57). Non-elite Armenians did, however, participate in what Migliorino (2008) calls “regional patriotic unions” (57) and one of my interviewees referred to as “compatriotic organizations.” My interviewee described these groups primarily as

social clubs based on village of origin in the Ottoman Empire. Describing their role in the 1920s, Migliorino (2008) writes, “Patriotic unions, named after cities or regions in the homeland... played a remarkable role in organising and managing self-help activities in the refugee camps, including the construction of shelters, schools and churches” (57). Through these organizations, Armenian refugees were able to participate in and contribute to institutional life.

Armenian printing in Syria further demonstrates the success of the Ottoman Armenian refugees in creating a complex Armenian world within their new communities. “The main centre of Armenian printing was initially Aleppo. Two printing presses were established in 1918 and about a dozen others followed starting from the early 1920s throughout the period of the Mandate” (Migliorino 2008:67). Soon after settling in Syria, Armenians had already begun to print their own publications. “By the end of the Mandate about thirty Armenian publications had appeared in Syria, including political newspapers, literary, religious, sports and satirical magazines, and student newsletters” (Migliorino 2008:69). In this short amount of time, Armenians recreated Armenian institutional life in Syria.

The reestablishment of Armenian community life in Syria supports the idea in Chapter I that diasporic organizations existing prior to 1915 contributed strongly to the preservation of Armenianness in exile. When I say ‘in exile,’ however, I do not refer solely to the condition of Armenians post-genocide; I describe the persistence of Armenian diaspora under foreign rule for centuries. Payaslian (2007) notes, “Significantly, the new environment did not give rise to new political parties; instead, the transplanted pre-genocide political organizations, the Dashnaktsutiun, Hnchakian, and Ramkavar parties, were reconstituted, and by the middle of the 1930s, the Dashnaktsutiun successfully claimed control over the political life of the emerging communities in Syria and Lebanon” (107). The idea of this permanent and continuous Armenian



diaspora becomes complicated, however, by the question of identity. Payaslian (2007) continues, “The political parties and community organizations thus led the difficult task of creating a common identity out of the various regional and local identities and dialects that had characterized the Armenian millet” (107). Like the references to “constructing” Armenian identity, Payaslian here presents the question of Armenianness and whether or not it predated the genocide. It would seem that the existence of these parties and organizations would suggest the existence of Armenian identity, even Armenian nationalism as I discuss in chapter one. Yet, Migliorino and Payaslian both suggest the need to “create a common identity” post-genocide.

#### Armenian Communities in Syria before 2011

Prior to the beginning of the war in Syria, Armenians were well integrated into yet culturally and geographically separated from the rest of Syrian society. From numerous discussions with Syrian Armenians, I learned that the primary Armenian neighborhoods in Aleppo were Aziziyeh, Suleimaniyeh, and Al Midan – known by Armenians as *Nor Kyugh*, meaning New Village. Discussing life for Armenians in Syria, Payaslian (2007) emphasizes the centrality of the community and its institutions. He claims, “The basis for political socialization has been the Armenian family, private educational institutions, and various community organizations whose primary object has been to perpetuate Armenian cultural identity and only secondarily Syrian national identity. These strongly tradition-inclined institutions, as established by the survivors of the genocide, exercised considerable command over the cognitive development of the next generation” (Payaslian 2007, 101). This description of the spheres in which Syrian Armenians operate and develop political awareness is consistent with the narrative constructed through my interviews with Syrian Armenians. With the exception of my one

interviewee from Damascus, the people I interviewed all lived in Armenian neighborhoods in Aleppo, moved within Armenian social and political circles, and attended Armenian schools (several even attended Armenian colleges). Armenian cultural identity was certainly central to everyday Armenian life in Aleppo.

Though the largest community of Armenians was in Aleppo, there were still significant Armenian populations in other Syrian cities. Given my limited contact with Armenians from elsewhere in Syria, I can only speak briefly to the experience of my one Armenian source from Damascus. The Armenian community still played a significant role in daily life – especially through NGOs, social clubs and religious activity –, but it did not create an environment as all-encompassing and insular as that in Aleppo. My interviewee, a dentist, interacted regularly with both Arab and Armenian clients. His children attended Armenian schools until high school, but then attended an international American school, as the Armenian education system was not as extensive as that in Aleppo.

The diasporic Armenian political parties – Dashnak, Hunchak, and Ramkavar – have played a major role in political and everyday life for Armenians in Syria. Though they initially vied for power with the religious authorities, the parties successfully secured political control within the Armenian community. “Since the 1940s the Armenian nationalist parties gradually emerged as the uncontested leaders of the community, increasingly able to speak in the name of the Armenians, efficient at mobilizing (or intimidating) the public and monopolizing political activities and communal formal institutions” (Migliorino 2006, para.17). When discussing the political parties, one of my interviewees also noted that Armenian education in Aleppo occurred in large part along party lines. Most Armenian schools were, and likely still are, informally associated with a political party.

