

The Origins of Armenian Nationalism in the United States and the American Armenian Press (1880s-1920s)

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The growing scholarship on the ethnic press in the United States has greatly contributed to our understanding of their functions within ethnic communities and in the broader society. This study, focusing on a sample of the Armenian ethnic press, demonstrates that in the formative stages of the Armenian immigrant community (1880s-1920s), the Armenian press promoted long-distance nationalism, on the one hand, and ‘cultural congruence’ between American and Armenian values, identities, and worldviews, on the other hand. Armenians arrived in the United States in increasing numbers beginning in the late nineteenth century, as they fled Ottoman persecutions and massacres, and the community further grew in the aftermath of the genocide during World War I. As Armenians established roots in their new environment, their cultural production during the period under consideration included more than one hundred dailies, weeklies, and monthly journals. These publications fell into three categories: nationalist/long-distance nationalist, religious, and non-political/professional. The Armenian ethnic papers catered to the tastes of nostalgic immigrants and emphasized the urgency of reforms in, or outright liberation from, the Ottoman empire. Thus, this case study demonstrates that the Armenian ethnic press propagated long-distance nationalism as they sought to forge community solidarity and to fortify cultural preservation. At the same time, they also promoted American values, the American Dream, active citizenship, and Americanization in general—a significant point regarding the paradoxical role of the ethnic press in host societies but often neglected in the literature on ethnonationalism and long-distance nationalism. This article also briefly discusses the long-term ramifications of Armenian ethnic cultural development as a diaspora community in the United States.

Keywords: American Armenian community, ethnic identity, ethnic press, long-distance nationalism, cultural congruence

In the past two decades or so, a valuable scholarship has emerged on the political and cultural significance of the ethnic press in the United States, contributing to our understanding of their functions within ethnic communities and in the broader society.² The extant literature has debated whether the ethnic press have played a deleterious or a positive, constructive role in society. In some quarters, the ethnic press have been demonized as influential agents causing retardation in the integration or assimilation of immigrants into mainstream American life.³ Such views, of course, closely correlated with negative opinions regarding immigration in general. Others, however, have praised the ethnic press as agents of acculturation and assimilation. Perhaps Edward Hunter has provided a more accurate assessment in stating that initially in their formative stages the ethnic press are ‘torn between two poles, a sense of belonging and loyalty to the country where their editors and their readers were born, and a sense of belonging and loyalty, too, to the country which received them so openly’. The immigrant eventually establishes roots and ‘materially and spiritually’ embraces Americanization.⁴ According to Michel Laguerre, the ethnic press constitute ‘an important arena in the construction of diasporic citizenship and identity’.⁵ As ‘rhetorical artefacts’, the ethnic press capture specific community moments and interpret their cultural and historical significance for the community.⁶ For society at large, such cultural productions, Khachig Tölölyan has observed, also contribute to American transdisciplinary discourses within the social sciences and humanities.⁷

This paper contends that in the formative stages of the Armenian community from the 1880s to the 1920s, the American Armenian press established the cultural and political foundations for both the articulation of Armenian nationalism as well as Americanization. The incipient American Armenian press performed two general functions: on the one hand, they sought to forge community solidarity, to fortify

cultural preservation (*azkabahbanum*; preservation of the nation), and to propagate Armenian nationalism. In the absence of Armenian statehood, most of the Armenian community newspapers also promoted the idea of a national statehood, which did not materialize until 1918. On the other hand, they simultaneously promoted American nationalism and Americanization.⁸ Thus, in Barthian terms, the American Armenian press sought to construct as well as transcend 'ethnic boundaries'.⁹

Clearly, such ethno-cultural hybridity was not an exclusively Armenian phenomenon. Similar processes took place in other immigrant communities, as in the American Greek community, whose homeland already constituted a sovereign state and whose newspapers served as 'carriers' of ethnicity, while promoting assimilation into American society.¹⁰ The American Polish press encouraged the attainment of U.S. citizenship while contributing to Polish nationalism in support of the creation of an independent Polish statehood.¹¹

