

# Who Built Nations in the Soviet Union?

## Testing and Explaining Pre-Communist and Soviet Influence in National Identity Formation\*

Matt Reichert†

Paper presented at the ASN World Convention, Columbia University

May 2-4<sup>th</sup>, 2019

[ please do not cite or circulate ]

**Note:** Thanks for reading! This is the first portion of a dissertation chapter. The case selection exercise and process-tracing exercise using Armenia are chiefly for theory-building, and I plan to do more theory-testing next. After I do a second paired case study (Belarus), my plan is to do some deeper empirical work that I'm hoping will involve primary sources and a more focused identification strategy. I especially welcome thoughts and feedback on potential next steps in the research (I pitch some initial plans for this in section 5, at the end of the paper).

Introduction . . . . .	1
Theory . . . . .	3
Case Selection . . . . .	13
Hypotheses . . . . .	16
Process Tracing	
Nationality Formation in Armenia Before 1917 . . . . .	Appendix
Armenia's Sovereign Moment, 1918-1920 . . . . .	Appendix
The Construction of a Mass Armenian Culture, 1921-early 1930s . . . . .	22
The Re-emergence of Nationality in Armenian Cultural Politics, 1953-1970s . . . . .	Appendix
The Mainstreaming of Counter-Hegemonic Armenian Nationalism, 1980s-1991 . . . . .	29
Summary of Findings and Next Steps . . . . .	35
Appendix . . . . .	45

**Abstract:** In this paper, I test the relative explanatory power of conventional theories of national identity based on pre-communist mass schooling against an explanation focused on the broader efforts of Bolshevik state-builders to administrate cultural life. With a nested design, I first use Soviet literacy rates to determine where the conventional wisdom over or under-predicts nationalist mobilization in 1988-91. I then select deviant cases to unpack the role that national intelligentsias may have played in these regions above and beyond pre-communist nationalist schooling. Working with the case of Armenia, I use process-tracing tools to test the plausibility of my hypothesis that, while mass literacy established a definition of the Armenian nation that would persist across generations, writers and scholars in the Armenian intelligentsia moderated this effect, and played a more proximate role in re-orienting Armenian nation away from the Soviet multi-national state.

\* Thanks to Tim Colton, Steve Levitsky, Yuhua Wang, Ron Suny, Erin Hutchinson, Brendan McElroy, Jane Kitaevich, and Daniel Ziblatt for feedback and advice.

† Department of Government, Harvard University, [mreichert@g.harvard.edu](mailto:mreichert@g.harvard.edu)

## Section 1: Introduction

Across the Soviet and post-Soviet space, national communities have been “imagined” differently. In Georgia and Lithuania, popular narratives locate the origin of these nations in the pre-modern era, and trace a history of nation-statehood interrupted by Russian and Soviet imperial occupation. In Armenia and Tatarstan there exists a similarly imagined multi-century history of nationhood, but one that was always under the protection of the Russian Tsars and the Soviet family of nations. In Belarus and Kazakhstan, the definition and history of the nation is still a subject of debate, and new post-Soviet states try hard to legitimate themselves by claiming to inherit a history of pre-modern nation-statehood.<sup>1</sup>

Why were nations across the Soviet space imagined differently? Specifically, why was both the *definition* of nations and their *orientation towards the Soviet state* conceived of so differently across the Soviet republics?

Existing research offers a compelling but incomplete answer to this question. In a strong interdisciplinary consensus, classic work in sociology, the most recent wave of Soviet history, and contemporary empirical work in comparative politics all point to what I term an “institutional origins” explanation that locates the origin of national identity in the active nation-building efforts of states in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. “Institutional origins” explanations, as in Weber (1976) and Gellner (1986), contend that the primary mechanism by which nations are imagined is mass literacy and mass schooling, which standardizes, homogenizes, and institutionalizes a common language, culture, history, and set of shared experiences.

Consistent with recent empirical work in contemporary politics, I contend that institutional origins arguments explain an important part, but only part, of the process by which nations are imagined. Mass literacy and mass schooling largely gets the correlation right – it can account for, in a broad way, the general shape of what we perceive today as nations, because it establishes foundational preconditions like shared language and a perceived common history that persist across generations. However, theories pointing to mass literacy and schooling lack a clear mechanism by which these institutional origins generate popular conceptions about the orientation of the nation towards or away from a state.

---

<sup>1</sup> Wedeen (1999) uses the word “shabby” to describe Hafez al-Assad’s stilted cult of personality in Syria, and that word probably captures the name changes and public demonstrations around imagined nationality in places like Kazakhstan as well.

I argue that *national intelligentsias* instead do this work. Writers, artists, musicians, and academics moderate the relationship between mass literacy and schooling and national identity by articulating arguments about the rightful or natural relationship between the nation and the state. In this way, national intelligentsias fulfill a more proximate causal role that is constrained by, but moderates, the deeper structural effects of mass literacy and schooling. Institutional origins and intelligentsias are individually necessary, but only jointly sufficient, to fully account for how national identities have been imagined in this region.

In the Soviet Union, mass literacy and schooling that did not exist prior to 1917 largely came during the 1920s, as Soviet nation-builders pursued large-scale campaigns to “liquidate illiteracy” amongst the adult Soviet population. But literacy can only account for some of the variation in national identity formation in this region. In the 1960s under the limited intellectual freedom afforded by Khrushchev’s thaw, new nationalist ideas began to emerge inside Soviet cultural institutions like national academies and unions for writers, artists, and musicians. It was these nationalist intellectuals that became first-movers during the nationalist mobilizations in the 1980s and argued the case linking national identity either to sovereign statehood or to the Soviet multi-national project and the banner of “friendship of the peoples.”

This paper is a theory-building exercise with two objectives. First, I establish empirically whether national intelligentsias represent a plausible independent variable that can explain variation in the construction of national identity beyond what can already be explained by mass literacy and schooling. Second, I hypothesize about the mechanisms by which national intelligentsias may have moderated the causal relationship between mass literacy and schooling and national identity formation. Each of these theory-building objectives is prior to the task of empirically testing a causal relationship between mass literacy and intelligentsias and national identity formation; for that reason, this paper performs no causal tests just yet and instead focuses on ruling in versus ruling out hypotheses.<sup>2</sup>

In the following section, I propose a conceptualization of national identity formation along three dimensions: the imagined *definition* of a nation, the imagined *orientation* of a nation towards a state, and the hegemonic, contested, or counter-hegemonic status of these ideas. I then summarize the “institutional consensus” in the existing literature on nationality formation, and establish why it is both compelling and incomplete. Finally, I hypothesize why intelligentsias may fill the explanatory gap by moderating the relationship between mass literacy and schooling and nationality formation.

---

<sup>2</sup> In Section 5, I do propose a few next steps for more narrowly testing specific causal steps in my theory.

Section 3 walks through a case selection exercise: I take seriously the existing research on institutional origins by replicating the results from Darden & Grzymala-Busse (2006)'s study on mass literacy and national loyalties. I then select two deviant cases, Armenia and Belarus, that the conventional wisdom from Darden & Grzymala-Busse (2006) under-predicts and over-predicts, respectively.

Section 4 is a process-tracing exercise using the Armenia case. I present six hypotheses, including one stipulating institutional origins and one on the role of national intelligentsias, that could account for why Armenia "overperformed" in national mobilization. I then use the Armenia case to establish whether each is plausible or implausible. The exercise "rules out" three hypotheses focused on pre-communist nation-building, Armenia's brief moment of independence in 1918-21, and the demonstration effect, and is indeterminant on a fourth hypothesis about Armenian exceptionalism. It establishes that my two preferred hypotheses focusing on the campaign to liquidate illiteracy in Armenia in the 1920s and the formation of an Armenian national intelligentsia in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, are plausible explanations for Armenia's over-performance, but are also incomplete and leave some key questions unanswered. To keep the paper short, I present only two sections of the process-tracing exercise in the paper body; the rest is included in the appendix.<sup>3</sup>

In Section 5, I summarize my findings from section 4 (including the appendix pieces) and establish a narrower scope of inquiry. I then propose three next steps that will more directly test the key causal relationships from my theory.

## **Section 2: Theory**

### *What I Mean By Nationality*

Most conceptualizations of nationality emphasize its socially constructed or imagined nature – specifically the imagining of boundaries or rules of belonging, the imagining of a common culture or common system of ideas and associations, the imagining of a common historical past, and/or the imagining of a common future possibly linked with sovereign nation-statehood.<sup>4</sup> Conventional approaches measuring national identity as a variable place nationality on a continuum along one

---

<sup>3</sup> Of course, I encourage the reader to take a look at these as well.

<sup>4</sup> Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 6; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 5-7.

dimension from less to more strongly felt nationalism, as in Darden & Grzymala-Busse (2006)'s operationalization of "national loyalties."

I am interested in three specific dimensions of how nationality is imagined: the imagined *definition* of the nation, the imagined *orientation* of the nation towards a state, and the degree to which these conceptions are hegemonic, contested, or radically unorthodox in public discourse.

By the *definition* or shape of the nation, I mean the set of common cultural traits, such as language, religious practices, geography, or shared historical experience, that are imagined to constitute a nationality. The definition of a nation may be imagined according to different or multiple characteristics: for example, while religion may figure deeply into the imagined definition of the Polish nation, territory may figure deeply into the imagined definition of the Belorussian nation. A nation might be imagined as strongly or weakly defined, A well-defined nation is one we all recognize, like the French nation. A poorly defined nation is one whose status as a nation we might argue over, like the Bashkir nation.

By the *orientation* of the nation towards a state, I mean what is deemed the rightful or natural relationship between a nation that has a definition and either nation-statehood, or some alternative model of statehood, like the Soviet multi-national one. The principle of Soviet multi-nationalism, under the slogan "friendship of the peoples," held that "the Soviet state would *maximally support* those 'forms' of nationhood that did not conflict with a unitary central state [emphasis mine]."<sup>5</sup> It is an archetypical example of what Akturk (2012) termed a multi-ethnic regime of nationality, in which "a state accepts people from ethnically diverse backgrounds as its citizens *and* allows, encourages, or even participates in the legal and institutional expression of ethnic diversity."<sup>6</sup> Some well-defined nationalities, such as Tatars and Buriats, have been imagined as consistent with this principle, so that the alternative of sovereign nation-statehood has only rarely entered mainstream debate.<sup>7</sup> Others, such as the Baltic nationalities and Georgians, have consistently imagined their nations as tied to sovereign statehood, either historically or aspirational, so that the Soviet multi-national state was considered an alien imposition. As a shorthand, I will refer to this dimension as the *orientation* of the nation towards or away from the Soviet multi-national state.

---

<sup>5</sup> Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 9-10.

<sup>6</sup> Akturk, "Regimes of Ethnicity," 119.

<sup>7</sup> Mason (2005)'s description of the Armenian "true believer" who "remained an Armenian patriot within the vast multi-national Soviet empire" also nicely captures this type of imagined relationship between nation and state (Mason, "Living the Lie," 61-2).

By hegemonic, contested, or unorthodox, I mean to capture the idea that while nationality is imagined, it can also be (but is not always) contested. Lustick (1996)'s conceptual vocabulary, adapted from Gramsci (1971), is useful here: a particular imagining of the nation may be hegemonic, or "deeply embedded" as a set of "maximally institutionalized norms" that "imply a restricted set of intellectually or politically conceivable alternatives," or it may be counter-hegemonic and challenge those norms.<sup>8</sup> Herrera uses similar language – her terms are orthodox and heterodox, and borrow more from Bourdieu (1977) to describe how economies are imagined to be "a system of meanings and values which appear beyond question."<sup>9</sup> Broadly speaking, I seek to explain whether a particular definition of the nation, and its orientation towards a state, is taken as natural and uncontested (hegemonic or orthodox), is radical and outside mainstream discourse (counter-hegemonic or heterodox), or is actively contested.

My three-dimensional conceptualization of national identity formation is meant to accommodate and collapse into the more conventional, one-dimensional approach, though at the cost of some analytic leverage.<sup>10</sup> Peoples and movements that we might think of as having the strongest "national loyalties,"<sup>11</sup> like Catalonia, tend to represent well-defined nationalities that are oriented strongly towards sovereign statehood.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, I am interested in these three dimensions – shape, orientation, and hegemony – of how nations are imagined *independently* of the many other variables that will influence how or whether nationality drives political behavior. The rational calculation of self-interested politicians,<sup>13</sup> the example and spillover from national movements elsewhere,<sup>14</sup> the capacity of the state to repress, and other factors will all affect the expression of nationality in observable outcomes like mass mobilization, and especially the achievement of national goals. For me, these represent threats to measurement validity. For that reason,

---

<sup>8</sup> Lustick, *Unsettled States*, 53-6.

<sup>9</sup> Herrera, *Imagined Economies*, 80-4.

<sup>10</sup> One example of what a single dimensional conceptualization fails to capture, however, would be peoples and movements that are very well-defined but not oriented towards sovereign statehood at all. The Tatars in Russia, for example, have historically been circumscribed very clearly as a nationality by language, Islamic faith, and even territorial administration, but have only in a few rare instances yielded serious movements in favor of sovereign statehood. My scheme provides a clear conceptual vocabulary to describe Tatar national identity: strongly defined, oriented towards the Russian multi-national state, and near-hegemonic.

<sup>11</sup> As used in Balcells (2013) or Darden & Grzymalla-Busse (2006).

<sup>12</sup> For would-be nationalist movements pursuing counter-hegemonic goals, this schema shows how some have only needed to reorient well-defined nations, as for Armenians in the 1980s, while others have needed to *both* define the nation and orient it, as for the Buriats at the same time.

<sup>13</sup> Laitin, *Identity in Formation*, 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization*, 2002.

where I can, I focus on discourse and how imagined national identities are expressed rather than real political outcomes – in the Armenia case study in this paper, I focus chiefly on 1987 and 1988 and the onset of nationalist mobilization, rather than the full stretch of the Armenian independence movement and its eventual success in 1991.

*Where Does Nationality Come From? - An Inter-disciplinary Consensus on “Institutional Origins”*

A broad inter-disciplinary consensus, originating from historical sociology, locates the origins of national identification in the deeper, structural changes brought about by nation-building institutions and policies installed by states in formation.<sup>15</sup> Weber (1976)’s and Gellner (1986)’s work on nationality formation in Europe is foundational to this paradigm. They argued that, during the era of industrialization and national economic integration in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, states seeking to homogenize the populations over which they ruled installed wide-reaching systems of mass schooling, promoted mass literacy, and standardized languages. Mass literacy was a key mechanism by which modernizing states like France and Germany deliberately constructed a shared culture according to which nations could be imagined.

A striking aspect of what I term the “institutional origins” paradigm is the degree to which it has travelled specifically to Soviet history. A generation of Soviet historiography, originating in the late 1980s and accelerated by the archival revolution of the 1990s, built on the premises stipulated in Weber (1976) and Gellner (1986). The paradigm is especially apparent in the “maker of nations” versus “breaker of nations” debate in Soviet historiography. According to the more or less essentialist and now largely defunct “breaker of nations” argument, also caricatured as the “freezer hypothesis” and best represented in the work of Robert Conquest, nations existed prior to Soviet Rule and were effectively contained by a combination of strategic concessions and divide-and-rule, before ultimately “unfreezing” and resurfacing in the late 1980s and early 1990s to reclaim their “natural” boundaries.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> In another consensus in political science and political economy, constructivist theories of national identification have tended to emphasize short-term and active decision-making at the individual level. In this framework, boundedly rational agents actively navigate identity categories by, for example, choosing to learn a language (Laitin, 1998). These approaches usefully capture how an individual might make a utility-maximizing decision to “activate” one identity versus another under particular constraints and in a particular context, but abstracts away from the “ideas and signs and associations” embedded in such identities that may be historically determined. As a consequence, these instrumentalist approaches have largely stayed within political science political economy. For a useful statement of the is research program, see Chandra (2012).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Conquest, *The Nation Killers*; Conquest, *Stalin: Breaker of Nations*; or Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*.