The non-profits through which young Armenians participate in activities such as scouts are also aligned with particular parties. The groups promote nationalistic cultural expression and preservation, ensuring younger generations understand and connect with their Armenian identity. “Many Armenian families participate in the activities of *Hamazkayin*, *Nor Serount*, *Tekeyan*, *AGBU*, all chapters of larger transnational networks of the Armenian diaspora aimed at the promotion of Armenian literature, music, dance, and theatre” (Migliorino 2006, para. 35). Migliorino (2006) describes one function of these clubs as fostering “important connections of the community with the wider Armenian cultural world, and [placing] Aleppo on the map of the inter-Armenian cultural exchanges” (para. 35). NGOs associations with the political parties would of course suggest that Armenian youth should be not only culturally, but also politically engaged in the Armenian transnation.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, tension between the different Armenian parties in Syria has peaked and then subsided again in recent decades. Migliorino (2006) writes, “the Armenian nationalist parties were caught in a heated confrontation over the issue of the relations with Soviet Armenia and, more in general, over the struggle for communal leadership... During the 1950s, the ‘Armenian cold war’ reached its peak, with the Dashnak party eventually emerging as the hegemonic force within the Armenian communities of the Levant” (para. 19). Today, Dashnak remains the largest of the three nationalist parties.

Regarding the conflict between the parties, one Syrian Armenian claimed that it reached the point where members of the different parties were killing each other in the streets, and the government had to get involved. Another told me that the conflict emerged because the Dashnaks realized that they would not be able to resist the Soviets, so they surrendered to the USSR. Stances toward the USSR divided the Armenian parties, and then, he claims, “conspiracy

theories” in the early 40s about meetings between the parties and both sides of World War II caused further tension. Finally, he claims that during the 1956 election of the Holy See of Cilicia, the Dashnaks backed one candidate and while the Hunchaks and Ramkavars backed the other. Enmity between the parties remained strong during the 50s and 60s, but my interviewee argued that, with more open and educated generations coming of age, this conflict has significantly subsided. This seems likely, as the Syrian Armenians that I have talked to during the course of this study seemed less concerned about political affiliation than the history would suggest. At one time, an interviewee tells me, people would react to seeing a member of an opposing party like they were seeing a Turk. Through this comparison, he references the animosity of many Armenians towards the Turks since the Armenian Genocide, thus emphasizing the extreme tension between the parties.

Despite the significant role of politics within the Armenian communities of Syria, the communities have had minimal involvement in local Syrian politics. One Syrian Armenian told me that, since 1970, there has always been a least one Armenian in Syria’s parliament. He claims that there is an unwritten agreement ensuring that Aleppo always elects one Armenian. This estimation matches closely with Migliorino’s (2006) account, which cites that since 1973, “the Armenians have maintained an individual, but continuous presence in Syrian parliament” (para. 28). Despite this, Armenians have not significantly participated in local Syrian politics (Migliorino 2006, para. 32). Migliorino (2006) also writes:

Armenian politics focused mostly on the interests and problems of the Armenian people, both at the level of the Syrian-Armenian community and at the wider, international level. The approach of the Armenian nationalist parties towards Syria was generally one of loyalty, combining a sense of gratefulness for the country and people which had in some way provided a new home to the Armenians with the interest to maintain a system of institutions that had offered a number of advantages for the Armenian communal life. (para. 18)

This sense of gratefulness to the Syrian government and the Syrian people is a common theme throughout my interviews.

Migliorino (2008) writes that the 1960s marked a period of intense political non-participation on the part of Armenians in Syria during the rise of Ba'athism (109). The regime placed restrictions on many Armenian activities deemed political. From the early 70s onward, the Syrian government became more tolerant of Armenian community activity and organization. The Assad regime and Armenian communities had an informal understanding, that “the practice of state control over the communal activities of the Armenians would be relaxed in return for the Armenians’ support, or acquiescence” (Migliorino 2008, 156-57). Likely for this reason, compounded by fear of Islamist leadership, many Syrian Armenians become defensive of the Assads, praising their relatively secular administrations, when discussing the war in Syria. Still, as this agreement with the regime was unofficial, the political standing of Armenian institutions in Syria would remain uncertain and subject to the whim of the Assad regime (Migliorino 2008, 157).