The Armenian press in the United States emerged with the arrival of an increasing number of Armenians during the period under consideration (1880s-1920s).¹² An enormous cultural production occurred with the proliferation of Armenian private and political party publications, each claiming a certain ideological orientation. Other ethnic communities witnessed a similar growth in their publications. According to one estimate, there were 800 ethnic publications in the United States in 1880, and 1,323 in 1917.¹³ In the early 1920s, Robert E. Park, of the Chicago School of Sociology, estimated that 43 or 44 languages and dialects were spoken by immigrant groups in the United States in the early twentieth century. He mentioned three Armenian newspapers: *Hayrenik* (Fatherland), *Asbarez* (Arena), and *Yeridasart Hayasdan* (Young Armenia). Park added that Armenian papers had a circulation of about 19,400, and their contents were 52% 'propagandist' and 48% 'commercial'.¹⁴ Marshall Beuick, also writing in the 1920s, contended that the ethnic press commonly perceived as socialists and radicals in

reality were 'loyal' 'American products'.¹⁵ Similarly, Robert Mirak has noted that the Armenian newspapers seldom supported socialist causes. While the 'nominally socialist' *Hayrenik* quoted Karl Marx, it remained largely capitalist in orientation. 'Under the intellectual façade of socialism', Mirak wrote, 'was a deep-seated, emotional and psychological commitment to business and capitalism'. Armenian newspapers praised capitalism and the Protestant work ethic.¹⁶ Armenian cultural production included more than one hundred dailies, weeklies, and monthly journals, a major achievement one commentator wrote in 1913, considering the small size of the immigrant community.¹⁷ These publications fell into three categories: nationalist/long-distance nationalist, religious, and non-political/professional.¹⁸ The Armenian papers catered to the tastes of nostalgic immigrants and emphasized the urgency of reforms for the Armenian communities within, or outright liberation from, the Ottoman empire. In conjunction, they also promoted the preservation of national identity and culture in the diaspora – what Nigoghayos Adonts referred to as the nation's 'supreme aspirations'.¹⁹

The Historical Setting

Armenian printing historically has enjoyed a prodigious inheritance dating back to the sixteenth century.²⁰ The earliest Armenian periodical, *Aztarar* (Monitor), appeared in Madras, India, in the late eighteenth century. During the nineteenth century, the Mkhitarist Catholic Order proved exceptionally productive; among its numerous publications were *Pazmaveb* (Polyhistory, established in Venice in 1843) and *Hantes amsorya* (Monthly Digest, Vienna, 1887), both published to this day. Throughout the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, numerous Armenian newspapers and journals appeared in different communities: *Hiusapayl* (Aurora Borealis) in Moscow and *Mshag* (Cultivator) in Tbilisi in the Russian Empire; *Hayasdan* (Armenia) and

Hayrenik in Constantinople; and *Arevelk* (East) and *Anahid* (goddess of fertility and wisdom) in Paris.²¹

Two historic events proved particularly significant during the period between the 1880s and the 1920s: the genocide committed by the Young Turk government against its Armenian citizens during World War I, and the re-emergence of an Armenian government in the form of the Republic of Armenia in 1918 in the Caucasus where the last Armenian government had collapsed in the eleventh century. Prior to the genocide, about four million Armenians, nearly equally divided between the Ottoman and Russian empires, inhabited the historic Armenian homeland of more than three millennia. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Ottoman oppressive rule and massacres compelled Armenians to emigrate. Thus, Armenian immigration to the United States originated largely in the Ottoman empire (and a relatively smaller number in the Russian empire), a process that accelerated as a result of the genocide when Armenians were forcibly removed from their homes and communities. The dispersion treks for the survivors of the genocide extended from Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Greece, France, the United Kingdom, among other places, across the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Atlantic, to the United States, Canada, and other countries in the Western Hemisphere.

Mirak has noted that by 1914, approximately 65,950 Armenians had immigrated to the United States. Following the Hamidian and the Adana massacres (1894-1896 and 1909 respectively), an estimated 51,950 arrived between 1899 and 1914. About 76% of Armenians in the United States were literate. Many belonged to the 'skilled' or 'professional' classes, and others were 'labourers'.²² By the late 1920s, the number of Armenians in the United States had reached more than 100,000, their communities concentrated in Boston, Providence, New York, Chicago, Racine, and farther west in Fresno and Los Angeles.