More recently, greater attention to Leninist nationalities theory and policies of *korenizatsiia* or affirmative action has suggested that, rather than breaking nations, Soviet state-builders had an active hand in creating them by, for example, baking national boundaries into the Soviet federal system, standardizing national languages, and systematically promoting national cadres in the communist party.<sup>17</sup> Subsequent work has documented a broad range of ways that Soviet state-builders, both purposefully and unintentionally, in both straightforward and roundabout ways, contributed to the active imagining of national identities, from the advancement of ethnography, to the construction of railroads, to the repression of patriarchal social practices.<sup>18</sup> The intention of Soviet nationalities policy was to promote an imagining of nationality that was “national in form, socialist in content” and consistent with the idea of the Soviet Union as a multi-national state or, in Slezkine (1994)’s metaphor, as a communal apartment. Suny (1993)’s “revenge of the past” argument contends that these policies created the nations that would ultimately undo the Soviet federal state.<sup>19</sup> Importantly, in much of this work, the Soviet state operates in much the same way as Weber’s France and Gellner’s Germany, with the state actively cultivating nationality via top-down organizational mechanisms like mass schooling and language policy.

Furthermore, recent work in comparative politics has offered strong evidence for the “institutional origins” of modern-day national identities in the organizations and policies of historical nation-builders. In Latin America, the advent of the national census and civil registration helped to institutionalize racial identity in Mexico<sup>20</sup> and Brazil<sup>21</sup>, while education reforms oriented perceptions of national identity in Mexico, Argentina, Peru, and Venezuela.<sup>22</sup> In Western Europe, the origins of Catalan nationalism have been traced to the absence of a French-style “scholastic revolution” in Spain.<sup>23</sup> In the Balkans, linguistic and national homogeneity may be a product of historical nation-builders that faced military threats from abroad.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Suny, *Revenge of the Past*, 1993; Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 2001.

<sup>18</sup> This research program is broad and continues today, but for some of the earlier and most influential work, see Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 2005; Paine, *Stalin’s Railroad*, 2001; Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 2003; for a similar revision to Russian Imperial history, which envisions the Tsarist empire as a “multi-confessional state,” see Crews, “Empire and Confessional State,” 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Suny, *Revenge of the Past*; for explanations more focused on how institutional arrangements undermined the Soviet state, see Bunce, *Subversive Institutions*, 1999 and Hale, “Divided we Stand,” 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Loveman, *National Colors*, 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Loveman, “Blinded Like a State,” 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Abbot et. al., “Transforming the Nation,” 2017; Vom Hau, “State Infrastructural Power and Nationalism,” 2008; Vom Hau, “Unpacking the School,” 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Balcells, “Mass Schooling and Catalan Nationalism,” 2013; this is the same “scholastic revolution” documented in Weber (1976).

<sup>24</sup> Darden & Mylonas, “Threats to Territorial Integrity,” 2015.



Some of the most convincing evidence for the origins of national identity in state policies and organizations comes out of Eastern Europe and Eurasia. Current work from multiple scholars exploits natural experiments offered by Ukraine’s political geography to show how national identities cultivated during the emergence of mass literacy under Austro-Hungarian rule in the 19<sup>th</sup> century persisted decades later in motivating costly political behavior like violent insurgency in the 1940s<sup>25</sup> and even political attitudes toward Russia today.<sup>26</sup> In an influential study on the former communist bloc, Darden and Grzymala-Busse (2006) show that the timing of the first onset of mass literacy – specifically whether it occurred before or after communist rule – is a powerful predictor of national loyalties, proxied by the share of parliamentary seats won by non-communist parties in the first modern free elections. They argue that mass education prior to communism instilled durable national loyalties that persisted through communist rule, because they were passed down through families. Importantly, in this variant of the Gellner story, national loyalties are written during the “first round” of mass schooling, but in pen – they could not be re-written afterward.

Considered together, the body of evidence from recent work in Soviet history and strong empirical work from comparative politics makes a convincing case that state organizations and policies played some role in the formation of national identities in Eurasia. However, two theoretical questions remain unresolved, suggesting that state-building organizations and policies may only partially account for the origins of nationality in the region.

First, while empirical work by Darden and Grzymala-Busse (2006), Darden (forthcoming), and Peisakhin (forthcoming) suggest that only the *first round* of mass schooling creates durable national loyalties, these findings contradict the large body of work by Soviet historians on how Soviet officials also cultivated national identity, *even in regions that had seen mass education prior to communism*. In regions where nationality had multiple authors, how can we predict which would-be nation-builder has ultimate causal priority?

Second, we lack a compelling mechanism by which the institutionalization of nationality at one time generates concrete political actions decades or generations later. Darden and Grzymala-Busse (2006) argue that, once learned in schools, ideas about nationality are “passed down through families” – but if this is true, then it is a mechanism that we would expect to vary over space and time as familial linkages are stronger, weaker, or strained by disruptive events like war, dislocation, and political purges. In

---

<sup>25</sup> Darden, working paper.

<sup>26</sup> Peisakhin, working paper.

addition, we need a mechanism that not only carries national identity forward in time, but links it with real political positions and real political actions, such as the decision to protest during the Soviet collapse in 1989-91. Even if historical nation-building efforts shaped what a group imagines the nation to be, how exactly did it answer the political question of how that nation should be oriented towards a state?

More broadly, explanations that point to purely institutional origins of national identity rely on schooling, mass literacy, or linguistic standardization to do all the causal work. In Darden & Grzymala-Busse (2006)'s account, for example, mass primary schooling prior to communism must both define what a nation is and establish what the rightful or 'natural' relationship is between that nation and the state. Furthermore, because the first onset of mass primary schooling only occurs once, **both** the imagined definition and the imagined orientation of the nation must persist across generations.

If institutional origins generate structural conditions like literacy and language use that are difficult to change, they certainly may account for the "durability" of conceptions about what the nation is. However, it is less clear how mass schooling, literacy, or language use in one generation shapes conceptions about what the rightful or 'natural' relationship is between the nation and the state in the next.

It may be that the historical experience of mass schooling, language, and literacy does shape long-durée and durable views about the definition of the nation, but without also shaping views about its orientation toward a state. In this formulation, institutional origins would be a necessary but not sufficient condition for explaining imagined national identity along all three of its dimensions.

#### *National Intelligentsias as a Moderating Variable*

To explain the imagined rightful or natural relationship between the nation and the state, we need a more proximate causal variable that can directly influence political preferences *within* a generation. In the East European and Eurasian context, **national intelligentsias** may play this role. During the collapse of communism, many of the most well-known leaders at the head of anti-communist nationalist movements had been former writers or academics – for example, Zviad Gamsakhurdia in Georgia, Vytautas Landsbergis in Lithuania, and Havel in Czechoslovakia. In fact, seven of the fifteen first post-

communist elected heads of state (and almost all the non-communist holdovers) were former writers, musicians, scholars, or in some other intelligentsia profession.<sup>27</sup>

While a cohesive and self-conscious research program on national intelligentsias does not exist in comparative politics, there is a good deal of theoretical basis in existing work for the hypothesis that intelligentsias played a key role in shaping mass beliefs about the orientation of nations toward or away from a state. In Anderson (1983)'s seminal work on nationality formation, "creole pioneers" in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Americas aggressively pursued claims to nation-statehood, even without a common language distinguishing them from colonial authorities in the metropole;<sup>28</sup> "vernacularizing intelligentsias" in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe at the helm of multi-ethnic imperial states adopted new models of 'official nationalism' that themselves drove language-homogenizing policies;<sup>29</sup> and colonial, bilingual native but European-educated intelligentsias in 20<sup>th</sup> century Southeast Asia and Africa adopted the European nation-state model even without linguistic homogeneity at home.<sup>30</sup>

In Lustick (1996)'s comparative historical analysis of realized or potential state contraction in Britain/Ireland, France/Algeria, and Israel/Palestine, intelligentsias also play a *proximate* causal role. Drawing on Gramsci (1971)'s theorizing about the role of "organic intellectuals" in "wars of position" that secure or challenge a hegemonic class, Lustick argues elites may reinforce "maximally institutionalized norms" about the territorial expanse of the state, or may raise "fundamental questions about the community's sense of itself and its rightful political domain."<sup>31</sup> For example, during at the beginning of the Fifth Republic in France, it was de Gaulle's ability to mainstream challenges to hegemonic norms about the shape of the French state that allowed the French state to disengage from Algeria.<sup>32</sup> However, such counter-hegemonic ideas only entered the political mainstream, and only motivated meaningful political action, when enabled by structural preconditions like the failure to meaningfully incorporate Algeria's population during the Fourth republic.<sup>33</sup> In this way, and consistent with what I will theorize, intelligentsias in Lustick's account *moderate* a prior causal relationship between structural characteristics like shared language and demographics and imagined national identity.

---

<sup>27</sup> Landsbergis in Lithuania, Meri in Estonia, Shushkevich in Belarus, Ter-Petrosyan in Armenia, Gamsakhurdia in Georgia, Alchivey in Azerbaijan, and Akayev in Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>28</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 47-66.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 83-112.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 113-40.

<sup>31</sup> Lustick, *Unsettled States*, 44.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 239-301.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-120.

More recent work in comparative politics lends empirical support to the conjecture that intelligentsias play an important and proximate causal role. Slater (2009), in a comparative historical analysis of seven Southeast Asian countries, finds that what he terms ‘communal elites’ or “a society’s primary possessors of national and religious authority,” when positioned autonomously from the regime, have been pivotal figures in mobilizing mass democratizing urban protest. According to Slater, while communal elites exercise considerable agency in the use of “charisma and creativity” to mobilize their constituencies, *who* these communal elites are and how they are credentialed is historically determined generations earlier.<sup>34</sup>

### *Institutional Origins and National Intelligentsias as a Joint Cause*

I contend that both mass literacy and national intelligentsias jointly determine the imagined definition and orientation of national identities. However, I argue that each of these variables plays a different role in the causal process, so that real political action motivated by issues of nationality cannot be predicted by either institutional origins or national intelligentsias alone.

I begin from the premise that the role of mass schooling and mass literacy theorized in Weber (1976) and Gellner (1986), explored by contemporary historical work on Soviet nationalities policy, and tested in studies like Darden & Grzymala-Busse (2006), is largely correct. However, I hypothesize that in the Soviet context, mass schooling and literacy had a specific effect on a particular outcome: it determined perceived “fundamental” demographic realities that shaped the perceived *definition* of nations that persisted over time.<sup>35</sup> By bringing to reality a shared and standardized language, and by rendering a group literate in that language across class and across geography, nation-builders were able to use the tools of literacy and schooling to create what would be recognized as a shared culture – especially under the auspices of a Soviet nationality policy that explicitly sought to accomplish this as its developmental goal. Mass nation-building institutions generated structural conditions that persisted across generations, and that were *necessary for* the imagining of nationality across generations. In the Soviet context, mass campaigns to “liquidate illiteracy” amongst the adult population, coupled with primary schooling and the standardization and systematic promotion of “native” languages, served this role to effectively create an Armenian, Kazakh, or Russian *narod* (Russian: nation or people). However, while mass nation-building

---

<sup>34</sup> Slater (2009) points to, in the Southeast Asian context, the emasculation of pre-colonial dynastic rulers, the existence of a hegemonic national religion, and/or the experience of a contentious struggle for national independence; however, in the Eurasian context, such historical determinants may be quite different.

<sup>35</sup> In this way, Darden & Grzymala-Busse (2006) only account for variation along one of my three dimensions of nationality.

organizations influenced the perceived *definition* of national identities, they did not specify an *orientation* toward a state that would persist across generations.<sup>36</sup>

Instead, national intelligentsias fulfilled this role. While the definitions of nations were historically determined and durable, in the Soviet context, it was up to writers, artists, musicians, and academics to articulate the rightful or natural relationship between that nation and the Soviet state. In some places, like Tatarstan, intelligentsias have almost always articulated a relationship that saw the nation as rightfully and naturally part of the Soviet multi-national project – as one people in the “friendship of peoples” (*družba narodov*). In others, like the Baltics, the counter-hegemonic notion that the rightful or natural relationship between the nation and the state was one of national sovereignty always remained present. In others, like Armenia, the orientation of the national intelligentsia towards the Soviet multi-national project changed more dramatically over time. As in Slater (2009), the development, cohesion, orientation, and autonomy of national intelligentsias was historically determined – in the Soviet context, this was linked to the organizations that housed and resourced national intelligentsias, especially republic-level universities and the writers’ unions. While institutional origins created structural constraints on the imagined definition of Soviet nations and the frames and claims available to intelligentsias, it was writers, artists, and academics who did the actual agential work of articulating a relationship between the nation and the state that reinforced or challenged the Soviet multi-national project.

In sum, I argue that mass organizational nation-building influences the definition of imagined nations, but that this effect is moderated by national intelligentsias, who articulate the imagined orientation of a nationality towards or against a state. In the Soviet context, this means that the mass literacy campaigns of the 1920s would have been critical to establishing which Soviet peoples counted as nations, but that national intelligentsias emerging from universities and writers unions would ultimately determine whether those nations oriented towards or against the Soviet multi-national project.<sup>37</sup> This theoretical intuition is diagrammed in figure 1.

---

<sup>36</sup> My claim is not that literacy campaigns and mass schooling do not specify an orientation for the nation; they often do, as in the Soviet principle of “nationalist in form, socialist in content.” However, I contend that, unlike demographics that constitute a definition of the nation, the orientation of the nation as received in mass schooling does not necessarily survive across generations.

<sup>37</sup> While previous work suggests that intelligentsias matter and are historically determined, I do not yet know whether the strength, orientation, cohesion, or autonomy of national intelligentsias is what accounts for their different stances through Soviet history; however, for some preliminary thoughts on how I might pursue this line of theory-building, see section 5.

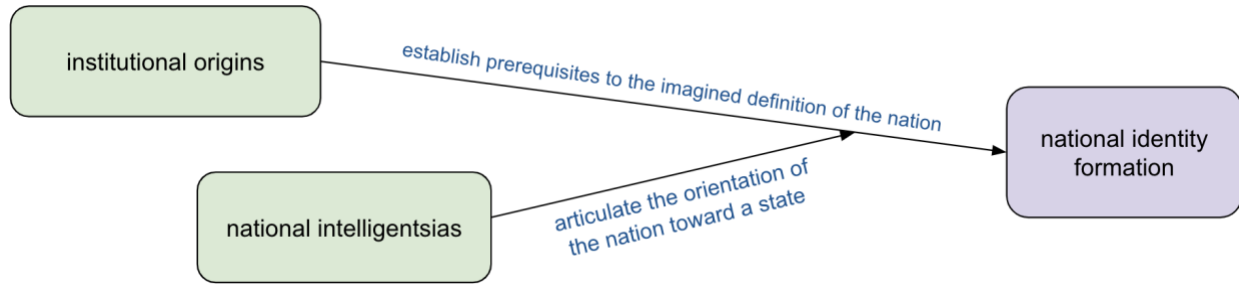


Figure 1: National intelligentsias moderate the relationship between mass literacy and schooling, and national identity formation

The remainder of this paper tests the plausibility of this theory. Specifically, I seek to (1) confirm existing work showing that mass literacy in part shaped national identity formation in the Soviet Union, and (2) test whether national intelligentsias, as a variable, can explain variation in national identity formation beyond what can be accounted for by mass literacy alone.

### Section 3: Case Selection

#### *The Research Design*

My empirical approach in this paper starts with a strategy of nested analysis that Lieberman (2005) terms “model-building small-n analysis” and that Seawright (2016) calls “case selection after regression using the selection of deviant cases.” In a nutshell, I first replicate the results from Darden and Grzymala-Busse (2006) by regressing the percentage of protests making secessionist claims in 1987-91 on the literacy rate at the time of Soviet incorporation, restricted only to the 15 Soviet SSRs. I then select deviant cases that Darden and Grzymala-Busse (2006) either overpredict or underpredict. Finally, I use process-tracing tools with secondary source materials to test the relative plausibility of my versus rival hypotheses to account for these deviant cases.