The Assad regime’s leniency toward Armenian communities co-occurs with the administration's resistance to acknowledging Syria’s ethnic diversity and thus the fact that Armenian institutions are in many ways defined by their unique cultural and ethnic separation from the rest of the country. However, Armenians and the regime alike circumvent the issue of ethnicity by framing Armenian institutions and their activities within the field of religious allowances. Migliorino (2005) writes, “The question of ethnicity has been in fact one of the most persistent taboos in the Syrian official discourse over the last decades. The regime has granted forms of recognition to the country’s traditionally rich religious diversity, but it has systematically played down the existence of allegiances to distinct communal or ethno-cultural

identities and – most crucially – it has severely obstructed their autonomous political mobilization” (para. 3). Ironically, despite the Assad regime’s denial of ethnic diversity, it “has continued to use ethnic and sub-ethnic allegiances as a strategic political resource” (Migliorino 2008, 4).

As I have discussed, political activity within Armenian communities in Syria has been severely restricted since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Simon Payaslian (2007) argues that Armenians in Syria have remained politically marginal throughout the decades and subscribe to a “subaltern consciousness” due to the hardships they have endured in exile. He writes, “A fuller understanding of the immigrant’s exilic existence would require a socio-psychological assessment of the subaltern consciousness, but clearly the diasporic community’s exilic existence obstructed the development of a sense of permanence” (106). Though his argument and his discussion of the subaltern provide an interesting and compelling intellectual proposition, they do not align with the narrative presented by my Syrian Armenian interviewees.

Discussing this supposed sense of impermanence felt by Armenians in Syria, Payaslian (2007) writes:

Although legally citizens, Armenians in Syria are nevertheless psychologically, culturally, and economically transient... As ‘tenants,’ Armenians for their part have not developed a deep sense of historical identification with the place and therefore have preferred to exit when possible. The force of this argument has been most visible with respect to the country’s compulsory military service, which compelled many Armenians to emigrate rather than serve” (113-14).

Payaslian’s mention of emigration to avoid military service resonates for me, as I was aware of this trend, and I know several older Syrian Armenians who moved to Beirut for this purpose. However, my interviewees strongly disputed his psychological assumption that Armenians lack a sense of belonging in Syria. Though neither Payaslian (2007) nor I have advanced psychological training, I can recount some of what my Syrian Armenian interviewees told me. Regarding

avoiding conscription, several Syrian Armenians argued that this phenomenon was not unique to Armenians. One of these interviewees had himself served as a lieutenant in the army and attended the military academy. He claimed that while Armenians left the country to escape military service, Sunni Syrians would bribe the army in order to excuse their children from serving. I have not confirmed this claim nor compared rates at which different groups avoid military service in Syria, but I believe the takeaway remains – the Syrian Armenians I have spoken with do not feel they lack a sense of belonging and permanence in Syria, at least no more than any other group.

Though they subscribe to a sort of dual identity, the Syrian Armenians I spoke to identified as Syrian, and those displaced by the war wanted nothing more than to continue living in Syria. As one example, I interviewed a few Syrian Armenians in Armenia who had applied for and received Armenian citizenship prior to fleeing Syria and, though they wanted Armenian citizenship as diasporic Armenians, never intended to live anywhere but Syria. Still, Payaslian (2007) argues, “As a result of the emphasis placed on cultural survival, along with other obstacles to assimilation, the Armenian community, even in its more developed form decades later, did not experience a deep sense of belonging in Syria, of full acculturation, except in the most formal, legal sense—its members were loyal citizens fulfilling their legal obligations as citizens” (109). By claiming that remaining culturally distinct prevents a sense of belonging, Payaslian suggests the impossibility of having multiple, coexisting identities. Yet, the experiences and the feelings expressed by my interviewees suggest a different conclusion – they demonstrate a joint identity expressed through a sense of belonging both within Syria and within transnational Armenian spaces.

Payaslian (2007) also supports his claim of Armenian subalternity in Syria by arguing that Armenians lack a political voice (115-16), but this does not seem unique to non-Arabs or non-Muslims in Assad's Syria. Payaslian (2007) writes, "Rather than risk their physical safety, imprisonment, or other human rights violations, those who disagree with the system choose to 'exit' as a less costly option" (116-17). Though this may be true, it fails to fully demonstrate his conclusion, that Armenians in Syria lack a sense of belonging – that they remain subaltern. He attempts to claim political subalternity for Armenians under a dictatorial regime, and acknowledges their generally privileged economic status.

More persuasively, Payaslian (2007) cites the decline in the Armenian population in Syria as evidence of Armenian "exit." Between the 1960s and 2005, the Armenian population in Syria dropped from around 150,000 to around 80,000 (Payaslian 2007, 118). According to Payaslian (2007), the population is decreasing because, given their marginal political status in Syria, "Armenians either remain voiceless in the realm of diaspora subalternities or exit" (123). Yet, all of the Syrian Armenians that I interviewed still disagreed with Payaslian's (2007) argument that Armenians lack a sense of permanence in Syria. In response to Payaslian's (2007) claim, one interviewee outlined the various events that he felt spurred Armenian emigration from Syria throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The first of these events is the Armenian repatriation movement between 1946 and 1949, which I discussed in Chapter I.<sup>7</sup> However, this movement probably occurs too early to be relevant to Payaslian's argument. Only 20 years after Ottoman Armenian refugees settled in Syria, the Armenian communities likely would not have had the time to develop a strong sense

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<sup>7</sup> For more on this movement, see page 26 and Yousefian (2011).



of belonging. Still, it does represent an “exit.” Alternatively, though, we could see the movement not as a rejection of Syria and other host countries, but as an expression of nationalistic duty.