An admixture of conflicting emotions energized the Armenian immigrants in their new setting. The formative stages of the Armenian community in the United States coincided with the advent of the 'New Immigration' wave, the economic depression of the 1890s, the nativist xenophobic calls for 'one hundred per cent Americanization', and the emergence of the United States as a global power. Armenian and other immigrants were 'regarded as backward and cowardly' and suffered low self-esteem and shame, which motivated them into active support for nationalist causes.²³ Alienation and resentment regarding injustices suffered in the homeland, the shame of victimhood and humiliation, a yearning for belonging and solidarity, national pride and honour, produced a powerful force of long-distance nationalism in the American Armenian community.²⁴ Individually, collectively, and the homeland institutions they transplanted to the New World – churches, political parties, and cultural institutions – were steeped in anger and resentment toward the regimes they had left behind, and the Armenian press gave political meaning to such sentiments and sought to win minds and hearts to galvanize support for a sovereign Armenian statehood – a recurring theme in the Armenian press for decades thereafter.

This phase also coincided with the advent of influential papers – for example, the *New York Sun*, the *New York World*, and the *New York Journal* – and yellow journalism, the Gilded Age, and the reformist Progressive Era.²⁵ As Jerair Gharibian has noted, the Armenian press drew political reports and cultural stories from the pages of the *New York Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Times* of London, and *Le Monde*, among others, thus offering their readership broader cosmopolitan perspectives beyond parochial interests.²⁶ They, in essence, served as what Laguerre has correctly characterized as 'transnational media'.²⁷

Many *émigré* Armenian intellectuals, representing largely the professional classes in the community, had developed such a cosmopolitan, internationally-oriented *Weltanschauung* in the

homeland, and the freedoms enjoyed in the United States enabled them further to widen the philosophical contours of their nationalist discourses and political activism. They arrived in the new country during the ‘intellectual migration’ of European thought in various natural and social sciences in the context of social and economic transformations, industrialization, and urbanization, and they considered themselves interpreters of American society for the newcomers.²⁸ As the constructionist model suggests (discussed below), these intellectuals and community leaders exercised great influence on the development of the Armenian nationalist movement as they worked to marshal community energies for nationalist aspirations. The American Armenian press sought to transform the inherited ‘culture of defeat’ (Wolfgang Schivelbusch’s phrase), subjugation and victimhood, as developed over the centuries under foreign domination, into a culture of security and success, a culture of meaningful citizenship with the attendant political, civil, and economic liberties.²⁹ One observer commented that for the first time in their history Armenians in growing numbers resided in an advanced society that could prove greatly beneficial to their material progress and cultural advancements, including improvements in Armenian journalism.³⁰

Concomitantly, Armenian intellectuals echoed the debates in American society – for example, Israel Zangwill’s characterization of the American experience as a ‘melting pot.’ The melting pot theory held that immigrants inevitably assimilate into American society as they shed their ethnic identities and cultures in efforts to secure a successful life in their adopted country. As demonstrated in the Armenian press, the Armenian immigrant experience to a large extent confirmed the validity of this theory. Many, perhaps most, Armenians embraced American ideals and values as they enjoyed the opportunities to advance professionally, financially, and politically. Yet, critics refuted the theory’s presuppositions, as many immigrants retained their emotional and

cultural attachments to their homeland and in some cases all together rejected acculturation or assimilation into American society. Thus, the Armenian experience also revealed the limitations of Zangwill's theory.