I deploy this nested approach for two reasons. First, this design takes seriously and explicitly the contention that Darden and Grzymala-Busse (2006) offer a correct but incomplete explanation of nationality formation in this region. Put differently, if pre-communist mass literacy explains some but not all of the variation in national expression in this region at this key moment, this exercise identifies explicitly *what* variation, and which cases, are left unexplained.

Second, according to both Lieberman (2005) and Seawright (2016), selecting deviant cases off of the regression line is an optimal strategy for theory-building.<sup>38</sup> Deviant cases may be useful for identifying omitted variables, as long as the omitted variable does in fact have a relationship with the outcome and is not a pure function of the independent variable – two questions that can be resolved with comparative case work and process tracing.<sup>39</sup> Here, this means that my deviant cases may help to identify variables omitted by Darden and Grzymala-Busse (2006), so long as those variables also contribute to national identity formation and are not themselves purely a function of pre-communist schooling.

In addition, deviant cases may be used to identify mechanisms in the original causal pathway that drove the deviant case above or below the regression line, due to an unusual relationship either between the independent variable and mechanism, or between the mechanism and the outcome.<sup>40</sup> For example, if my variable of interest – national intelligentsias – in part mediates the relationship between mass schooling and national identity expression, then variation in the development or orientation of national intelligentsias may push cases on or off the regression line.

### *The Case Selection Exercise*

To identify cases that deviate from the conventional wisdom, I regressed a measure of national loyalty on a measure of pre-communist literacy.<sup>41</sup>

To capture national loyalties, rather than Darden & Grzymala-Busse's measure,<sup>42</sup> I use the percentage of protests in 1987-91 that were secessionist in nature (data from Beissinger, 2003). This variable more directly measures the outcome of interest – national loyalties that, in the hands of opposition movements, in Darden & Grzymala-Busse's words, “claimed to be rescuing the nation from the grasp of

---

<sup>38</sup> Lieberman, “Nested Analysis,” 445-6; Seawright, *Multi-Method Social Science*, 86-9.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>41</sup> I restricted my inquiry only to post-Soviet states, which excludes Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and Mongolia from the replication and reduces the sample size by about half. For this exercise, traditional concerns about this very small sample size are less relevant – as Seawright (2016) notes, “In setting up these regressions, problems of descriptive or causal interest are not fatal” (Seawright, *Multi-Method Social Science*, 82). In particular, we can get away with a smaller sample size here since the sample encompasses the entire population from which it is drawn (post-Soviet states). [However, in order to achieve a more fine-grained sense of where the conventional wisdom holds up versus fails, I am also repeating this exercise at the province (guberniya, oblast) level. This work is currently still ongoing.]

<sup>42</sup> (The share of parliamentary seats won by noncommunist candidates in the first free competitive elections)

an alien, imposed, and illegitimate communist regime.”<sup>43</sup> It correlates with their original outcome variable, and is used as a proxy for national loyalties in similar work by Darden.<sup>44</sup>

To capture precommunist schooling, I use the literacy rate of each Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) at the time of incorporation into the Soviet Union. Because more detailed literacy data for the non-Russian territories is rare, I use the 1920 literacy rate for each SSR as listed in the 1970 All-Union Population Census. For the Baltic provinces (which were incorporated after Soviet occupation in 1944), I use the 1939 literacy rate. While these dates don’t match incorporation precisely, importantly, they closely pre-date the onset of the Soviet literacy campaigns that usually began in the early 1920s.

Figure 2 plots relationship between precommunist literacy rate and secessionist protest in 1987-91.

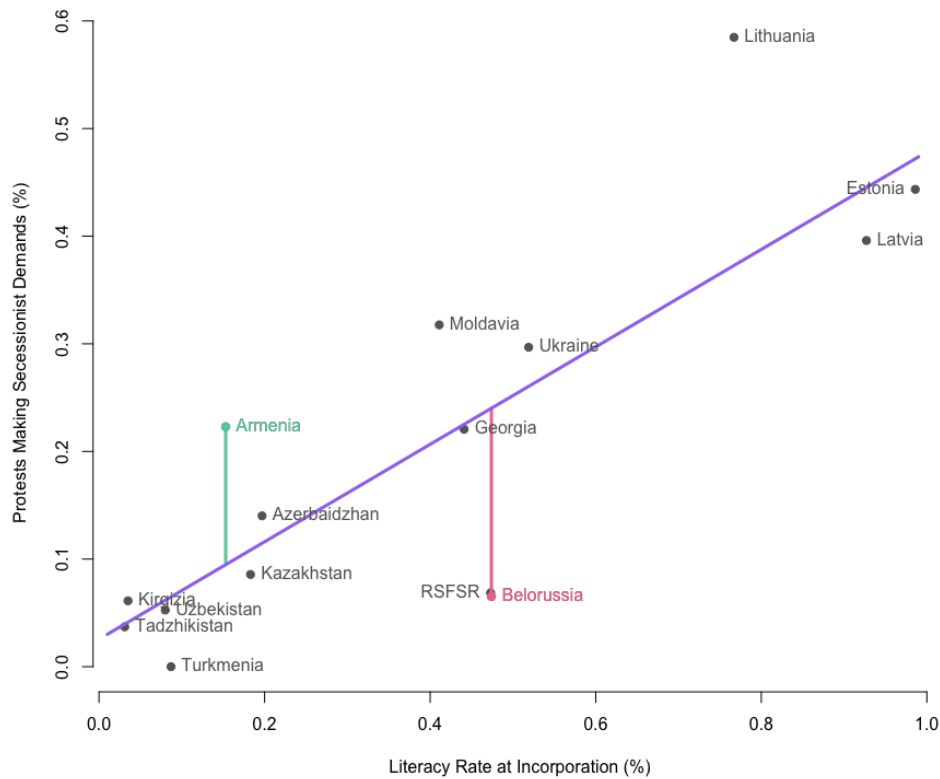


Figure 2: Replication of findings from Darden & Grzymala-Busse (2006), with deviant cases of interest highlighted in green and pink.

<sup>43</sup> Darden & Grzymala-Busse, “The Great Divide,” 90.

<sup>44</sup> Darden, working paper.



The general findings from Darden & Grzymala-Busse (2006) hold up well in this replication. As in their original study, here we see a strong positive relationship between literacy rate at incorporation and national loyalty, proxied by the share of protests making secessionist demands in 1987-91. If the regression line<sup>45</sup> represents the best estimate for what secessionist protest *should have* looked like in 1987-91 according to the conventional wisdom alone,<sup>46</sup> then Darden & Grzymala-Busse (2006) get a number of cases quite right – especially those at the extremes, such as places that were comparatively well-developed at the time of communist incorporation and were first-movers during the Soviet collapse (Georgia, the Baltic states) and places that were comparatively under-developed at incorporation and were latecomers to the movements for independence in 1987-91 (Central Asia).

Where the conventional wisdom falls short is cases between the ends of the spectrum – moderately developed before communist incorporation, and middle-of-the-pack during the wave of mobilizations in 1987-91. In particular, the conventional wisdom about pre-communist literacy *underpredicts* nationalist mobilization in Armenia (in green) and *overpredicts* it in Belarus (in pink).<sup>47</sup>

The following section presents a case study of Armenia that employs process-tracing tools to rule in and rule out plausible hypotheses that may explain why this case deviates from the regression line.

#### **Section 4 (1): Hypotheses**

Operationalized within the Armenian context, my research question is: Why did Armenians in large numbers support the notion of sovereign Armenian nation-statehood in the late 1980s? The following stipulates what I estimate to be the six most credible hypotheses explaining Armenian national identity formation (independent variables highlighted in green, mechanisms in blue):

---

<sup>45</sup> (i.e. the fitted values)

<sup>46</sup> Seawright, *Multi-Method Social Science*, 82.

<sup>47</sup> Here, the conventional wisdom also over-predicts Russia and under-predicts Moldova and Lithuania. I've chosen not to investigate them further, for now, in order to simplify the case studies. Russia's size and multi-national character means that its results may be being driven by sub-national heterogeneity – I expect to learn more about this when I reproduce this exercise at the province (guberniya/oblast) level. Moldova acquired about half of its territory, the Bessarabia region, from Romania only after 1944, meaning that the eastern and western half of the country have two very different histories and underwent two very different nation-building processes during the 1920s and 1930s. Lithuania, as with the other Baltic states, was only incorporated into the Soviet Union after 1944, and similarly to Bessarabia did not experience Soviet nation-building policies in the 1920s and 1930s. While these cases are important to account for in my ultimate theory, their exceptional historical circumstances make them less useful for theory-building at this point.

- H1: Pre-Soviet nation-building** (especially schooling) inculcated a loyalty to Armenian nation-statehood that passed down through generations until the opportunity to manifest in visible political action in the 1980s (direct adaptation of Darden & Grzymala-Busse, 2006).
- H2: Armenia’s brief moment of sovereign statehood in 1918-21** created a conception of the Armenian nation-state that survived informally and underground through the Soviet period and was mimicked in the nationalist movements of the 1980s.<sup>48</sup>
- H3: Soviet nation-building in the 1920s** – the literacy campaign, the standardization of Armenian language, and the creation of a Soviet Armenian school system – created demographic prerequisites to a broadly shared conception of Armenian nation-statehood necessary for mass support in the 1980s (my preferred hypothesis, institutional origins variable).
- H4: An Armenian national intelligentsia** formed within elite Soviet cultural institutions during the 1950s-70s, and pushed the Armenian public towards a counter-hegemonic orientation of Armenian nationhood in the 1980s (my preferred hypothesis, intelligentsias variable).
- H5:** Armenians were no more pre-disposed to nation-statehood than other Soviet identity groups; rather, **structural opportunities** like the political status of the Armenian SSR or the demonstration effect created a unique opening for the expression and radicalization of Armenian nation-state aspirations (adaptation of Beissinger, 2002).
- H6: Particular characteristics of the Armenian experience** – specifically the genocide, the diaspora, and/or Karabagh – promoted or created a foundational motive for the imagining of a common Armenian national history and destiny that could only be fulfilled with sovereign statehood.

Figure 3 operationalizes my two preferred hypotheses in the Armenian case:

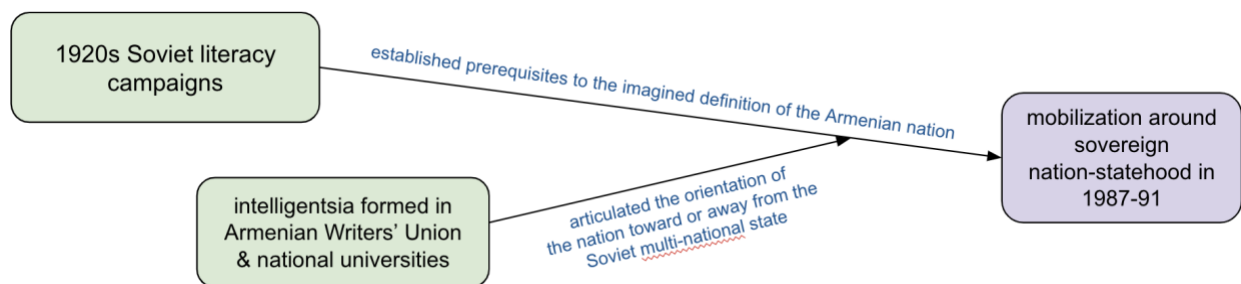


Figure 3: My hypothesis on national identity formation in the Armenia case

<sup>48</sup> This would loosely operationalize, in the Armenian context, the “long duree” argument in Ekiert & Ziblatt (2013).

## Section 4 (2): Process-Tracing

The following section walks through the broad outlines of the Armenia case. I use process-tracing tools to, for each of the hypotheses above, determine whether that hypothesis offers a plausible versus implausible account of the Armenia case. In this exercise, a hypothesis offers an implausible account of the Armenian case when its independent variable is absent or takes on a value other than the one hypothesized, or when its mechanism is absent.<sup>49</sup> A hypothesis is plausible if both its independent variable and mechanism is present as theorized in the Armenia case, and a clear pathway exists linking it to the imagining of Armenian nation-statehood.<sup>50</sup>

The exercise is divided into five sections: one for Armenia's time under Tsarism before 1917, one for the independent Republic of Armenia in 1918-1921, one for post-revolutionary Armenia from 1921 to the 1930s, one for Armenia during the thaw and stagnation periods in the 1950s-70s, and one for the Armenian independence movement in the 1980s. I include only the sections on post-revolutionary Armenia and the Armenian independence movement in the paper body here; the other sections are in the appendix.<sup>51</sup>

The goal of this exercise is not to empirically test a causal hypothesis. Rather, the goal is to theory-build by ruling out some hypotheses and ruling in others. Each section begins with a restatement of the most relevant hypotheses for that time period, and derives from each the evidence we should expect to see to confirm it as plausible, and the evidence that would render it implausible.<sup>52</sup> At the end of each section, I evaluate the relevant hypotheses and, where appropriate, stipulate remaining unanswered questions that we would need to answer to fully rule in or out a key hypothesis.

---

<sup>49</sup> For example, hypothesis 1 – that Soviet nation-building policies in the 1920s created demographic prerequisites to nation-statehood – would be implausible if we found that, in Armenia, Soviet nation-building policies were not implemented, were implemented unsuccessfully, or were implemented successfully but produced demographic changes that were later reversed.

<sup>50</sup> By plausible, I do **not** mean proven or causally identified. As I present it here, the burden of proof for plausibility is lower – it demands that the independent variable and mechanism be present in the case, but not that we have clear evidence that they exert the theorized causal effect.

<sup>51</sup> I put those process-tracing sections in the Appendix to keep the paper short, but of course I encourage the reader to take a look at them.

<sup>52</sup> Usually, this involves what Collier (1992) terms “hoop tests.” For this reason, my Armenia case study is generally better at ruling out hypotheses rather than ruling them in.

Lenin		Stalin		Khrushchev	Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko	Gorbachev
1918	1921	1936				1991
Tsarist Rule	Republic of Armenia	Transcaucasian SSR		Armenian SSR		Independent Armenia
1: Nationality Formation in Armenia Before 1917	2: Armenia's Sovereign Moment, 1918 – 1920	3: The Construction of a Mass Armenian Culture, 1921 – early 1930s		4: The Re-emergence of Nationality in Armenian Cultural Politics, 1953 – 1970s		5: The Mainstreaming of Counter-Hegemonic Armenian Nationalism, 1980s - 1991

Figure 4: Timeline of Case Study Exercise

## 1: Nationality Formation in Armenia Before 1917

H1: **Pre-Soviet nation-building** (especially schooling) **inculcated a loyalty** to Armenian nation-statehood that **passed down through generations** until the opportunity to manifest in visible political action in the 1980s.

*Evaluating Hypotheses:* Key features of pre-1917 Armenian history suggest that this hypothesis is **implausible**. A coherent national idea existed amongst Armenians before 1917, and was certainly a product of literacy, education, and urban development, even if this national idea was contested, Russophilic, and only weakly tied to an aspiration for sovereign statehood. However, this coherent national idea was limited to a class and generation of Armenians that would be killed, dislocated, and purged over the next decade, effectively disrupting any plausible mechanism by which this national idea could be transmitted to subsequent generations.

[see appendix for full process trace]

## 2: Armenia's Sovereign Moment, 1918 – 1921

H2: Armenia's brief moment of **sovereign statehood in 1918-21** created a conception of the Armenian nation-state that **survived informally and underground** through the Soviet period and **was mimicked** in the nationalist movements of the 1980s.

*Evaluating Hypotheses:* This hypothesis is **implausible** as it bears out in the case. The Democratic Republic of Armenia and its Dashnak government was hamstrung from generating any kind of long-lasting impact on Armenian identity politics for at least three reasons. The Dashnaktsutyun governed a state that was brought into existence only reluctantly, they governed without any broad national consensus supporting their rule, and they governed under circumstances of existential crisis. That the Dashnaks established a functioning state while fighting off multiple invasions is a remarkable achievement, and while the Dashnaks did oversee the emergence of what would remain as the modern-day location and shape of territorial Armenia, they were limited in their ability to pursue any kind of ambitious nation-building project.