Then, argues my interviewee, in 1960 and 1961, Armenians were faced with “ultra-nationalism and oppression” due to Nasser’s United Arab Republic. He claims that political oppression caused a large wave of immigration to Lebanon at this time. Migliorino echoes this sentiment. In reference to pan-Arabism and Syria’s union with Nasser’s Egypt in the late 1950s, Migliorino (2008) writes, “In Syria, on the contrary [to Lebanon], political developments severely restricted the spaces for Armenian public participation” (100). He then adds, “The evolution of the state during the union was once again severely restrictive for civil liberties and considerably damaged the system of Armenian communal institutions” (Migliorino 2008, 104). Payaslian (2007) writes, “Nasserism and its attendant pan-Arab nationalism exhibited deep resentment, sometimes bordering on intolerance, toward the Armenians” (112). Under Nasser, Syria became a “police dictatorship,” and tension rose between the regime and the Dashnak party due to the Dashanaks’ sympathy for the West. Migliorino (2008) credits increased violence between the Dashanaks and the government for the emigration of Armenians during this time. While the Syrian Armenian I interviewed correctly attributed this movement to the repressive atmosphere under Nasser and Arab nationalism, Migliorino’s (2008) account is more specific. He writes, “The crisis of Dashnak-state relations eventually resulted in the migration of hundreds of Armenian-Syrian families to Lebanon and the position of the Dashnak party in the country was severely weakened” (Migliorino 2008, 104).

My interviewee also referenced *ta’ mim*, or nationalization, as a major contributor to Armenian emigration from Syria. Payaslian (2007) explains, “Nasserist economic policies of nationalization also had detrimental consequences for the Armenian community as they led to

the mass emigration of upper- and middle-class Armenians, first to neighboring Lebanon and thence to the distant shores of Europe, North and South Americas and Australia” (113).

However, anthropologist Aseel Sawalha (2010) and historian Samir Kassir (2010) both refer to this exodus of upper-class Syrian capitalists without referring specifically to the Armenians, suggesting that this phenomenon was more widespread. They discuss the importance of this movement for the growth of the Lebanese economy (Sawalha 2010, 34; Kassir 2010, 358). Therefore, we may infer that this emigration was not unique to Armenians and thus not illustrative of their exceptionally marginal political status.

Through these waves of emigration, we can also see the creation of a unique Syrian Armenian diaspora within the larger Armenian diaspora. Whether or not we can say that this group maintains a unique cultural identity, the exoduses certainly create familial networks throughout the world for Syrian Armenians.

In a decade-old article, Migliorino (2006) argues that the “future of Armenian cultural diversity in Syria” relies partly on “the transnational connections that the diaspora maintains, and regards the extent to which the interaction with other ‘Armenian worlds’ in the diaspora will be allowed” (para. 40). However, with the war in Syria that began in 2011, “the transnational connections that the diaspora maintains” take on a new role. In the next chapter, I will discuss how the transnational networks maintained by Syrian Armenians impact their experience of forced migration and integration into the host country.



## Chapter III: Mobilizing Diasporic Networks

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Tölölyan (1996) asserts that one way diasporas engage with the homeland is by working to help “one’s needier kin in yet a third country,” meaning a country other than the host country or the homeland (15). The conflict in Syria presents a clear case where the Armenian diaspora throughout the world can use its resources to affect change for “needier” sectors of the global diaspora. In addition to the reach of transnational Armenian organizations as discussed in the first two chapters, the different waves of migration seen in the previous chapters create transnational social networks on the individual level for Syrian Armenians. How do these institutional and personal networks affect the choices and experiences of displaced Syrian Armenians?

### ‘Returning’ to Armenia

I walked through Yerevan’s *Halebi Shuga*, an underground strip of shops called Aleppo Market in the Armenian capital. I was nervous about whom to approach for my first interview, but my cousin assured me that any of the shop owners would probably be happy to talk to me. I entered into a small empty shop and asked the woman working if she had come from Aleppo recently and if she would allow me to interview her.