Hannah Arendt, for example, maintained that the ethnic press enabled the immigrant groups, often 'passionately interested in the future of their homelands', to affirm their identities in their new environment. It would be a mistake to think, as 'overoptimistic advocates of the melting pot' do, that 'the foreign-language press is as "American" as any English-language press' in the United States.³¹ Marcus Lee Hansen observed that 'A favourite occupation of the immigrant intellectual was journalism'. The immigrant communities, he averred, supported 'a multitude of weekly and monthly periodicals.... Page after page of news, lifted from European sources, attests the continuing interest in the homeland. Once a week, though perhaps two months late, the settler was transported back to the politics and official gossip of the world he had left'. While the process of Americanization inevitably altered the views and values of many immigrants, 'the distant continent was never forgotten.... The newspaper was both an aspect of culture and an instrument of culture'.³² Robert Bellah and his associates characterized ethnic communities as 'communities of memory' whose members do not forget their past. An ethnic community creates its institution of memory to retell 'its constitutive narrative'.³³ Armenian essayist and historian Leo (Arakel Babakhanian) wrote in the early twentieth century that a nation's history is intimately intertwined with its evolution of printing and literature.³⁴ In the diaspora, such cultural productions were expected to serve as community agencies for the propagation of what Joshua Fishman has called 'language loyalty' and maintenance.³⁵

The American Armenian press considered salvaging the nation's transplanted cultural capital among their principal aims. Unsurprisingly, therefore, many newspapers bore the names of places of origin in the homeland (eg, *Taurus*) or compatriotic societies, such as *Nor Arapgir*

(New Arapgir), a publication of the Union of Arapgir in New York. Others symbolised geographical markers of historical significance, such as *Ararad* (Ararat) and *Yeprad* (Euphrates). *Arakadz* monthly, named after Mount Arakadz, stated in its inaugural issue that along with Mount Ararad, Mount Arakadz represented the heart of the Armenian nation and its proud cultural heritage.³⁶ The publications *Azadutiun* (Freedom) and *Artarutian tsayn* (Voice of justice) more explicitly announced their nationalist and revolutionary aspirations.

Armenian immigrants were particularly interested in homeland news. Sarkis Atamian recounts how as their primary leisurely activity they gathered in meeting places to drink coffee and discuss politics, a common practice transplanted from the homeland.³⁷ Vartkes Aharonian, the son of the prominent intellectual and statesman Avedis Aharonian, observed that at the A.R.F. Zavarian reading room in Detroit those present, many of them factory workers at the nearby Ford plant, read Armenian-language newspapers and engaged in endless debates concerning conditions in the homeland.³⁸ In addition to news, newspaper advertisements also catered to immigrant memories and sentiments. For instance, an advertisement placed in *Hayrenik* by Araksi Apigian, the wife of the poet Taniel Varuzhan (Daniel Varoujan), who was among the Armenian intellectuals arrested in Constantinople on April 24, 1915, and subsequently murdered, asked the reader: 'Do you want to remember your homeland? Purchase Varuzhan's brilliant works, the best present for friends!'³⁹

Functions of the Ethnic Press

It should be clear by this point that the Armenian ethnic press performed a number of functions in the immigrant community and that these functions reflected the changing moods and circumstances in the larger

society. In the early years of the twentieth century, during the Progressive Era, sensationalist ‘yellow journalism’ was expected to be replaced with standards of professionalism. Newspapers would employ reporters and intellectuals to serve the best interests of the nation. The ideal press could hire, in the words of Alfred Harmsworth (editor of the *Daily Mail* in London), ‘the best brains’ so that they could exercise a ‘positive influence and leadership’ in the community.⁴⁰ Each paper would have ‘a soul of its own’ imbued with high ideals, ethical standards, and independent voice. Albert Shaw (editor-in-chief of the *American Review of Reviews*) maintained that the ‘press as civilizer’ represented ‘the highest agent in modern civilization’. The press, he averred, ‘lifts us out of the local rut and gives us the broader spirit and intelligence of common citizens of a great country. Still further, it extends our sympathies beyond national bounds and gives us the feeling of human solidarity’.⁴¹

Similarly, Armenian newspapers claimed to promote cultural enlightenment and civic virtue and therefore to serve as ‘civilizers’. Armenian intellectuals in the United States and other diasporic communities in general espoused the idealised view of the press. In Paris, Vazken Shushanian, for example, wrote that the ideal intellectual participated in community affairs and contributed to the cultural advancement of community and humanity.⁴² Further, the American Armenian press functioned as ‘community builders’, ‘community sentinels’, and ‘community boosters’, encouraging success in American society and thereby promoting a positive image of the community.⁴³ The Armenian press acted as ‘buffers’ or mediating institutions ‘suspended’ (to borrow Oscar Handlin’s term) between the immigrant and host cultures, while promoting Americanization and the American Dream.⁴⁴ They articulated community interests in the public sphere and accordingly contributed to the overall cultural pluralism in American society. As ethnic newspapers, they interpreted homeland and