[see appendix for full process trace]

## The Creation of Soviet Armenia

Because it was a transformative period for the political status of what would become territorial Armenia, three major developments during the creation of the of the Armenian SSR are worth reviewing.

### *The Transcaucasian Federation*

Armenia entered the USSR in 1922 as one constituent Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) of the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (TSFSR), one of the USSR's four founding members.<sup>53</sup> The formation of the TSFSR represented a serious devolution of governing authority away from the three capitals of formerly sovereign republics, and would place policy-making power over Armenian affairs in Tblisi (the capital of the TSFSR) and in Moscow. The centralizing move was pushed for hard by Stalin (then Commissar for Nationalities; a native Georgian) and his allies from the region (Anastas Mikoyan and Grigol Ordzhonikidze), and opposed by Lenin, who argued for a more hands-off approach in the Caucasus, but was too physically sick to see it through.<sup>54</sup>

Of the three major Caucasian republics, Armenia was most supportive of entering the USSR as a member of the Transcaucasian federation rather than as an independent republic, owing to its overall weak position.<sup>55</sup> Georgia by contrast, in a stronger position and under a more stable Menshevik government, was most reluctant to form the federation.<sup>56</sup> Had a more developed national consciousness formed in Armenia during its pre-1917 history or under the Dashnaks<sup>57</sup> we might have expected more reluctance to make the serious concessions in sovereignty required by the TSFSR proposal, as in Georgia.

### *Leninist policy*

In the debate over Soviet policy in the caucuses following the Red Army invasions of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, Lenin's preference for a hands-off approach conflicted with a more aggressive line

---

<sup>53</sup> The TSFSR existed until its dissolution in 1936. The other founding USSR members were the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, and the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic.

<sup>54</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 141; Blank, "Bolshevik Organizational Development," 316-333.

<sup>55</sup> (an economy in collapse, lack of broad popular support for the Dashnak government, and the continued presence of diasporic Armenians outside the boundaries of the territory)

<sup>56</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 141.

<sup>57</sup> (see appendix for discussion of pre-1917 and the Dashnak government)

advocated by the Stalin-Orjonikidze-Mikoyan group. Two lines of reasoning underlined Lenin's thinking. First, the Caucasian republics occupied a unique position in the imagined developmental hierarchy of Soviet nationalities. The caucuses were more backward, "more peasant than Russia;" at the same time, they were well-positioned to establish trade with the capitalist west, which offered an incentive to slow the Bolshevik assault on privileged classes. Lenin wanted to offer the caucuses a degree of autonomy, and urged "greater gentleness, caution, concessions in dealing with the petty-bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia, and especially the peasantry."<sup>58</sup> Second, Lenin was sensitive in all nationality policy to avoiding the appearance "Great Russian chauvinism" – a feature of Tsarist imperialism that Lenin aggressively sought to distance the new Bolshevik government from. In Lenin's memorable words during the conflict with the Stalin-Orjonikidze-Mikoyan group over Georgian autonomy, "Scratch many a communist, and you will find a Great Russian chauvinist!"<sup>59</sup> This attempt to respect national autonomy and avoid the appearance of imperialism would be a foundational principle motivating the *korenizatsiia* or nativization policies of the 1920 and 30s.

### *Sovietization*

The first Soviet government in Armenia included and established all of the "standard" elements associated with Sovietization. It was headed by militant Bolsheviks that had served in the civil war, and was hostile to the Dashnaks that continued to serve in politics. The new Soviet government abolished previous government institutions, established a Cheka branch, and arrested officials associated with the former government. Armenia received the full treatment of war communism, including the nationalization of banks and major industries, and the requisitioning of food believed to be in surplus. By late 1923, the Dashnaks had been formally abolished, all other parties besides the Communists had been eliminated from Armenian politics, and former Dashnaks and Mensheviks were purged from institutes and party cells.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 140. For a more thorough examination of what became known as the "Georgian Affair," see Smith (1998).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 142.

### 3: The Construction of a Mass Armenian Culture, 1921 – Early 1930s

H3: Soviet nation-building in the 1920s –the literacy campaign, the standardization of Armenian language, and the creation of a Soviet Armenian school system – created demographic prerequisites to a broadly shared conception of Armenian nation-statehood necessary for mass support in the 1980s.

#### Evidence For

- Social-transformative changes in Armenian literacy, language, and schooling exist
- These changes are broad in scope, reaching all major groups in Armenian society
- These changes are lasting – clear pathways exist by which they might be transmitted across generations
- These changes in scope match or predict in a clear way later ideas about the shape and definition of the Armenian nation

#### Evidence Against

- Soviet policies around Armenian literacy, language, and schooling were limited in goals or implementation, and not social-transformative
- Soviet nation-building policies only reached some pieces of Armenian society, leaving others intact
- Soviet nation-building policies existed and were transformative, but these changes did not last for subsequent generations, or were reversed in later decades
- These changes occurred, but were tied to ideas about the shape and definition of the Armenian nation dramatically different than the ones apparent during Armenian independence and today

Conventional wisdoms about the Soviet Armenian case might point to three socially transformative changes during the 1920s as driving the formation of a modern, secular, and socialist Armenian nationality: the establishment of an secure Armenian homeland and the filling of that homeland with ethnic Armenians, the establishment of an Armenian state apparatus and the filling of those state offices with ethnic Armenians, and the attack on longstanding premodern Armenian traditions associated with gender and the church. However, while each of these changes certainly contributed to realities on the ground necessary for a modern Armenian nation state, unlike the literacy campaign, none exercised a mechanism directly connected to the imagining of Armenian nationhood.<sup>61</sup>

#### *Territory & Demographics*

The existence of the Armenian SSR meant the realization of three important “firsts.” First, the Armenian SSR constituted, for the first time, a guaranteed physical homeland for the imagined Armenian people. Despite losses of territory in Georgia, Azerbaijan (Karabagh), and Turkish Anatolia, Armenia now had hard boundaries formalized in treaties with neighboring states and Soviet republics. Soviet Armenia had

---

<sup>61</sup> As in institutionalist variants of constructivist identity theory, e.g. Weber (1976), Gellner (1986).

eliminated the threat of Turkish invasion for the foreseeable future and secured the protection of a major power in Russia. Second, the center of Armenian political life had now shifted from Tblisi, Baku, and other diasporic locales to Yerevan, even if authoritative decision-making now came from Moscow. Third, as displaced Armenians from neighboring territories (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iran) and from the wider diaspora (Greece, France, the United States) returned to the newly created Armenian homeland, bringing with them a diversity of dialects, customs, and historical experiences, territorial Armenia became a majority Armenian region for the first time in its history.<sup>62</sup> In sum, the experiences of the first world war, independence, and the creation of the Armenian SSR secured a few important conditions for nation-statehood: territorial boundaries, a political center, and a viable demographic reality.

### *Political Aspects of Korenizatsiia*

In addition to creating an Armenian-majority territory, the 1920s saw the creation of a truly Armenian state, meaning a state filled with Armenians. Affirmative action policies associated with *korenizatsiia* were successful (certainly when compared to policies in neighboring Azerbaijan and Central Asia<sup>63</sup>) at Armenianizing the state and party apparatus – by the end of the 1920s, 90% of party members were Armenian.<sup>64</sup> Armenian nationality was promoted symbolically as well – strikingly, the new Soviet Armenian emblem included the irredentist image of Mount Ararat.<sup>65</sup>

### *Attack on Armenian Traditions*

As in other parts of the new Soviet territory, the new Armenian government pursued a campaign to discourage Armenian traditions seen as culturally backward – in Armenia, this manifested primarily as a campaign for women's equality and a parallel effort to suppress religious observance. Efforts to promote gender equality resembled similar campaigns in Soviet central Asia, with the creation of a women's section (*Ginbazhin*) and a focus on eroding the role of rural patriarchal elders.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 145-6.

<sup>63</sup> Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 77.

<sup>64</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 147.

<sup>65</sup> Mount Ararat is located in a former Armenian region of Turkish Anatolia (Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies*, 271).

<sup>66</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 144; For the campaign for gender equality in Central Asia, see Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 2004.



Efforts to suppress religion were actually less intensive than might be expected, for two reasons. First, by 1917, despite its rural and semi-literate character, Armenia was not actually all that religious.<sup>67</sup> The Armenian Church, once a central social institution, was no longer a center of Armenian scholarship or the arts. The Armenian intelligentsia before 1917 was already largely secular. Armenian schools, even under the Tsars, were already secular – even parochial schools had been secularized.<sup>68</sup>

Second, consistent with the policy of avoiding the appearance of Great Russian chauvinism, Soviet authorities in Armenia were more cautious than elsewhere about attacking the church itself, and chose a strategy of promoting a national culture that stigmatized religion broadly and celebrated secular values.<sup>69</sup> The Armenian church was curtailed from the public sphere - church property was confiscated, church schools were secularized, and religious propaganda was forbidden.<sup>70</sup> At the same time, Soviet policy in Armenia formally guaranteed freedom of worship, and in practice, liberal religious organizations like the Armenian “Free Church” movement were allowed to exist.<sup>71</sup> These institutions competed with state-sponsored messaging stigmatizing religion; for example, Armenian writers were encouraged to produce stories with anti-religious themes.<sup>72</sup> Rather than formally and intensively suppressing religion, in Armenia, Soviet anti-religious policy instead largely sought to influence, but not necessarily curtail, the choices of Armenian Soviet citizens.

### *The Literacy Campaign and Language Use*

A second demographic reality more directly tied to nationality was realized with the establishment of Soviet Armenia – the establishment of Armenian as a standardized, widely spoken, and dominant language of both government and everyday life in the territory.<sup>73</sup> Prior to Sovietization, the Armenian language was split into numerous dialects, and for urban educated Armenians living in Tblisi Yerevan and Baku, was often secondary to Russian. An important priority of *korenizatsiia* was to raise the status of Armenian and standardize it, furthering the development of Armenians as a nationality (in the eyes of Bolshevik theorists). To this end, the Eastern Armenian literary language was selected as the official

---

<sup>67</sup> Rutland, “Democracy and Nationalism in Armenia,” 840.

<sup>68</sup> Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies*, 302-3; If any stronghold of loyalty did exist, it was among the peasantry, who became the target of secularization campaigns just as they were the target of the literacy campaign (Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies*, 302-3).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 304.

<sup>70</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 144; Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies*, 305.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 304, 306.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 310.

<sup>73</sup> What Anderson (1983) would call a “mass vernacular” and what Gellner (1986) might call “cultivated” or “gardened.”

language of the Armenian SSR,<sup>74</sup> and the Soviet Armenian government introduced a new standardized orthography for the language in 1922.<sup>75</sup>

Armenian became the dominant language in all aspects of Armenian life, including in government, courts, schools, and professional fields – “for the first time since the Middle Ages, Armenian became a language of science.”<sup>76</sup> Armenian language reached into symbolic politics as well, as previously Turkish or Tsarist street and city names were changed to Armenian, and historical Armenian manuscripts were nationalized and moved to Yerevan.<sup>77</sup> Outside of these small pockets, by the end of the 1920s Armenian had successfully established itself, thanks to Soviet policies, as both a standardized mass language (as in Gellner, 1986) and as a privileged language of high politics and high culture (as in Anderson, 1983).

The standardization and privileging of Armenian language was paired with a broad and ambitious campaign to “liquidate illiteracy” in Armenia that paralleled a similar campaign in Russia. The campaign was initiated in 1921 with a government decree that all persons aged 16-30 must learn to read and write (in Armenian).<sup>78</sup> The literacy campaign was conducted under the heading of “adult education” and under the jurisdiction of the Armenian SSR’s Commissariat for Education (*Narkompros*; also translated as Commissariat for Enlightenment).

Regular school buildings were repurposed for adult education in the evenings and established as either *liggayan* (“illiteracy liquidation points” – equivalent to the Russian *likpunkti*) or as schools for semi-literates.<sup>79</sup> Separate *liggayan* were established for women, who could also receive instruction in reading and writing at sewing centers; women’s literacy was a particular priority for the Soviet Armenian government.<sup>80</sup> State efforts to combat illiteracy were supplemented by a civic organization called “Down with Illiteracy” (ODN) – an Armenian sister organization to the Russian one of the same name. As in

---

<sup>74</sup> Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies*, 272; Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 146; As opposed to Western Armenian, which is still spoken by many in the diaspora.

<sup>75</sup> Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies*, 272-3; Again, the classical orthography was retained only by the diaspora.

<sup>76</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 146.

<sup>77</sup> Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies*, 273; This is the kind of symbolic politics emphasized in Centeno (2002); Russian did remain a language of importance in at least two ways – it continued to be a common second language (preferred to Azerbaijani or Georgian), and was an obligatory second language in schools after 1932 (Rutland, “Democracy and Nationalism in Armenia,” 841). It also retained usage in specialized fields where Armenian could not supply a vocabulary: Russian words would continue to appear in academic journals, and trade union publications kept technical terminology in Russian.

<sup>78</sup> Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies*, 300.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

Russia, the campaign was broadly advertised through anti-illiteracy propaganda on radio, in iconic posters, and in a special magazine devoted to the anti-illiteracy campaigns.<sup>81</sup>

The number of students in *liggayan* rose from 6,453 in 1922-23 to 9,834 in 1928, while the number of students in semi-literacy schools leapt from just 72 in 1922-23 to 3,547 in 1928.<sup>82</sup> Because urban areas had largely become literate prior to 1917, the Soviet campaign had its most transformative effect, as in Russia, in the Armenian countryside.

While the Soviet literacy campaign clearly had the effect of homogenizing and standardizing a key feature of Armenian national demography – language – whether and how the campaign shaped the way Armenians imagined the relationship between their nation and the state is less clear. Suny (1993) in his broad history of Soviet Armenia captures this indeterminacy well: “Language and literacy were important in the reconstitution of the Armenians as a nation, but they were also instruments through which the Soviet political leadership could integrate the Armenians into the new political order . . . At the same time, they were inculcated with the secular internationalist values of the Communist party, as well as with a fresh appreciation of the history and literature of the Armenians. *It is not surprising that internationalism competed with a revived nationalism in many young minds* [emphasis mine].”<sup>83</sup>

#### *The Establishment of Armenian Cultural Institutions*

During the 1920s, Soviet Armenia experienced a small cultural renaissance, which saw the founding of cultural institutions like an Armenian opera, film studio, national radio, academy of sciences, museums, and a state university.<sup>84</sup> Such institutions were part of a broader effort to create a “post-bourgeois cultural system” with a “popular basis” in the exploited classes and in underdeveloped and previously subordinated nationalities.<sup>85</sup> These institutions, like the literacy campaign, were all overseen by the Commissariat of Education.<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 144-5.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>85</sup> Mikirtichian, “Aksel Bakounts as the Champion of the True Concept,” 68-70; for a broader discussion of the Soviet goal of a “postbourgeois cultural system,” see Fitzpatrick (1992) and Clark (1995 and 2011).

<sup>86</sup> Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies*, 270.

Of particular note was the creation of Yerevan State University, which was founded in January of 1921, began operating substantively in 1923, and through the 1920s was already a “hotbed of nationalism.”<sup>87</sup> With the stated mission to prepare technical workers<sup>88</sup> and to “deepen understanding of the problems and needs of Soviet life and work as a whole,” the university encompassed four faculties – medicine, technology, agriculture, and social sciences – with the social science faculty including historical-literary, legal, and pedagogical sections.<sup>89</sup> As for most specialized fields in the 1920s, professors at the university had mostly come from European or Russian institutions.<sup>90</sup> Due to this constraint, the scarcity of Armenian textbooks, and a narrow Armenian academic lexicon, it took some years to fully Armenianize the university system.