As the name of the market might suggest, this woman and her sister had lived their whole lives in Aleppo and arrived in Armenia together in 2012. Their grandparents arrived in Syria as survivors of the Armenian Genocide. When I ask when her family first settled in Syria, she

seemed to anticipate my line of thought. “Now we have lived a second emigration,” she tells me unprovoked, “we used to hear the story; now we actually lived it.”<sup>8</sup>

Before the war had affected their lives in Aleppo, the sisters had heard that it was easy to get Armenian citizenship. She tells me, “We said, why not? We’re Armenian. Let’s get the passport.” After applying for Armenian citizenship, they learned in April 2012 that their passports were ready and that they should fly to Yerevan to pick them up. At this point, the war had begun. She tells me, “We said if the war doesn’t get worse, or what’s going to happen, we don’t know, we’ll come in October and get our passports, then go back... and we stayed here.”

Again, she emphasizes that she had no intention of living in Armenia: “I’m Armenian, so I wished to get the citizenship, but I hadn’t thought I would come live here or stay. The war was that difficult, brought such difficult days that we were forced to stay here. We came unprepared.” Because they traveled to Armenia thinking they would stay for only a short visit, the sisters were unable to pack up their home or the shop they owned in Aleppo. They arrived for the passports and were not able to return to Syria due to the war and the destruction of their neighborhood. She explained, “Because our house’s area is very bad – our store is damaged; our house is damaged. It’s very bad. Actually we were right at the frontline between the Syrian army and the terrorists. If we were to go back to Aleppo it would have to again be repaired, newly constructed – the house and the store.” The travel, at least, was easy. Because it was still the beginning of the war, they were able to travel by plane.

After arriving in Armenia, they visited tourist destinations and enjoyed a holiday until realizing that they would not be able to return to Aleppo. “When we saw, no, from now on we’re going to stay here and live here, we have to also find a means to survive. The saved money runs

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<sup>8</sup> This interview was conducted in Armenian, so the quotes that I include are all my own translations.

out quickly – *chellar* [it can't be] – you have to work, at least do a job, do something.” She indicates that she is now talking about her little shop in *Halebi Shuga* and continues, “For us, this is our work. We say it's suitable. We did this work in Aleppo. But it was three stories. There was more, bigger, wider selection. Here, now... very small. From below zero starting over.” The narrative of starting over is consistent throughout all of my interviews, whether my interviewees reference losing a business, finding their education and degree irrelevant in their new home, or having to make new friends.

In *Halebi Shuga*, this woman described to me the challenges she and her sister faced in starting a business in Armenia: “It was very difficult because we didn't know this country's laws. You have to get to know new laws, get to know new products, new people; you will work with businessmen. Everything was new. This was the difficulty. The laws were a bit difficult until we learned; we got used to it. Anywhere you go, in the beginning it's a new country, a new city, new laws. You're going to have difficulties.” One such difficulty was the tax system, which she noted was stricter than that in Syria. The moment the business opens, they owe taxes regardless of profit.

As I conceptualized this project, I wondered whether or not Syrian Armenians would belong to their own subgroup within the Armenian diaspora, operating principally within Syrian Armenian spaces in their host communities. *Halebi Shuga* demonstrates such a tendency and the dual identity of Syrian Armenians. The shop owner I spoke with explained that she and her sister found the space for their store when they came to buy from the other shops in *Halebi Shuga*. They were informed that there were empty shops where they could consider restarting the business they left in Syria. She told me, “We saw it... We liked it... We said since we're all *Halebtsi* [from Aleppo] it will be easier to work together.”

When I asked if the Aleppo Armenians help each other in Yerevan, she replied that, of course, “*Odaroutyan meches kone mege mouysin tserk da* [When you’re in a foreign land, the least you can do is give each other a hand].” This formulation stands out given that she and several other Syrian Armenians I spoke to described Armenia as though becoming a citizen was the natural choice given their ethnic identity. Yet, this woman describes Armenia as a foreign land – one in which Syrian Armenians are surrounded by foreigners. She depicts Armenia more as a host country than as a “homeland” to which she has “returned.” Though this may seem contrary to her expression of Armenian identity, when we understand the Armenian nation as a transnation, her desire for Armenian citizenship can be framed as a desire for physical representation (the passport) of her identity as a diasporic Armenian. The Armenian spaces in which many Syrian Armenians feel most at home are not those within Armenia – a foreign country. Their Armenian nation exists within the diaspora and its deterritorialized reconceptualization of national space.

In terms of ending up in here, this interviewee says that she and her sister did not have the opportunity to consider going anywhere but Armenia, as they did not have time to plan. They realized once in Armenia that they would have to stay. Other members of her family who were still in Aleppo in 2012 ended up in Canada, where a branch of the family had settled in the 1970s. The Canadian branch had been living in Beirut, like many Syrian Armenians, but left because of the Civil War in Lebanon. Most of the Syrian Armenians that I have spoken to either fled to Canada themselves or have friends and family members who did. However, several Syrian Armenians have mentioned to me that those with dual citizenship (with Armenia) are not eligible for refugee visas. This presents limitations for those with Armenian citizenship who

would prefer to move elsewhere, but ultimately Armenia's dual citizenship laws help Syrian Armenians escape the war at home in Syria.