international news and promoted policy advocacy activities through the prism of nationalistic sentiments.⁴⁵ In the words of Handlin, 'Nationalistic agitation whipped up a display of emotions'.⁴⁶ Moreover, they propagated their ethnic tongue, legitimized the community's nostalgia and emotional attachments to the homeland, and educated immigrants about the culture, politics, and traditions of the hostland.⁴⁷ Accordingly, the ethnic press also constituted what Joseph Nye has referred to as 'soft power' and Tölölyan has called 'stateless power' – a diasporic community's effective utilization of affective attachments to and instrumentalization of transnational culture and identity.⁴⁸

As such, the ethnic press function as adaptive institutions in the evolution of the community. Tölölyan has identified a number of functions that diasporic elites and institutions perform in diasporic 'precarious conditions', including 'philanthropic, cultural, and political activities', as adaptation to hostland environments transforms the early phases of immigrant 'exilic nationalism to diasporic transnationalism'. The 'tone and content' of most Armenian cultural productions, he adds, have 'until recently been parochial, elaborating a form of exilic nationalism', which 'remains a potent force'.⁴⁹

The evolution of ethnic identity from exilic nationalism to diasporic transnationalism places under scrutiny the debates between primordialists (or essentialist) and constructionists (or instrumentalist), a topic beyond the scope of this essay. Succinctly put, primordialists assume that ethnic individuals possess a single, fixed identity shaped by 'natural' and 'deeply rooted' attachments.⁵⁰ The constructivists, in contrast, posit the view that ethnic identity and nationalism are the products of concerted efforts by an educated and politically active elite that utilizes instruments of communications to 'construct' the group's identity and image. Their repertoires of identities consist of multiple and malleable constructs, as they respond to variable conditions in the hostland.⁵¹ However, as Anthony D. Smith has argued, ethnic identity is

not created *ex nihilo*, as ethnic individuals possess ‘repertoires’ of cultural memories, values, and traditions.⁵²

The constructionist model places a premium on the role of the community leaders in the development of its institutions and overall identity. Accordingly, ethnic identity is seen as the product of concerted efforts by educated and culturally-politically active leaders who utilize the ethnic press to construct and reconstruct the group’s identity, values, and collective memory for various objectives.⁵³ In the Armenian experience the press, along with the church, provided the institutional foundations for the construction of American Armenian identity and sought to contribute to the maintenance of community cohesion and solidarity. Yet, in contrast to the idealised view of the press as promoting solidarity, as party organs they also generated and exacerbated intra-community tensions and divisions.

Two closely intertwined themes are discussed in the following sections: the construction of what Benedict Anderson has referred to as ‘long-distance nationalism’, followed by a discussion of the construction of ‘cultural congruence’ between American and Armenian identities and values.⁵⁴ Many of the new arrivals experienced conflicting emotions regarding preservation of homeland traditions, values, and mores as they sought integration into American society. The experience of the Armenian community in the United States reveals the complexities involved in the formative stages of a diasporic community. More than a century of the presence of the Armenian press in American life has demonstrated that the Armenian press have not retarded assimilation. While they have served as agents of cultural preservation, in the long run they have also served as agents of the construction of American Armenian identity, the *Homo Americanus*. American Armenians anchored their primary allegiance to the United States and adamantly upheld American identity and values (as adamantly as any American nationalist).

The case of the Armenian ethnic press demonstrates that the propagation of the American Dream is not the exclusive domain of the mainstream American press. Ethnic groups also seek to promote the American Dream in addition to long-distance nationalism. This highlights a fundamental paradox: On the one hand, the Armenian ethnic press cultivated ties with the homeland and contributed to long-distance nationalism; on the other hand, it promoted American values, reinforced American nationalism, and contributed to the Americanization of the Armenian community. This paradoxical role of the ethnic press is often neglected in the literature on ethnonationalism and long-distance nationalism. The model formulated here therefore offers a more dynamic approach to ethnonationalism than the static models currently prevalent in the literature.