The university structure and curriculum however, represented a sharper revolutionary break. All university instruction began from Marxist-Leninist principles.<sup>91</sup> An “active system” of instruction and mentorship was implemented.<sup>92</sup> Scheduling and curricula were designed to accommodate working students, consistent with the goals of creating an educated and class-conscious proletariat.<sup>93</sup> Whether the Armenian university system accomplished this goal by the end of the 1920s is an open question; while the composition of university students did transition away from bourgeoisie and non-laboring classes, they were replaced largely with students from white-collar backgrounds, and the goals of recruiting chiefly from the peasantry and proletariat were generally not met.<sup>94</sup>

Alongside the establishment of cultural institutions, the Armenian SSR actively recruited and supported ideologically friendly artists, writers, musicians, and other creatives with the goal of forming a national but also Soviet intelligentsia in the territory.<sup>95</sup> Established Armenian artists were given support by the new Soviet government, and new artists and art forms were encouraged, especially in cinema.<sup>96</sup> Amongst this group was included a cabal of prewar Armenian cultural figures deemed ideologically acceptable that

---

<sup>87</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 145; Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies*, 296.

<sup>88</sup> Consistent with the overarching Soviet goal of creating a generation of proletarian technicians to replace “bourgeois specialists”

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 297.

<sup>92</sup> Faculty were assigned to small groups of students, and asked to assess each student at the end of each year to judge whether the student was fit to continue in a given program (Ibid.).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 298.

<sup>95</sup> Mikirtichian, “Aksel Bakoutts as the Champion of the True Concept,” 73.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 74-5. Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 146; Suny lists Saryan, Shirvanzade, Isahakian, Tumanian, and Spendiarov and Bek-Nazarov, “who translated Sundukian’s stage comedy *Pepo* into fresh cinematic images” (Ibid.).

the new regime sought to co-opt.<sup>97</sup> Foreign Armenian creatives from the diaspora were invited to live and work in Armenia,<sup>98</sup> similar to how cultural celebrities on the left were invited to Moscow through the 1920s, 30s, and 40s.<sup>99</sup> According to Mary Matossian’s history of Soviet policies in Armenia, “Nationalist feeling was exceedingly strong among the Armenian intelligentsia in the twenties,” and it was in these circles that some of the loudest voices for irredentism and visions of “Greater Armenia” could be found.<sup>100</sup>

### *Evaluating Hypotheses*

The Armenia case suggests that the hypotheses that Soviet nation-building policies in the 1920s created demographic prerequisites to a broadly shared conception of Armenian nation-statehood is **plausible**, but **does not completely confirm** this hypothesis. The Soviet literacy campaign in particular certainly qualifies as a social-transformative change that was broad in scope, reaching all major groups in Armenian society. Furthermore, unlike the social development in Armenia prior to 1917,<sup>101</sup> the school system and literacy campaign of the 1920s affected Armenian social groups – the peasantry and the nascent proletariat – that would continue to be the basis of Armenian society in subsequent decades.

### *Unanswered questions*

However, because I do not have more detailed information on curricular content for this time, I cannot yet know precisely what definition of “Armenian nation” was operationalized in the literacy campaign or pursued by its leaders. Who was included and who was excluded, and on what basis? In other words, while the evidence suggests that Soviet nation-building in the 1920s occurred on a large scale and was social-transformative, I do not yet have evidence on the outcome – Armenian national identity formation, and especially the imagined definition of the Armenian nation – in this period.

In addition, while I primarily locate the formation of an Armenian national intelligentsia in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s (section 4, in appendix), I still have only limited evidence about the composition or

---

<sup>97</sup> Suny (1993) cites “the old Bolshevik writer Hakop Hakopian” and “those giants of prewar Armenian culture who were not openly hostile to the Soviets . . . the poet Hovhannes Tumanian, the historian Leo, the writers Nardos, Demirchian, Mirakian, Sushanik Kurginian, the actors Siranush, Alikhanian, Ter-Davtian, the artist Martiros Saryan, and others” (Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 137).

<sup>98</sup> Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies*, 274.

<sup>99</sup> Prominent examples include George Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, Roman Roiland, and John Steinbeck.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>101</sup> See appendix for discussion.

orientation of the Armenian intelligentsia was that occupied the newly created Yerevan State University and the writers' organizations in this period, during the 1920s.

#### 4: The Re-emergence of Nationality in Armenian Cultural Politics, 1953 – 1970s

H4: An Armenian national intelligentsia formed within elite Soviet cultural institutions during the 1950s-70s, and pushed the Armenian public towards a counter-hegemonic orientation of Armenian nationhood in the 1980s.

*Evaluating Hypotheses:* The case of Armenia in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev periods **confirms**, but **incompletely**, the plausibility of this hypothesis. It is very clear that this period saw the emergence of a vocally nationalist intelligentsia – one that promoted both orthodox and counter-hegemonic ideas about the orientation of the Armenian nation toward the Soviet multi-national state. Furthermore, it is striking how the issues that became salient during this period – Karabagh in particular – foreshadow the ones that would motivate and accelerate Armenian nationalism in the 1980s.

*Unanswered Questions:* However, the *organizational basis* for these national intelligentsias is not clear – writers and scholars are vocal key actors in this period, but we have less information about the organizations they come from (especially the Writers' Union and Yerevan State University), and whether these intelligentsias could have formed without those organizations. In addition, while the national intelligentsia that forms in this period seems to foreshadow the one that drives Armenian politics in the 1980s, it is not clear whether they are the *same* intelligentsia. In other words, we still lack evidence that a clear pathway exists by which the intelligentsia that was activated in the 1960s and 70s exerted influence over Armenian politics in the 1980s.

[see appendix for full process trace]

#### 5: The Mainstreaming of Counter-Hegemonic Armenian Nationalism, 1980s - 1991

H4: An Armenian national intelligentsia formed within elite Soviet cultural institutions during the 1950s-70s, and pushed the Armenian public towards a counter-hegemonic orientation of Armenian nationhood in the 1980s.

##### Evidence For

- Armenian intelligentsia figures play a key role in national mobilization
- This intelligentsia is directly tied to Armenian cultural institutions that had already existed
- This intelligentsia is the same one that promoted nationalist ideas during the 1950s through 1970s, or is directly linked to that intelligentsia via mimicry, learning, or some other clear mechanism of inter-generational transmission

##### Evidence Against

- Armenian nationalist mobilization in this period occurs largely without the intelligentsia, or the intelligentsia plays only a secondary or following role
- An intelligentsia does play a leading first-mover role in nationalist mobilization, but it is not connected to Armenian cultural institutions
- An intelligentsia does play a leading first-mover role in nationalist mobilization, but it is in no way connected with the nationalist intelligentsias of the 1950s-70s

H5: Armenians were no more pre-disposed to nation statehood than other Soviet identity groups; rather, structural opportunities like the political status of the Armenian SSR or the demonstration effect created a unique opening for the expression and radicalization of Armenian nation-state aspirations.

#### Evidence For

- Leaders in the Armenian national movement explicitly mimic existing national movements elsewhere, when possible
- Without an existing national movement elsewhere to emulate, Armenian nationalists are largely quiet
- Armenian nationalists draw explicitly on institutions associated with Armenia’s status as an SSR

#### Evidence Against

- Leaders in the Armenian national movement operate independently of existing national movements elsewhere
- A strong movement seeking sovereign statehood forms in Armenia in the absence of movements elsewhere to emulate
- Institutions associated with Armenia’s status as an SSR are largely irrelevant or tangential to the goals of Armenian nationalist leaders (though not necessarily to their tactics)

#### *The First Movers*

February of 1988 is conventionally credited as a starting point for the modern Karabagh dispute, in part because the political actions taken in February sparked some of the earliest demonstrations associated with the nationalist wave of 1988-91. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of February, the local Soviet in Nagorno-Karabagh passed a resolution requesting that the Supreme Soviets of the Azerbaijani and Armenian SSRs transfer the Nagorno-Karabagh region to Armenia.<sup>102</sup> The resolution was accompanied by demonstrations in Stepanakert,<sup>103</sup> in which demonstrators shouted nationalist slogans alongside conservative Soviet ones.

The Karabagh intelligentsia and especially the creative class played a leading role in these demonstrations, with speeches given by figures like Armenian actress Zhanna Galstain, who declared “by coming out here, the Karabakhi has killed the slave in himself.”<sup>104</sup> An eyewitness account by the Azerbaijani writer Sabir Rustamkhanli is telling: “we organized a watch. We were in the regional committee. I was the chief editor of the [Azerbaijani] publishing house and I had published their books in Armenian. The writers were all there. Ohanjenian was there. Gurgen Gabrielian, the children’s writer who had always called me a brother [was also there].”<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>102</sup> De Waal, *Black Garden*, 10.

<sup>103</sup> Capital of the Nagorno-Karabagh Autonomous Oblast.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

At the same time that demonstrations were underway in Stepanakert, delegations of Armenian artists, writers, and scholars lobbied for the Karabagh cause abroad. A group headed by the actress Zhanna Galstain was sent to Moscow,<sup>106</sup> while Sergei Mikoyan – a historian and the son of Anastas Mikoyan – and Zori Balayan – a journalist for *Literaturnaya Gazeta* – conducted interviews with Armenian diaspora leaders.<sup>107</sup>



Figure 5: Nagorno-Karabagh and Surrounding Territories

The next delegation to Moscow, led by Zori Balayan and the celebrated Armenian poet Silva Kaputikian, was received by Gorbachev personally.<sup>108</sup> De Waal (2003) describes Zori Balayan as the “chief ideologist of the Karabagh movement,” and characterizes Balayan’s “uncompromising” belief that “the whole Karabagh issue is part of a larger theme: the dangers posed by the ‘Great Turan’ of Turkic powers to Armenia and the ‘civilized world.’”<sup>109</sup> Silva Kaputikian was “Armenia’s most famous living poet and, as it emerged from the meeting, counted Raisa Gorbacheva [Gorbachev’s wife] as one of her fans” and was generally more moderate and conciliatory than Balayan.<sup>110</sup> Armenian cultural figures like Balayan and Kaputikian exercised political clout in Moscow, where they were able to bargain for a 400 million ruble investment and a promise from Gorbachev to create “a little renaissance” in Karabagh. As powerful “communal elites,”<sup>111</sup> they also now commanded constituencies at home: after cutting this deal with Gorbachev, Kaputikian and Balayan were able to disperse the crowds in Stepanakert on command – something envoys from Moscow had failed to do.<sup>112</sup>

### *The Karabagh Committee*

The first and most important organized body promoting the Armenian nationalist cause in the late 1980s was the Karabagh Committee, which contemporary accounts named “the most influential nationalist

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>108</sup> Rutland, “Democracy and Nationalism in Armenia,” 843.

<sup>109</sup> Da Waal, *Black Garden*, 27

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 28; the two Politburo envoys were Anatoly Lukyanov and Vladimir Dolgikh.

<sup>111</sup> As used in Slater, “Revolutions Crackdowns, and Quiescence.”

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.; Rutland, “Democracy and Nationalism in Armenia,” 843.



group in Armenia”<sup>113</sup> The Karabagh Committee was almost entirely composed of Armenian intelligentsia – of its eleven members, seven were academics.<sup>114</sup> Another, Ashot Manucharian, was a schoolteacher.<sup>115</sup> Five of its members would go on to become major political leaders in post-Communist Armenia.<sup>116</sup> By 1989, the Karabagh Committee was physically operating out of the building for the Armenian Writers’ Union, which de Waal describes as “one of the more outspoken groups in society” at this time.<sup>117</sup> The popular credibility of Karabagh committee leaders swelled after their arrest by Soviet officials in 1988 and subsequent release in 1989, after which, according to committee member Ashot Maniucharian, they were viewed as “something in between Saint Francis of Assisi and the Pope.”<sup>118</sup>

Two of the committee’s most important leaders were Vazgen Manukian and Levon Ter-Petrosian, who would become independent Armenia’s first prime minister and president, respectively. Manukian was “a mathematician with an owlish look and an impulsive streak” who “was also the organizer and fixer for the group” and often hosted the group in his apartment.<sup>119</sup> Ter-Petrosian was a philologist at the Matenadaran Institute of Ancient Manuscripts in Yerevan who spoke 10 languages and had written 6 books.<sup>120</sup> He was “the committee’s chief strategist” with a family background in the Syrian communist party and “intense hooded eyes that seem to suck energy from you.”<sup>121</sup>

### *Counter-Hegemonic Nationalism Goes Mainstream*

The Karabagh committee was unified around the conviction that the definition of the Armenian nation was one that included Nagorno-Karabagh, but a similar consensus within the committee did not exist around the orientation of the Armenian nation towards the Soviet multi-national state. In fact, this was a point of debate within the committee, and the winning side shifted over time.<sup>122</sup> Until late in the game (1988 and 89), the consensus amongst committee members was that the Karabagh issue should be pursued within the existing federal framework of the Soviet Union.<sup>123</sup> Independence and sovereignty was not on the table except for radical fringe groups like the aforementioned National Unity Party. Even as

---

<sup>113</sup> “Evolution in Europe,” *The New York Times*, April 6, 1990.

<sup>114</sup> De Waal, *Black Garden*, 56.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>116</sup> They are Ter-Petrosyan, Vazgen Manukyan, Babken Ararktsyan, Ashot Manuucharyan, and Vano Siradeghyan.

<sup>117</sup> Rutland, “Democracy and Nationalism in Armenia,” 844; De Waal, *Black Garden*, 22.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*; Rutland, “Democracy and Nationalism in Armenia,” 842.

<sup>121</sup> De Waal, *Black Garden*, 57.

<sup>122</sup> Rutland, “Democracy and Nationalism in Armenia,” 845.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 853.

early as 1979, Ter-Petrosian, who would lead Armenia to independence,<sup>124</sup> contended that “We are talking about *building a federation of the peoples of the USSR* and achieving the democratization of the country [emphasis mine].”<sup>125</sup>

The broadening of nationalist aims, from the resolution of the Karabagh issue within the Soviet system to the pursuit of sovereign statehood, caused a split in the Armenian nationalist leadership, the departure of older nationalist leaders (Igor Muradian, Zori Balayan, and Silva Kaputikian) and the emergence of new leaders (Ter-Petrosian and Vazgen Manukian). According to Ter-Petrosian, “The first Karabakh Committee – Igor Muradian, Zori Balayan, Silva Kaputikian, and others – thought only about Karabakh . . . They thought that the Karabakh question had to be solved by using the Soviet system. And we understood that this system would never solve the Karabakh issue and that the reverse was true: you had to change the system to resolve this problem.”<sup>126</sup> By 1988 and 1989, the “Armenian cause” or *Hei Dat*, “united Armenians from across the world, from Beirut to LA, around common nationalist aims.”<sup>127</sup>



Figure 6: Exhibition titled “Plus Minus” from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, an avant-garde movement with nationalist and dissident themes that formed in the late 1980s in the Armenian Union of Artists (Harutyunyan, *The Political Aesthetics*, 42-102).

The intellectuals that comprised the Karabagh committee were first-movers in the public articulation of Armenian nationalist aims – they were followed by, and did not follow themselves, career politicians and state officials in the Armenian communist party. An important indicator of the mainstreaming of previously radical nationalist claims was the “flipping” of state officials and party members who were suddenly “tacking between the demands of Moscow and their own societies,”<sup>128</sup> foreshadowing how former communists would turn nationalist in other Soviet republics .

In May 1988, Moscow installed a new first party secretary in Armenia – Suren Harutiunian, who quickly “decided to run before the prevailing nationalist wind” by, just a week after taking office, allowing demonstrators to display the outlawed flag of the first Republic of Armenia (a red, blue, and orange tricolor) for the first time in 70 years.<sup>129</sup> Harutiunian’s actions were soon followed by an Armenian

---

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 849.

<sup>125</sup> De Waal, *Black Garden*, 72.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 60.