As of April 2014, about 12,000 Syrian Armenians were living in Armenia (Călin-Ștefan 2014, 63). In a recent paper, Georgia Călin-Ștefan (2014) discusses his study of the integration of displaced Syrian Armenians into the Republic of Armenia between 2011 and 2014. He explains that, when the conflict in Syria began in 2011, Armenia welcomed Syrian Armenians and worked to promote the ease of their integration (Călin-Ștefan 2014, 61). However, these first Syrian Armenians to migrate to Armenia were under the impression that the conflict would be a short one and the move would be temporary. For example, one project to ease this transition involved setting up a school in Armenia for refugees to continue their education following the "Syrian curriculum, in Arabic" (Călin-Ștefan 2014, 61). Referring to Chapter II, the establishment of Syrian education in Armenia ironically presents an inversion of the construction of Armenian schools by Ottoman Armenian refugees in Syria.<sup>9</sup> It also provides further evidence that Syrian Armenians have adopted a secondary, dual identity through their relationships with their Syrian host country. If the focus on Syrian education in Armenia does not demonstrate Syrian Armenians' sense of belonging in Syria, at minimum it shows their desire to return home to their Armenian communities in Syria.

In terms of the legal questions of mobility, in addition to a 1995 law allowing individuals of Armenian ethnicity to secure Armenian citizenship, a 2012 "government decree allowed people to apply for Armenian citizenship in consulates and at the end of 2012, foreign citizens of Armenian origin who take refuge from acts of violence did not require a visa or residency permit" (Călin-Ștefan 2014, 62). Călin-Ștefan writes that these, and additional measures,

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<sup>9</sup> Refer to page 40 in Chapter II



facilitated and streamlined the citizenship process for Syrian Armenian. The Armenian government has taken seriously its role in “the Armenia-diaspora partnership,” facilitating the mobility of Syrian Armenians – if only to the republic of Armenia – and minimizing the legal challenges of crossing borders during forced migration.

Călin-Ștefan further discusses in his study the role of Armenian NGOs in providing services to Syrian Armenians. He writes, “NGOs like The Aleppo Compatriotic Charitable Organization implemented emergency relief operations to people in Syria and also provided support, mentoring and additional help in exiting conflict zones and transitioning to the Republic of Armenia” (Călin-Ștefan 2014, 62). The Armenian NGOs make up an important part of the Armenian diaspora. These organizations exist both in the country of Armenia and in Armenian communities around the world, and represent an important part of the diasporas engagement with the idea of homeland.

Călin-Ștefan’s study discusses some of the challenges that have faced the Armenian government and NGOs in seamlessly integrating Syrian Armenians. Though still economically weak, by continuing to prioritize the Armenian diaspora and offering citizenship to diasporic Armenians, the Armenian republic serves as an important center for the diaspora.

### Canada

Based on the group of Syrian Armenians that I spoke with, Canada appears to be one of the most common destinations for Syrian Armenians due to personal social networks and the government’s relatively open policy towards accepting refugees. The process is difficult, but seems much easier when compared with securing travel documents to the United States.

I spoke with a family who had arrived in Canada just two months prior to our conversation. Before being allowed to travel to Canada, the family had taken two busses from Aleppo to Beirut in order to interview at the Canadian Consulate and undergo the necessary medical examinations for visas. They then had to wait indefinitely in Beirut until their visas were processed. This time period can vary significantly, but this family received their visas after spending about half year in Beirut following the interviews. Like many Syrian Armenians moving to Canada, their visa was sponsored by an Armenian organization in addition to a Canadian relative who served as guarantor. Both the institutional and familial ties that Syrian Armenians have to Canada reflect previous migration movements. The familial ties likely reflect specifically Syrian Armenian migration, as discussed in the context of emigration from Syria. The institutional network, on the other hand, reflects the wide reach of the Armenian diaspora in general and its communities.

The family I spoke with told me that the two primary organizations in Toronto sponsoring Syrian Armenians are Hay Getron – the Armenian Community Center in Toronto – and Armenian Family Support Services. This family was sponsored through Armenian Family Support Services, which offers resettlement in Toronto to “Syrian or Iraqi Armenian Refugees with a qualified Canadian Sponsor living in the GTA [Greater Toronto Area]” (Armenian Family Support Services 2017). The co-sponsor, in many cases a family member, “must agree to FULLY FINANCIALLY SUPPORT and help deliver settlement assistance and share the responsibility for supporting the sponsored refugees” (Armenian Family Support Services 2017).

In terms of integration into Canadian society and Canadian Armenian communities, the institutions discussed in my first two chapters ease the transition into the host country. For one, the NGOs that sponsor Armenians coming to Canada serve as first institutional points of contact

and support for arriving refugees. Additionally, many Syrian Armenians arriving in Canada are quickly introduced to their local Armenian Church, around which social and religious life can be structured.

The youth also may find structured Armenian community life through AGBU or Homenetmen's youth programs. When I spoke to this family in Toronto, their teenage daughter had already become active in their local Homenetmen chapter. She participated in Homenetmen's Armenian scouts in Aleppo for 15 years, volunteering at food banks and teaching Armenian children. She tells me that participating in Homenetmen's cultural and volunteer activities makes her feel better in Canada. She told me, "I love in my heart – not just I love – I love in my heart... I love helping Armenian people, and I want to one day go back to Armenia and help Armenians." When I ask why she would like to move to Armenia, where she has never been, she explains as though it should be obvious, "My name is Armenian and my last name is Armenian so I'm Armenian Armenian... original Armenian." Though she traveled to Canada with her family and would rather move on her own to Armenia, she has become an active member of the diasporic Armenian community in Toronto. She also says that the Armenian community center is helping her find a job, and she is excited to practice speaking English with me.

However, her 22-year-old cousin has had a more difficult time integrating. She has had trouble meeting people and making friends in Canada. She participated in scouts through AGBU while in Aleppo, but she told me that she is not involved in the same way as her teenage cousin because Toronto AGBU is far from her home and she does not know anyone. She seems more reserved than her cousin, preventing her from participating in community activities. Though she

has not been motivated to get involved in life in Canada, this young woman has taken advantage of government sponsored English classes.

This family moved to Toronto because their Canadian relative provided them the opportunity for sponsorship. The Armenian I spoke to from Damascus was sponsored by an Arab friend from Syria. A young woman I interviewed in Toronto came through a family friend, but feels alone because a number of her friends from Aleppo have been resettled in Montreal. Armenian networks (and for the man from Damascus, Syrian networks) have allowed many Syrian Armenians to flee Syria for Canada. Once there, Armenian community and transnational organizations provide opportunities for integration into Canadian Armenian life.

### The U.S.

In the United States, the refugees that I interviewed would not be legally classified as such. Instead, most of the Syrian Armenian that have recently arrived in Glendale, California, a major hub of diasporic Armenian activity, received green cards before the war in Syria began but chose not to immigrate. The exceptions to this rule, according to one Syrian Armenian, are visas for handicapped refugees or for the wife of a *shahid* [martyr in Arabic]. In retrospect, I should have asked to clarify this comment, as I am not sure who the martyrs are in this situation.

One interviewee told me that he got his green card in 2004 and tried moving to the United States several times, but ultimately he decided that he did not like it and remained in Syria until fleeing the war in 2012. When he originally arrived in the United States with his wife and teenage daughter, he settled elsewhere in California. The family soon moved to Glendale, however, in order to be around other Armenians.

In the United States, some of my interviewees are able to subsist by working as language tutors and teachers and by receiving social services, including food stamps. According to a Syrian Armenian who arrived in 2012 with his family, private Armenian schools support Syrian Armenians in the community by giving major tuition discounts. Still, he chose to send his children to the local public schools. Like in Syria after the Genocide and in Armenia today, educational institutions play an important role in the integration and cultural preservation of refugee communities.

Many Syrian Armenians, regardless of where they have chosen to settle during the war, claim that they will return to Syria and the conflict ends. When I asked one of my interviewees in Glendale about this, he argued that most of these people would not end up returning, if and when the war ends. He explained that he has been in the United States for five years now, his children are growing up here, and only the eldest of his three daughters even remembers Arabic. He believes that, except for those in Beirut, most people's experience will reflect his own and they will not return to Syria.

In response to some people's claim that Armenians should stay in Syria in order to preserve the *kaghut*, this same interviewee repeats throughout our conversation that the situation in Syria is "not our war" and that "two Arab brothers are fighting each other so we can't pick a side."<sup>10</sup> Based on his characterization of the war in Syria as between "two Arab brothers," I inquired Armenians' sense of belonging in Syria. He countered, "Syria is my country. But two brothers are fighting – whose side should I take? Neither is right. Armenians say the president, but what if he's not right?" "You can rebuild schools," he said, "but you can't get back life. It's

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<sup>10</sup> These comments are translated from Armenians

not our war.” After all, the contents of this project might suggest that Armenians are constantly rebuilding.