Supreme Soviet resolution formally giving approval to idea of transferring Nagorno-Karabagh to Armenia and sparking the “war of laws,” in which Armenian and Azerbaijani regional party organs passed competing and increasingly antagonistic legislation.<sup>130</sup> In just a couple years, Armenian intellectuals had steered nationalist claims about Armenian sovereignty from the fringe to the mainstream and enlisted communist party officials in their cause,<sup>131</sup> so that “Armenia, formerly one of the most loyal of republics, turned into the leading rebel in the Soviet Union.”<sup>132</sup>

### *Evaluating Hypotheses*

The composition of the Karabagh Committee and its role in Armenian nationalist mobilization **strongly confirms** but **incompletely** the plausibility of the hypothesis that Soviet cultural institutions incubated national intelligentsias that shaped the imagined orientation of the Armenian nation towards the Soviet state. Four pieces of evidence stand out: (1) that the Karabagh committee was comprised chiefly of former scholars and writers from the Armenian intelligentsia, (2) that the committee articulated an imagined orientation of the Armenian nation that first was consistent with the Soviet multi-national project and then shifted to one attached to sovereign statehood, (3) that the committee demonstrated the ability to mobilize crowds, and (4) that the committee pre-empted communist politicians in pursuing increasingly radical nationalist objectives. The Karabagh committee represents a clear example, during the open politics of a “war of maneuver,” of a national intelligentsia in the driver’s seat, steering Armenians toward a revised imagining of Armenian national identity.

The events of 1987-89 around Karabagh also **confirm but incompletely** the hypothesis that structural opportunity and example figured into Armenian national mobilization (Beissinger, 2002). It is clear that the Baltic example played a role in rendering independent nation-statehood a conceivable goal to Karabagh committee leaders like Ter-Petrosyan. At the same time, the earliest mobilizations led by Armenian intelligentsia occurred largely without the benefit a demonstration effect. It seems likely that while structural opportunity *alone* cannot account for Armenia’s overperformance, that it may have played a key role in enabling and empowering Armenian intelligentsia. Structural opportunity and demonstration effect in this way may be a moderator on the causal relationship between national intelligentsias and national identity formation.

### *Unanswered Questions*

---

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 60-1.

<sup>131</sup> Rutland, “Democracy and Nationalism in Armenia,” 843.

<sup>132</sup> De Waal, *Black Garden*, 61.

There are at least two key questions that we still need to answer to substantiate the national intelligentsias hypothesis. While it is clear that the Armenian national intelligentsia drove mobilization in 1987-89, it is not clear that this is the same national intelligentsia that formed in the 1960s and 1970s. In the same vein, the institutional background of Armenian nationalist leaders is diverse, and it is not obvious whether Soviet cultural institutions enabled the Silba Kaputikians and Ter-Petrosyans to exist, or whether these national intelligentsias would have formed in the same way without institutional homes.

### **Section 5 (1): Summary of Findings**

The objective of this paper has been to develop and test the plausibility of a theory of national identity formation in the Soviet and former Soviet space. Existing explanations that are based in an interdisciplinary consensus on the institutional origins of national identities point to the role of mass schooling and mass literacy as key determinants of how national identities are “imagined,” in the spirit of Weber (1976) and Gellner (1986). A replication of recent work by Darden and Grzymala-Busse (2006) showed that this conventional wisdom does a good job explaining much, but not all, of the variation in national identity formation, proxied by secessionist protest in 1987-91 – specifically, literacy rate at the onset of communism under-predicts secessionist mobilization in Armenia and over-predicts it in Belarus

To account for this variation left unexplained, I first proposed a reconceptualization of national identity along three dimensions: the imagined *definition* of the nation, its imagined *orientation* towards or against a state, and the hegemonic, contested, or counter-hegemonic status of those ideas. I then proposed a theory by which national intelligentsias moderate the existing causal effect of mass literacy and schooling on national identity formation: while mass literacy and schooling establish prerequisites about the definition of the nation that persist across generations, intelligentsias do the more proximate causal work of articulating the rightful or natural relationship between the nation and the state. In the Soviet Union, this would suggest that mass campaigns aimed at liquidating adult illiteracy in the 1920s, and the cultural institutions like Writers’ Unions and national academies that incubated national intelligentsias in the 1950s through 70s, would have jointly contributed to the expression of national identity during the Soviet collapse.

A process-tracing exercise using the case of Armenia effectively ruled in two hypotheses associated with my theory, ruled out three rival hypotheses, and was indeterminate on a fourth. Explanations for Armenian over-performance that point to nation-building either during Armenia's pre-communist history or during Armenia's brief moment of independence in 1918-21 fail "hoop tests"<sup>133</sup> in the case history. Literacy and national consciousness before 1917 was only experienced by a segment of urban and bourgeoisie Armenians that largely did not survive the next decades, while the Dashnak government of independent Armenia, operating under conditions of crisis, did not themselves do any serious nation-building work at the mass level. The demonstration effect and the Baltic example, while serving a key role in accelerating the mainstreaming of radical nationalist ideas in the late 1980s, followed rather than predated the first onset of major Armenian nationalist actions in 1987-88. Exceptional features of Armenian history – especially the genocide and the Karabagh question – were important issues that motivated challenges to the hegemonic Soviet conception of Armenian nationality, and it is not clear if a counterfactual Armenian history without these features would have generated the same over-performing nationalist mobilization. Using this case study by itself, I have not been able to rule an "Armenian exceptionalism" hypothesis in or out.

The exercise established that mass literacy achieved during the 1920s and a national intelligentsia formed during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s are plausible explanations for Armenian national mobilization, but several holes in the evidence need to be filled in before these hypotheses can be fully ruled in. While the Soviet campaign to liquidate illiteracy amongst Armenia's adult population was a transformative event that firmly established a common, standardized, and shared Armenian language, without information about curricular content, we still don't know the particular definition of the Armenian nation that motivated and informed the campaign. A nationalist intelligentsia certainly formed within the Armenian Writer's Union and at Yerevan State University in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s espousing an "orthodox" vision of Armenia's orientation toward the Soviet multi-national project, and a decade later writers and scholars filled the Karabagh committee, representing first-movers in the nationalist mobilizations and pushing counter-hegemonic ideas about an Armenian nation-state to the mainstream. However, I do not know if the 1980s intelligentsia was the same as the 1950s, 60s, and 70s intelligentsia, and if cultural institutions were required for this intelligentsia to form.

---

<sup>133</sup> See Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing," 826-7.

## Section 5 (2): Next Steps

### *Theory-Building*

This Armenia case study helped me fill out my theory in two ways: first, it confirmed that one my independent variables – national intelligentsias – played an important role in nationalist mobilization. Second, it provided suggestive evidence for a mechanism linking my mass literacy IV with national identity formation (the establishment of demographic prerequisites) and for a mechanism linking my national intelligentsias IV with national identity formation (articulating a public case). Overall, though the standard of evidence needs to be raised for theory-testing, for theory-building alone I'm pretty confident that I've correctly identified at least two relevant independent variables and their mechanisms in the Armenia case.

However, I still have not fully theorized the *variation* in national identity formation across cases. For this, I need to identify the *characteristics* or *dimensions* of my IVs that explain this variation. For national intelligentsias, this means answering two questions: First, what *dimensions* or *characteristics* of the Armenian intelligentsia allowed it to successfully re-orient the Armenian nation? It may be the strength of the Armenian intelligentsia, its own national orientation, its cohesiveness around a common national idea, its dominance over competing intellectual groups, its credibility as a “communal elite,” or its existence at all. Second, what *dimensions* or *characteristics* of Armenian cultural institutions allowed the Armenian intelligentsia to form in that way? Slater (2009) suggests that the *autonomy* of communal elites from the state is important and historically determined, but this story may be more complicated.

I hope to accomplish this next theory-building step by pairing this Armenia case with a similar process-tracing exercise focused on Belarus (recall that my replication of Darden & Grzymala-Busse [2006] *under-predicted* Belarus). I will be looking for two things: first, is Belarussian under-performance, as compared with Armenia, due to its' experience during the 1920s literacy campaigns, the formation of the Belarussian intelligentsia, both, or some other rival hypothesis? If the major difference between Belarus and Armenia is *either* in the literacy campaigns or in intelligentsia formation (but not both), then the comparison should help me parse out the specific *dimension* or *characteristic* of either the two literacy campaigns or the two intelligentsias that differs between the cases.

I also would like to re-do my replication exercise at the province level (I have literacy data for most provinces in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and parts of Central Asia, though not for major parts of the Caucasus or Baltics). I expect to find some major deviations from the conventional wisdom in specific provinces like Tatarstan (in Russia) and Bessarabia (Moldova), and the exercise may throw up some other paired comparisons. I don't expect these provinces to offer finer-grained case studies because the secondary literature will be more scarce, but the tighter comparisons may be a useful validation tool.

I could also do a brief paired comparison of Latvia and Lithuania.

### *Mechanisms*

As my theory is written, there four mechanisms that I could potentially devote some further empirical work to:

- (1) The link from mass literacy to 'demographic prerequisites' to national definition
- (2) The link from demographic prerequisites to imagined definitions of the nation
- (3) The link from particular cultural institutions to national intelligentsias
- (4) The link from national intelligentsias to imagined orientation of the nation

Currently, I have two initial exercises planned to explore mechanism (3), about how cultural institutions shape national intelligentsias arguing for a particular orientation of the nation.

The first and easier exercise is to create an inventory of cultural figures involved in leading nationalist mobilization in Armenia during the 1980s and trace their career arcs backward. Here, I am interested in learning how many and which figures came from Soviet Armenian cultural institutions, and what they wrote and argued about during their time in those institutions. Were the most radical nationalist leaders in Armenia always radical nationalists? Were they always credible and authoritative? Who did they debate with before they became political leaders? When and why did they switch from mainstream to counter-hegemonic ideas about Armenian national identity? And, are these answers consistent across individuals?

The second and more time-intensive exercise would be to perform a structured text analysis of "thick journals" associated with the most important cultural institutions in Soviet Armenia – the Armenian Writers' Union would be the first candidate. In the Soviet Union, "thick journals" were an important

piece of media; while similar text analysis have been done using Soviet newspapers, for understanding the emergence of ideas in the Armenian intelligentsia, thick journals would be the more appropriate source (although one alternative would be the all-Union literary newspaper *Literaturnaya Gazeta*). The purpose of the exercise would be to attempt to track the development of debates and consensus about national identity amongst the Armenian intelligentsia through the 1950s-1980s. The major logistical hurdle is that Armenian “thick journals” are for the most part not digitized, (though *Literaturnaya Gazeta* is digitized and searchable). I could do this by hand or with machine learning tools.

### *Causal Identification*

As my theory is written, there are two broad causal relationships that I need to substantiate:

- (1) Whether mass literacy exerts a causal effect on the imagined definition of the nation
- (2) Whether national intelligentsias exert a causal effect on the imagined orientation of the nation

I have two potential identification strategies in mind to substantiate relationship (1) on the effect of mass literacy. For both, I would use a province-level panel dataset I am currently building on the 1920s literacy campaign that includes variables on literacy rates, literacy targets, allocated funding, and the number of adult literacy centers (“likpunkti”). One strategy would be to look for exogenous variation, sharp discontinuities, or a potential instrument for the literacy campaign using this data (in the spirit of recent “natural experiments” by Peisakhin [working paper] and Darden [working paper]).

The second, and I think more promising, strategy would be to perform a cohort analysis using this data. Because enrollment in the adult literacy liquidation centers (likpunkti) had a hard age cutoff, there may be a hard discontinuity between the generation of Armenians that became literate via the likpunkti and their predecessors. In addition, I could test to see if this cohort effect is heterogeneous according to the concentration of likpunkti by province. One of the main challenges would be finding a measure of my outcome, the imagined definition of the Armenian nation. More obvious measures, like secessionist mobilization or responses to the 1991 referendum on the future of the Soviet Union, and relevant survey data, are too far into the future. Survey data from the 1930s through 70s is limited. There is substantial data on language use and maybe some data on national identification, and this may be my most promising route.



I have also considered doing a similar cohort analysis to identify the effect of exposure to nationalist appeals by the Armenian intelligentsia in the 1980s on that generation of Armenians, in order to substantiate causal relationship (2). However, here I don't see an obvious way of disentangling the causal effect of the Armenian intelligentsia from the causal effect of experiencing the 1980s more broadly. So, I am still looking for a more credible identification strategy for parsing out the specific effect of national intelligentsias on the imagined orientation of national identity.

## Bibliography

### General

- Abbott, Jared A., Hillel David Soifer, and Matthias Vom Hau. "Transforming the Nation? The Bolivarian Education Reform in Venezuela." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 49.4 (2017): 885-916.
- Aktürk, Şener. *Regimes of ethnicity and nationhood in Germany, Russia, and Turkey*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso Books, 2006.
- Balcells, Laia. "Mass schooling and catalan nationalism." *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 19.4 (2013): 467-486.
- Beissinger, Mark R. *Nationalist mobilization and the collapse of the Soviet State*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Bunce, Valerie. *Subversive Institutions: the Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State*. Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Centeno, Miguel Angel. *Blood and debt: War and the nation-state in Latin America*. Penn State Press, 2002.
- Chandra, Kanchan, ed. *Constructivist theories of ethnic politics*. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Clark, Charles E. *Uprooting otherness: the literacy campaign in NEP-Era Russia*. Susquehanna University Press, 2000.
- "Literacy and labour: The Russian literacy campaign within the trade unions, 1923–27." *Europe-Asia Studies* 47.8 (1995): 1327-1341.
- Clark, Katerina. *Moscow, The Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931-1941*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011
- *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Collier, David. "Understanding process tracing." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44.4 (2011): 823-830.
- Conquest, Robert. *The nation killers: the Soviet deportation of nationalities*. Macmillan, 1970.
- *Stalin: breaker of nations*. Viking Pr, 1991.
- Crews, Robert. "Empire and the confessional state: Islam and religious politics in nineteenth-century Russia." *The American historical review* 108.1 (2003): 50-83.
- Darden, Keith. "Resisting Occupation: Mass Literacy and the Creation of Durable National Loyalties." (2011). (working paper)
- "Resisting Occupation: Lessons from a Natural Experiment in Carpathian Ukraine." (working paper)
- Darden, Keith, and Anna Grzymala-Busse. "The great divide: literacy, nationalism, and the communist collapse." *World Politics* 59.01 (2006): 83-115.
- Darden, Keith, and Harris Mylonas. "Threats to territorial integrity, national mass schooling, and linguistic commonality." *Comparative Political Studies* 49.11 (2016): 1446-1479.
- Ekiert, Grzegorz, and Daniel Ziblatt. "Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe one hundred years on." *East European Politics and Societies* 27.1 (2)
- Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet organization of education and the arts under Lunacharsky, October 1917-1921*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.
- Garrard, John Gordon and Carol Garrard. *Inside the Soviet Writers' Union*. IB Tauris, 1990.
- Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and nationalism*. Cornell University Press, 1986.

- Gramsci, Antonio, Quintin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. New York: International Publishers, 1971. Print.
- Hale, Henry E. "Divided we stand: Institutional sources of ethnofederal state survival and collapse." *World politics* 56.2 (2004): 165-193.
- Herrera, Yoshiko M. *Imagined economies: The sources of Russian regionalism*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Hirsch, Francine. *Empire of nations: Ethnographic knowledge and the making of the Soviet Union*. Cornell University Press, 2005.
- Kornai, János. "Hungary's U-turn." *Society and Economy in Central and Eastern Europe* 37.3 (2015): 279-329.
- Laitin, David D. *Identity in formation: The Russian-speaking populations in the near abroad*. Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Lieberman, Evan S. "Nested analysis as a mixed-method strategy for comparative research." *American political science review* 99.3 (2005): 435-452.
- Loveman, Mara. "Blinded like a State: the revolt against civil registration in Nineteenth-Century Brazil." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49.1 (2007): 5-39.
- *National colors: Racial classification and the state in Latin America*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2014.
- Lustick, Ian. *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank-Gaza*. Cornell University Press, 1993.
- Martin, Terry Dean. *The affirmative action empire: nations and nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. Cornell University Press, 2001.
- Mason, John W. "Living in the Lie: The Armenian Intelligentsia in the Soviet Union." *Oral History* 33.2 (2005): 57-68.
- Northrop, Douglas. *Veiled empire: gender and power in Stalinist Central Asia*. Cornell University Press, 2004.
- Payne, Matthew J. *Stalin's Railroad: Turksib and the Building of Socialism*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001.
- Peisakhin, Leonid. "History's Long Shadow: Persistence of Long Duree Political Identities in Ukraine." (working paper)
- Pipes, Richard. *The Formation of the Soviet Union: communism and nationalism, 1917-1923*. Vol. 13. Harvard University Press, 1964.
- Seawright, Jason. *Multi-method social science: Combining qualitative and quantitative tools*. Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Slater, Dan. "Revolutions, Crackdowns, and Quiescence: Communal Elites and Democratic Mobilization in Southeast Asia." *American Journal of Sociology* 115 (2009): 203-54.
- Smith, Jeremy. *The Bolsheviks and the national question, 1917-23*. Springer, 1999.
- Soifer, Hillel David. "The sources of infrastructural power: evidence from nineteenth-century Chilean education." *Latin American Research Review* 44.2 (2009): 158-180.
- Suny, Ronald. *The revenge of the past: Nationalism, revolution, and the collapse of the Soviet Union*. Stanford University Press, 1993.
- Suny, Ronald Grigor, and Michael D. Kennedy, eds. *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation*. University of Michigan Press, 2001.
- Vom Hau, Matthias. 2008. State Infrastructural Power and Nationalism: Comparative Lessons from Mexico and Argentina. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 43 (3-4): 334-354
- "Unpacking the school: Textbooks, teachers, and the construction of nationhood in Mexico, Argentina, and Peru." *Latin American Research Review* 44.3 (2009): 127-154.