Regarding the transnational structure of the diasporic political parties, their role in the diaspora arose during one of my interviews in Glendale. A middle-aged Syrian Armenian noted that he is a card-carrying Dashnak and had been on the organizing committee in Aleppo. When he came to the United States, he brought his transfer paperwork to join the local chapter, but he did not follow through with the paperwork. It strikes me that the political parties, which are associated with the various youth oriented organizations, provide a similar structure for adult Armenians as the scouts provide for the youth. Both allow diasporic Armenians to join their local chapter, engage with their Armenian identity, and remain connected to the larger transnation through these transnational institutions.

Finally, the Syrian Armenian Relief Fund (SARF) is a Glendale-based organization that sends financial support to Armenians still in Syria. Unlike the organizations in Canada, SARF does not attempt to resettle Syrian Armenians in the United States. Instead, they raise money through a telethon, in order to provide “water, food, shelter, health, and education” to Armenians in war-torn Syria. However, several interviewees argued that the Armenian community is not doing enough for Syrian Armenians. I interviewed a Syrian Armenian who arrived in the United States several decades ago, long before the war in Syria, and is particularly involved in the Armenian community. He laments that the diasporic community takes a “sentimental approach” toward the situation of Syrian Armenian – that they say, “we have to help,” but then forget as they are “occupied by daily duties.”

Lebanon

Most Armenians fleeing Syria pass through Lebanon for visa interviews and to fly out of the airport. While not a first choice for relocation, Beirut seems to be most people's backup plan. Almost everyone has an aunt or a cousin or some other relative whom they say they would join if not for their plan A. Given the many waves of migration from Syria to Lebanon, deep familial ties exist between the Armenian community in Aleppo and the community in Beirut. As a transit stop, however, many have complained that Beirut is too expensive and that they just burn through their savings while waiting to hear about visas, even if they find a job. I have been told that many actually prefer to wait in Syria. Still, the diaspora does provide Syrian Armenians with networks that facilitate life in Lebanon, and most of the diasporic institutions that they have in Aleppo are present in Beirut as well.

## Conclusion

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Though the Armenian transnation remains deeply divided by political differences, Armenians globally unite in order to ensure national survival. This is especially the case in the last century, since the nation faced the existential threat of extermination during the Armenian Genocide. Tölölyan (1996) suggests that diasporas remain linked transnationally partially because of their collective memory (13), which is certainly the case for Armenians and the memory as the Genocide as it has been passed down and disseminated as part of the national identity.

Like the woman in Armenia who told me, “We used to hear the story; now we actually lived it,” many Syrian Armenians have drawn parallels between their experience of the war in Syria and the previous generation’s experience of Genocide. The recent film, *Houses without Doors*, makes this comparison by presenting depictions of everyday life in the filmmaker’s apartment in Syria during the war interspersed with archival and film footage depicting the Armenian Genocide. Though many draw this comparison, others that I have asked about it have responded dismissively saying, “they’re completely different.”

Though the conflict in Syria has elicited these comparison and sporadic recognition from the Armenian community with social media movements like #savekessab, in support of the Armenian majority town in Syria, the plight of Syrian Armenians does not seem to garner to kind of interest from the diaspora that the Genocide continues to provoke a century after the fact. During the course of this project, I have joined numerous Armenian diaspora Facebook groups in order to stay current on the conversations dominating the transnational Armenian public sphere. Most recently, practically every post is about the new Armenian Genocide film, *The Promise*. I wonder if future social media analysis could compare the frequency over the past five years at



which Armenians have discussed the issue of Genocide recognition versus the very current issue of refugee Syrian Armenians.

A young Armenian American that I know posted a picture of her and her fiancé in front of the poster for *The Promise*, a popular trend among Armenians on social media. She captioned it, “If our ancestors didn't survive, we wouldn't have been able to see this movie. We wouldn't have met each other. But, they survived and now it's our turn to educate others. To start our own Armenian family and to keep the Armenian culture alive [Armenian flag emoji].” This victorious rhetoric of survival is common among Armenians, along with the social media hashtag #turkeyfailed. But, what about Syrian Armenians? Is this extremely nationalistic diaspora doing enough to ensure their survival? Throughout this project I have discussed the institutional diasporic structures that have allowed for the preservation of a transnational Armenia. These institutions are working once again on behalf of Syrian Armenians – ensuring their mobility and successful integration into host communities. However, like in Ottoman Armenian refugee communities in Syria, this organization does not seem to extend down from institutions and their leadership.

As the great granddaughter of four Armenian Genocide survivors, the importance of recognition is not lost on me. However, as the daughter, granddaughter, niece, cousin of Syrian Armenians, I wonder to what extent the wider Armenian transnation puts its resources toward the conflict in Syria and to what extent the differing factions of the global Armenian community will unify over the threat and crisis faced by Armenians in Syria. How many people show up to April 24<sup>th</sup> marches around the world, publicize *The Promise* on social media? And how many of these people have supported Syrian Armenians in the past 5 years?

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