- Weber, Eugene. *Peasants into Frenchmen: The modernization of rural France, 1870-1914*. Stanford University Press, 1976.
- Wedeen, Lisa. *Ambiguities of domination: Politics, rhetoric, and symbols in contemporary Syria*. University of Chicago Press, 2015.

### *Works Consulted on Armenia*

- Blank, Stephen. "Bolshevik Organizational Development in Early Soviet Transcaucasia: Autonomy vs Centralization, 1918–1924." *Transcaucasia: Nationalism and Social Change*(1984): 305-338.
- Burg, Steven L. "Nationality elites and political change in the Soviet Union." *The Nationalities Factor in Soviet Politics and Society*. Westview Press, Oxford (1990).
- De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War, 10th Year Anniversary Edition, Revised and Updated*. NYU press, 2013.
- Dimmitt, Nicholas James. "Language choice and language use in the Armenian education system: The impact of independence on educational language policy in the Republic of Armenia." (1995). Dissertation.
- Fairbanks Jr, Charles H. "Clientelism and Higher Politics in Georgia, 1949-1953." *Transcaucasia, Nationalism and Social Change: Essays in the History of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, Ann Arbor* (1983): 339-370.
- Fowkes, Ben. *The disintegration of the Soviet Union: A study in the rise and triumph of nationalism*. Springer, 1996.
- Geukjian, Ohannes. *Ethnicity, nationalism and conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the legacy of Soviet nationalities policy*. Routledge, 2016.
- Goble, Paul A. "Readers, Writers, and Republics. The Structural Basis of Non-Russian Literary Politics." *The Nationalities Factor in Soviet Politics and Society* (hrsg. von L. Hajda und M. Beissinger, Boulder, CO, 131–147 (1990).
- Harutyunyan, Angela. *The political aesthetics of the Armenian avant-garde: The journey of the 'painterly real', 1987–2004*. (2017).
- *On the ruins of Utopia: the political aesthetics of the Armenian avant-garde*. Diss. The University of Manchester, 2009.
- Hovannisian, Richard G. *The republic of Armenia: the first year, 1918-1919*. Vol. 1-4. Univ of California Press, 1971.
- Jones, Stephen. "The establishment of Soviet power in Transcaucasia: The case of Georgia 1921–1928." *Soviet Studies* 40.4 (1988): 616-639.
- Kharmandariān, S. V. *Armiānskaiā SSR v pervyi god novoï ēkonomicheskoi politiki, 1921-1922*. Erevan, 1955.
- Kivelson, Valerie A., and Ronald Grigor Suny. *Russia's Empires*. Oxford, 2017.
- Malkasian, Mark. *Gba-ra-bagh!: The Emergence of the National Democratic Movement in Armenia*. Wayne State University Press, 1996.
- Minasian, A.G. *Sotsialisticheskoe stroitel'stvo Armianskoi SSR, 1920-1940 gg.; statisticheskiĭ sbornik*. Erevan, 1940.
- Matossian, Mary Allerton Kilbourne. *The impact of Soviet policies in Armenia*. Brill Archive, 1955.
- Rutland, Peter. "Democracy and nationalism in Armenia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 46.5 (1994): 839-861.
- Mikirtitchian, L. "Aksel Bakounts as the Champion of the True Concept of the Popular Basis of Literature in Soviet Armenia, 1959, 144 pp."

- Myklebost, Hallstein. "Armenia and the Armenian colonies." *Journal of The Royal Central Asian Society* 18.1 (1931).
- Rost, Yuri. *Armenian tragedy*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1990.
- Russell, James R. "The Black Dervish of Armenian Futurism." (working paper).
- Schulze, Ilona. "Language and identity construction: Evidence from the ethnic minorities of Armenia." *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 2017.248 (2017): 137-157.
- Smith, Jeremy. "The Georgian affair of 1922—Policy failure, personality clash or power struggle?." *Europe-Asia Studies* 50.3 (1998): 519-544.
- Suny, Ronald Grigor. *Looking toward Ararat: Armenia in modern history*. Indiana University Press, 1993.
- *The making of the Georgian nation*. Indiana University Press, 1994.
- "Transcaucasia: Cultural cohesion and ethnic revival in a multinational society." *The nationalities factor in Soviet politics and society* (1990): 228-52.
- Ter-Gabrielyan, Gevorg. "The Archeology of Future Literature: Digging out Prose from Independent Armenia's History." *Caucasus Analytical Digest* 14 (2010).
- Verluse, Pierre. *Armenia in crisis: The 1988 earthquake*. Wayne State University Press, 1995.
- Wixman, Ronald. "Ethnic nationalism in the Caucasus\*." *Nationalities Papers* 10.2 (1982): 137-156.
- Zisserman-Brodsky, Dina, ed. *Constructing ethnopoltics in the Soviet Union: samizdat, deprivation and the rise of ethnic nationalism*. Springer, 2003.

## Appendix

### 1: Nationality Formation in Armenia Before 1917

H1: **Pre-Soviet nation-building** (especially schooling) **inculcated a loyalty** to Armenian nation-statehood that **passed down through generations** until the opportunity to manifest in visible political action in the 1980s.

#### Evidence For

- A coherent national movement exists
- That movement is shared amongst most groups
- That movement ties Armenian nationality to sovereign statehood
- A clear mechanism exists by which ideas about Armenian nation-statehood are transmitted to subsequent generations

#### Evidence Against

- No coherent, broadly agreed-upon conception of Armenian nationality exists
- A coherent Armenian national idea exists, but it is not tied to sovereign statehood
- A coherent Armenian national idea exists, but only amongst a narrow group
- A coherent Armenian national idea exists, but means of inter-generational transmission are blocked or do not exist

National consciousness in Armenia on the eve of 1917, when most Armenians were still subjects of the Russian Empire, was unusual and, in many ways, self-contradictory. Armenians boasted an educated and nationally self-conscious bourgeoisie and intelligentsia that had largely benefited from the emergence of a capitalist economy in the Russian Empire during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, this Armenian intelligentsia was dispersed through the Empire and abroad – Armenian nationalists were more likely to be found in Tblisi, Moscow, and Baku than in Yerevan. Amongst Armenians living in the future Armenian territory itself, most were peasants – illiterate and living under an agrarian social order similar to the one governing rural life in European Russia.<sup>134</sup>

Within urban Armenian society, major political divisions on the basis of class, community, and party split the Armenian middle class from the Armenian left.<sup>135</sup> The Left during the first World War had only modest geopolitical aims – they sought a return to the prewar territorial status quo and a “democratic peace,” consistent with the position of the Russian social democrats. The Armenian middle class, in contrast, was both more Russo-phillic and more irredentist, defending Russian expansion while advocating for irredentist claims, especially over portions of Turkey.<sup>136</sup> This more ambitiously nationalist Armenian middle class was based more in Baku and Tblisi than in territorial Armenia, and largely fell out of power after the establishment of the wartime caucis republics as the Mensheviks came to rule in Tblisi, the constitutional-democratic / pan-Islamic/pan-Turkic Musavats came to rule in Baku, and the socialist Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF, or Dashnaktsutyun) came to rule in Yerevan.

While the nationalist Armenian middle class was unable to remain atop Armenian politics after 1917, two important faces of its brand of nationalism would re-emerge at various points in Armenian national discourse. One was a long-standing Russo-phillicism, which viewed the Russian and then Soviet empires as a benevolent, or at minimum the least threatening, protector of a vulnerable Armenian nation. The other was hostility and fear of Turkey, rooted in the experiences of mass violence in 1915 and Turkish

---

<sup>134</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 136.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

Republican nationalism afterward. In its tamest form, this Russophilism viewed Russia as a necessary protector against Turkish aggression. Coupled with more radical irredentism, the idea viewed Russia as a savior that would fulfill ambitions for a greater Armenian state – as illustrated in the rhetoric of Armenian party liberal Khristofor Vermishev at the Kadet Party Congress: “Armenia has waited for long years for Russian imperialism to say its mighty word in Turkish Armenia and lead the Armenians from under the Turkish yoke.”<sup>137</sup>

Finally, urban bourgeoisie Armenians would suffer two disruptive blows that effectively cut them off from the rest of 20<sup>th</sup> century Armenian history. First, during the conflict with Turkey, much of the Armenian intelligentsia was either dislocated or killed. Second, it was precisely the bourgeoisie nationalist intelligentsia, which had so benefited from pre-1917 modernization, that would be explicitly targeted as a class by the purges of the 1920s. While a nationalism certainly existed in pre-1917 Armenia, its purveyors were too disconnected from Armenia itself, both politically and geographically, to translate that nationalism into a mass consciousness, and would not last long enough to carry that nationalism further into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>138</sup>

### *Evaluating Hypotheses*

In sum, key features of pre-1917 Armenian history suggest that a hypothesis linking pre-1917 nation-building to modern Armenian national consciousness is **implausible**. A coherent national idea existed amongst Armenians before 1917, and was certainly a product of literacy, education, and urban development, even if this national idea was contested, Ruso-phillic, and only weakly tied to an aspiration for sovereign statehood. However, this coherent national idea was limited to a class and generation of Armenians that would be killed, dislocated, and purged over the next decade, effectively disrupting any plausible mechanism by which this national idea could be transmitted to subsequent generations.

---

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>138</sup> The historiography of the period reflects this – while Ron Suny (1993) contends that “The first phase of modernization for Armenians took place . . . in the nineteenth century in various urban communities under the influence of the capitalist and industrial revolutions that were revolutionizing European society” (Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 136), and that “By 1917, the Armenians had become a politically conscious and mobilized nationality,” (Ibid., 119) he also notes that “modernization affected only a minority of Armenians . . . and the dislocations and trauma of the First World War, the massacres of 1915, and the Russian Revolution and Civil War (1917-1921) left the Armenians who had come under Soviet power with only remnants and traces of a century of development” (Ibid., 136). This reality suggests that there was little in the way of real connective tissue by which the nationalism of pre-Soviet Armenians could have concretely influenced the form and content of national consciousness in territorial Armenia after the revolution – 1917 was a genuine break.

## 2: Armenia's Sovereign Moment, 1918 – 1921

H2: Armenia's brief moment of **sovereign statehood in 1918-21** created a conception of the Armenian nation-state that **survived informally and underground** through the Soviet period and **was mimicked** in the nationalist movements of the 1980s.

### Evidence For

- Armenia's independent state is rooted in a broadly shared conception of what the Armenian nation is
- Clear mechanisms exist by which that shared conception of nation-statehood is reproduced after the Armenian nation-state no longer exists

### Evidence Against

- Armenia's independent state is not rooted in any identifiable conception of Armenian nationhood, or that conception is contested or not broadly shared
- Armenia's independent state is rooted in a broadly shared conception of Armenian nationhood, but no pathways exist by which that conception can outlive the independent Armenian state, or such pathways exist but are blocked

A trend in the recent comparative politics literature on post-communist countries, separately from the sociological literature on nationalism, has emphasized the long *durée* consequences of brief pre-communist moments of democracy and democratic breakdown for the stability and pluralism of post-communist regimes.<sup>139</sup> The natural analogue to this long *durée* argument in the caucuses would point to the Democratic Republics of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan that briefly existed between 1918 and 1920/21, after the breakup of the even shorter lived Transcaucasian Federation.

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation, or the Dashnaksutyun,<sup>140</sup> brought Armenia into sovereign statehood only reluctantly. They were never a secessionist party – prior to 1917, the Dashnaks favored federalism and individual sovereignty over independent Armenian statehood, including the division of Transcaucasia into ethnic cantons and a system of “extraterritorial cultural autonomy” that would guarantee each Armenian citizen cultural rights irrespective of where he or she was in the empire.<sup>141</sup> Such a system made sense for an ethnic group the majority of whom still lived outside of their home territory; it was also quite consistent with Lenin's views on nationality that emphasized full civil and social rights and self-determination on the basis of national groups.<sup>142</sup> In April of 1917, the Dashnaks presented a set of demands to the Russian Constituent Assembly, which included national and social improvements, the amelioration of workers' conditions, the lowering of land rents, the nationalization of schools, and the use of local language in judicial and administrative bodies, but nothing approaching independent statehood.<sup>143</sup>

Lenin's policy of no annexations or contributions and his principle of national self-determination – meant to assure Russia's minorities that the Bolsheviks had not inherited the Russian monarchy's imperialism – left the caucus nations largely to fend for themselves. After the collapse of the Transcaucasian Federation in 1918, Lenin would permit an independent Armenia, but importantly,

---

<sup>139</sup> Ekiert and Ziblatt, “Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe,” 2013; Especially compelling arguments have drawn a red line from Horthy to Orban in Hungary, and from Pilsudski to Kaczynski in Poland (Kornai, “Hungary's U-Turn”).

<sup>140</sup> The Dashnaks led the First Republic of Armenia during its entire three-year existence.

<sup>141</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 122.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.



would not use Russian troops to help protect it.<sup>144</sup> Meanwhile, having solicited the patronage of Imperial Germany, the Mensheviks in neighboring Georgia were setting up an independent state. Armenia had courted the Allied powers instead, who largely held back from providing the kind of support Armenia would have needed to pursue territorial claims in Eastern Anatolia.<sup>145</sup> “Given a choice, the Armenian leadership in Tiflis would not have declared independence, preferring some kind of political relationship with Russia or at least with the other peoples of Transcaucasia.”<sup>146</sup> Independence without pursuing irredentist claims was the safest and the only option that would protect Armenians from Turkish aggression in these years after the mass killing of Armenians in Anatolia.

Furthermore, the Dashnaks lacked the popular consensus enjoyed by the neighboring Georgian Mensheviks. Through the beginning of the 1900s, while the Mensheviks dominated politics in Tsarist Georgia (representing Georgia in the national Duma),<sup>147</sup> the Dashnaks remained dispersed with operative cells throughout the Russian, Ottoman, and Persian Empires. The pre-1917 divisions between eastern and western Armenians and between liberal middle-class Armenians and the center-left Dashnaktsutiun persisted after the revolution. In January 1919, Armenia actually sent two delegations to the Paris Peace Conference – one, speaking for the Left, from the Republic of Armenia (headed by writer and Dashnak activist Avetis Aharonian) and one, representing liberal middle-class Armenians in the diaspora, from the Armenian National Delegation (led by a wealthy Egyptian Armenian).<sup>148</sup>

Finally, during its three years in power, the Dashnak government in Armenia was largely preoccupied with resolving several humanitarian crises while preserving Armenian independence in the face of aggression from Republican Turkey. Armenia had been stricken by famine in 1918 and by the middle of 1919 had lost approximately 200,000, people, or 20% of the republic’s population.<sup>149</sup> At the same time, urban centers in territorial Armenia swelled with refugees fleeing Georgia, Azerbaijan, and the mass killings in Turkey. The country was in economic crisis, with high inflation making Armenian currency next to worthless.<sup>150</sup> Finally, the Dashnaks during this period fought wars on three fronts – against Georgia to the north, Azerbaijan to the east, and Turkey to the west.<sup>151</sup> Facing these crises, the Dashnaks were able to construct an “embryonic state structure”<sup>152</sup> in Yerevan, but did little in the way of establishing an education system, improving mass literacy, creating new cultural institutions, or engaging in other tasks of concrete nation-building.

If the Dashnaks are to be credited with contributing to the modern-day Armenian nation-state, it should not be for building the modern Armenian state or the modern Armenian nation, but rather for securing some of the demographic and geographic reality that underpins it. Under the Dashnaktsutyun, the centers of Armenian population shifted from Tblisi, Baku, and Anatolia to a rump Armenian territory, and the Dashnaks were able to preserve it as the territorial homeland that would persist as modern-day Armenia.<sup>153</sup> At the same time, crediting this as nation-building requires some hindsight; because both an extensive Armenian diaspora and active irredentist claims on Armenia’s neighbors continued to exist through this period, Armenians at the time could not and largely did not envision a permanent Armenian nation-state in the boundaries of what is current-day territorial Armenia.

---

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 123; Blank, “Bolshevik Organizational Development,” 308-9.

<sup>145</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 131-2.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>147</sup> Blank, “Bolshevik Organizational Development,” 307; also see Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 113-85.

<sup>148</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 128.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>151</sup> Blank, “Bolshevik Organizational Development,” 311.

<sup>152</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 131-2.

<sup>153</sup> Mason, “Living the Lie,” 59; Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 131-2.

## *Evaluating Hypotheses*

In sum, the hypothesis that the brief moment of sovereign statehood that Armenians experienced between 1918 and 1922 generated understandings about the Armenian nation-state that persisted for decades under Soviet rule is **implausible** as it bears out in the case. The Democratic Republic of Armenia and its Dashnak government was hamstrung from generating any kind of long-lasting impact on Armenian identity politics for at least three reasons. The Dashnaktsutyun governed a state that was brought into existence only reluctantly, they governed without any broad national consensus supporting their rule, and they governed under circumstances of existential crisis. That the Dashnaks established a functioning state while fighting off multiple invasions is a remarkable achievement, and while the Dashnaks did oversee the emergence of what would remain as the modern-day location and shape of territorial Armenia, they were limited in their ability to pursue any kind of ambitious nation-building project.

### **4: The Re-emergence of Nationality in Armenian Cultural Politics, 1953 – 1970s**

H4: **An Armenian national intelligentsia** formed within elite Soviet cultural institutions during the 1950s-70s, and **pushed the Armenian public towards a counter-hegemonic orientation of Armenian nationhood** in the 1980s.

#### **Evidence For**

- A coherent intelligentsia in Armenian cultural institutions exists
- Nationalist ideas percolate in the mainstream of Armenian intelligentsia circles
- The Armenian intelligentsia that promotes conceptions of nationhood in this period is available in the 1980s, or a clear pathway exists by which this intelligentsia exerts influence in subsequent decades or on subsequent generations

#### **Evidence Against**

- Armenia in this period lacks a coherent intelligentsia, or an intelligentsia exists but is under developed (relative to other SSRs)
- An developed and coherent Armenian intelligentsia exists in this period, but does not engage with ideas about Armenian nationality, or is highly conservative in its articulation of Armenian nationality
- A developed and coherent Armenian intelligentsia exists in this period and articulates clear envelope-pushing ideas about Armenian nationality, but has no means of remaining relevant or transmitting those ideas in subsequent decades or to subsequent generations

## *Political Turnover*

Stalin's death in 1953 had severe implications for the political composition of the party leadership in the caucuses. Following a brief power struggle in Moscow resulting in the arrest and execution of former NKVD chief Beria, Beria's political machine – centered in Georgia but influential in Armenia as well<sup>154</sup> – was uprooted and his former clients purged. All members of the Armenian central committee were removed except one, and former Beria ally Grigor Arutiunov was replaced with soft-liner Suren

---

<sup>154</sup> For an in-depth account, see Fairbanks, "Clientelism and Higher Politics in Georgia."

Tovmasian as first party secretary.<sup>155</sup> Anastas Mikoyan, a native Georgian and a close Stalin ally during the early 1920s who had now become an instrumental Khrushchev supporter, returned to Yerevan.<sup>156</sup> After the dismantling of the Beria machine, party politics in Armenia was remarkably stable even through the Brezhnev era, with only four first party secretaries between 1953 and 1988, with a robust and local network of patron-client ties, and without any kind of large-scale purges like the ones that occurred in neighboring Georgia in 1972.<sup>157</sup> Finally, as in most of the SSRs, Armenia benefited from a general decentralization of authority during the thaw period.<sup>158</sup>

### *Re-emergence of an Orthodox Armenian Nationalism*

The thaw period in Armenia was announced by a number of highly visible symbolic gestures from Moscow that strongly signaled that a certain brand of “orthodox” nationalism, taboo during the late 1930s and 1940s, was now acceptable and encouraged. This orthodox nationalism was one that drew on historical experiences of hostility towards the Church, traditional Armenian Russophillism, longstanding conceptions of Armenians as a ‘loyal millet’ under multi-national empire, and even Armenian status as an ancient center of Christendom.<sup>159</sup>

In the sphere of cultural politics, de-stalinization meant that the rehabilitation of disgraced and condemned public figures would be used as a tool to signal the new party line on nationalism. In March of 1954, Anastas Mikoyan announced the rehabilitation of a canon of nationally-oriented Armenian writers that had been purged under high Stalinism, including the popular nationalist writers Aksel Bakunts and Yenghishe Charents.<sup>160</sup> Nationalist tendencies that had been punishable during the two previous decades were now celebrated as “sincerity” in literature and the arts, and public nationalist pride was openly displayed at public cultural events like concerts and poetry readings.<sup>161</sup>

Through the Armenian territory, changes to monuments and public art also broadcast the new orthodox nationalism. Most famously, the largest statue of Stalin in USSR, which was located in Yerevan, was removed by soldiers during the night and replaced with 150-foot statue of Mother Armenia.<sup>162</sup> Smaller monuments to Armenia’s national heroes, sponsored by the new pro-Khrushchev SSR government, sprung up throughout the Armenian territory, including equestrian statues and busts of such figures as Vartan Mamikonian, the 5<sup>th</sup> century defender of Armenian Christianity, and General Andranik Ozanian, the military commander that led Armenian forces against the Ottomans during WWI.<sup>163</sup> The 1915 Armenian genocide, a subject kept out of public discussion during the Stalin period, was now commemorated in officially sanctioned marches and monuments, such as the one on Tsitsernakaberd hill in Yerevan.<sup>164</sup>

A consequence of this change in party line during the 1960s, which cemented the new orthodox Armenian nationalism as a permissible ideological program, was to benefit a new younger generation of

---

<sup>155</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat* 180; Batalden et. al., *The Newly Independent States*, 100.

<sup>156</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 180.

<sup>157</sup> Those four first party secretaries were: Suren Tovmasian (1953-60), Zakov Zarobian (1960-66), Anton Kochinian (1966-74), and Karen Demirchian (1974-88) (Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 182).

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>159</sup> Mason, “Living the Lie,” 59; Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 186;

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 180; Other writers that Suny notes include the writers Raffi, Patkanian, Gurgen Mahari, Vagharshak Norents, and Vhram Alazan; For an in-depth look at the nationalist character of Aksel Bakunts’ work, see Mikikirtchian, “Aksel Bakounts as the Champion of the True Concept,” 79-90.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>162</sup> Mason, “Living the Lie,” 59; Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 181.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 186-7.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

politicians and cultural elites allied with the Khrushchev program. In party cells, in academic faculties, and on editorial boards, young adherents to the new orthodox nationalism debated and jostled with older Stalin-era holdovers. In many circles, the new nationalists won – Suny (1993) quotes a western observer to this point: “With industrialization, urbanization and the educational explosion, *new national elites* have been emerging since the 50s in numbers which exceed by far those of the old elites. Many have in the meantime moved up into key positions in the economy, the Party and the education system and have become custodians of a new national awareness which attempts to *combine fundamental acceptance of the Soviet order with loyalty towards their own nationhood* [emphasis mine].”<sup>165</sup>

### *Emergence of a Counter-Hegemonic Armenian Nationalism*

At the same time that the Khrushchev era oversaw the return of an officially sanctioned orthodox Armenian nationalism, it also experienced the creeping growth of a more extreme, counter-hegemonic, dissident brand of nationalist discourse.<sup>166</sup> Rather than a coherent ideological system, dissident nationalism at this time manifested, usually, in individual and isolated transgressions that crossed the boundary of permissible discourse or public action. Yet, the issues that motivated dissident Armenian nationalism, and the instances of organized mobilization that it yielded, strikingly foreshadowed the issues and organizations of the 1980s.

Two principle issues motivated instances of nationalism that transgressed sanctioned boundaries in the Khrushchev period, and later under Brezhnev. One was the 1915 genocide, as in the well-known case of an unsanctioned medium-scale protest (about 100,000 participants) in 1965 at the Spenidarian Opera House in Yerevan demanding official recognition of the event.<sup>167</sup> The second was the status of Armenians outside the territory of the SSR, as in 1978, when attacks on Armenians in Lebanon elicited calls of outcry from both the Soviet Armenian and diasporic press.<sup>168</sup> More prominent was the status of Armenians in the Azerbaijani-controlled enclave of Karabagh. Karabagh became the core, unresolved, and “frozen” issue driving the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict after 1991, but it is in this period that it entered the public debate as an animator of Armenian nationalist actions. While these two issues – the genocide and the status of extraterritorial Armenians – more than any others animated dissident Armenian actions in this period, the issues themselves were not unorthodox. The genocide was recognized in memorials that were officially sanctioned, and the Karabagh issue was one discussed and debated in the Communist party. Instead, these issues motivated actions that themselves crossed boundaries, like unsanctioned public protest. In these instances, the claims made by Armenian nationalists did not yet include radical challenges to Soviet authority, like a demand for sovereign statehood.

More organized and sustained instances of dissident nationalism in the Armenian SSR were rare, but those that existed articulated political goals that ultimately would be realized in 1990-91. The most well known were the small human rights groups that formed in Yerevan in April 1977 to monitor compliance with the Helsinki accords, similar to Helsinki groups that formed in other Soviet Republics.<sup>169</sup> Even more radical was the National Unity Party – an illegal party formed in 1967 and led by Stepan Zatikyan, Shahen Harutyunyan, and the painter Haykaz Khachatryan.

---

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>166</sup> Suny (1993) uses the language of “orthodox” and “dissident;” these two politics also fit Herrera’s (2004) categories of orthodox versus heterodox discourses. Dissident nationalism in his case is also consistent with the Gramscian notion of counter-hegemonic ideas as used in Lustick (1996).

<sup>167</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 186; Zisserman-Brodsky, *Constructing Ethnopolitics*, 119-20.

<sup>168</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 187.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 187; Zisserman-Brodsky, *Constructing Ethnopolitics*, 122.

The National Unity Party (NUP) pursued an irredentist agenda that included an independent and democratic Armenia and a Greater Armenian state incorporating Karabagh, Nakhchivan,<sup>170</sup> and portions of Turkish Anatolia. After publishing one issue of a journal called *Paros*, the NUP leadership was arrested and imprisoned in 1974, and its remaining members turned to acts of public demonstration and terrorism. The NUP was responsible for a public demonstration in 1974 in which a young woman named Razmik Zograbian burned a portrait of Lenin, and a bombing of the Moscow metro in 1977.<sup>171</sup> The NUP remained in existence until 1987, after which its successor, the Union for National Self-Determination, became a major player in the Armenian independence movement and continues to compete in parliamentary elections today.

### *The Emergence of Karabagh as a Salient Issue*

The status of Nagorno-Karabagh, a majority-Armenian enclave physically located inside Azerbaijan, has been the core animating issue behind Armenia's post-communist conflict with Azerbaijan and was the issue that motivated the movement in Armenia in 1988 traditionally credited with sparking the collapse of the USSR.<sup>172</sup> Yet, in secondary accounts of Soviet Armenian history, the Karabagh issue doesn't enter the public discourse and a visible way until the 1970s. Prior to Khrushchev's Thaw, Karabagh is just one of many territories (e.g. Nakhchivan) imagined as part of a wished-for but abandoned Greater Armenia.

During the 1970s, Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabagh Autonomous Oblast were declining demographically (from 94% of the Karabagh population in 1917 to 79% in 1979), had a lower standard of living than their Azerbaijani neighbors, and were threatened at times with legal restrictions on the use of Armenian language.<sup>173</sup> However, the Karabagh issue became visible only with the provocation of sympathetic political and cultural elites. In April 1965, a petition and an officially sanctioned march commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian genocide was met by a rival, more radical group of demonstrators demanding the return of Armenian territories in Turkey, but also Akhalkalaki and Lori in Georgia and Nakhchivan and Karabagh in Azerbaijan<sup>174</sup> Later that year, the poet Silva Kaputikian made noise at a regional party conference accusing the Armenian authorities of being insincere in their commemoration of the genocide.<sup>175</sup>

In a well-known scandal in 1975, a Komsomol secretary named Iasha Bablian read a poem in public declaring "We have already seen the other side of the moon. But when will we see the other side of Ararat?"<sup>176</sup> The Karabagh party secretary, sensitive to the reaction from Baku, fired Bablian, and initiated a small purge of Armenian intellectuals in the Karabagh region. Sero Khanzadian, a prominent Armenian writer,<sup>177</sup> was sent to Karabagh to investigate the condition of the Armenian population there and wrote a letter to Brezhnev in protest. Notably, the letter framed the scandal in terms of a broader issue of unfulfilled sovereignty for Karbagh Armenians, claiming that "the Armenian population of Karabagh has never voluntarily accepted its present status," that they were "detached and separated from their mother country," and that the formal status of Karabagh was "in itself an instance of injustice which calls for liquidation" that, if corrected, would be "bound to be appreciated by other nations as a

---

<sup>170</sup> An Azerbaijani territory bordering Armenia's western side.

<sup>171</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 187; Zisserman-Brodsky, *Constructing Ethnopolitics*, 120-22.

<sup>172</sup> Rutland, "Democracy and Nationalism in Armenia," 839, 841.

<sup>173</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 188.

<sup>174</sup> Rutland, "Democracy and Nationalism in Armenia," 842.

<sup>175</sup> Fowkes, *The Disintegration of the Soviet Union*, 92

<sup>176</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 189; Fowkes, *The Disintegration of the Soviet Union*, 92; Mount Ararat is located in a formerly Armenian region of Turkey.

<sup>177</sup> Known for the historical novel *Mkhitar Sparapet*

new accomplishment of the Leninist nationality policy.”<sup>178</sup> By the end of the 1970s, Karabagh had seriously emerged as a salient issue around which Armenia nationalists organized, but the issue was still pursued only within the framework of the existing Soviet federal system.

### *Evaluating Hypotheses*

The case of Armenia in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev periods **confirms**, but **incompletely**, the plausibility of the hypothesis that Soviet cultural institutions incubated a national intelligentsia that articulated how the Armenian nation would be oriented. It is very clear that this period saw the emergence of a vocally nationalist intelligentsia – one that promoted both orthodox and counter-hegemonic ideas about the orientation of the Armenian nation toward the Soviet multi-national state. Furthermore, it is striking how the issues that became salient during this period – Karabagh in particular – foreshadow the ones that would motivate and accelerate Armenian nationalism in the 1980s.

### *Unanswered Questions*

However, the *organizational basis* for these national intelligentsias is not clear – writers and scholars are vocal key actors in this period, but we have less information about the organizations they come from (especially the Writers’ Union and Yerevan State University), and whether these intelligentsias could have formed without those organizations.

In addition, while the national intelligentsia that forms in this period seems to foreshadow the one that drives Armenian politics in the 1980s, it is not clear whether they are the *same* intelligentsia. In other words, we still lack evidence that a clear pathway exists by which the intelligentsia that was activated in the 1960s and 70s exerted influence over Armenian politics in the 1980s.

---

<sup>178</sup> Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 189.