The Construction of Long-Distance Nationalism

Armenian cultural reawakening in the Ottoman and Russian empires in the nineteenth century led to the proliferation of nationalist cultural production. Newspapers and other publications asserted national identity, articulated a romanticized triumphalist national history, and voiced demands for an independent, sovereign Armenian statehood.⁵⁵ In its formative stages, the Armenian community in the United States derived its ethno-nationalist 'constitutive narratives' largely from the cultural and political discourses prevalent in the homeland, narratives that from early on shaped the transgenerational ideological trajectory of the community.⁵⁶ These narratives, transnational in content, amplified the immigrant's 'undying membership in, and unyielding obligations to,' the distant homeland.⁵⁷ As Zlatko Skrbiš has rightly noted, diasporas 'encourage constructions of narratives and symbolisms highly charged' with expressions of loyalty to the nation and the homeland.⁵⁸

While the American Armenian press placed a premium on the preservation of Armenian culture and identity and called for the mobilization of material support for the homeland, they represented diverse approaches and motivations. For example, some newspapers greatly appreciated the commercial value of nationalist journalism. Haygag Eginian (the ‘father of the American Armenian press’) published the monthly *Arekag* (Sun) in 1888, the first Armenian-language newspaper in the country, and subsequently *Surhantag* (Messenger) in 1889 and *Azadutiun* (Freedom) in 1890.⁵⁹ A controversial figure, he appreciated the commercial aspect of newspaper publishing, although his ventures repeatedly met with failure. He published contradictory views on Armenian immigration and life in the United States, initially opposing the exodus from the homeland but later encouraging emigration to what he referred to as the land of opportunity, freedom, happiness, wealth, and security. Perhaps Eginian realized the marketability of the American Dream and the futility of combatting emigration.⁶⁰

Other publications more accurately featured the characteristics of ‘long-distance nationalism’. Parnag M. Ayvadian, the son of Mateos Ayvadian, the famed publisher of *Ararad* in Constantinople, published the bi-lingual *Ararad* monthly in New York in the early 1890s. Significantly, the banner ‘Established 1869’ appeared beneath the masthead of the New York *Ararad* to emphasize its continuity from the father in the homeland to the son in the diaspora. In its issue of September 1892, *Ararad* advocated the establishment of an autonomous Armenia, and displayed a map of its envisioned boundaries across its first page with the phrase ‘Home Rule’ in red ink.⁶¹ Its pages covered national and international issues, community life, reports about Ottoman and Russian communities, educational pieces, geography, and literary works.⁶²

In a similar vein, the New York *Hayk* (Armenians or Armenia, 1891-1898), also a private publication, reported on the conditions in the

homeland and offered its readers commentaries on such topics as Armenian language and culture, American politics, and community announcements (eg, in New York guest speakers discussed the skills required to enhance employment opportunities).⁶³ With an intensely nationalist zeal, an article claimed that only in the historic homeland could Armenians build their modern national institutions. Its assertion that the year 1894 would offer favourable conditions for the creation of an independent Armenian government proved rather premature as 1894 witnessed the launch of the Hamidian massacres, which for the next two years claimed more than 100,000 Armenian lives.⁶⁴

The privately operated press for various (financial, personal) reasons lived a rather short lifespan and, despite their commercial or nationalist value, could not compete with political party papers. Newspapers that served as political party organs enjoyed a broader base of a politically and ideologically motivated loyal readership. They employed U.S.- and homeland-based paid and volunteer staff, writers, and reporters, in addition to peripatetic intellectuals who toured Armenian communities to rally support for the party cause. The party press therefore survived much longer than their privately published competitors – more than a century in the case of *Hayrenik* of Boston (1899-present).

Four Armenian political parties in the United States contributed to the development of long-distance nationalism, their divergent ideologies notwithstanding: the Social Democrat *Hnchagian* ('Clarion') party, founded in Geneva in 1887; *Hay Heghapokhagan Tashnagsutiun* (*Dashnaktsutiun*; the Armenian Revolutionary Federation), Tiflis, 1890; the *Veragazmial* (Reformed) *Hnchagian* party, Alexandria, Egypt, 1898; and the *Ramgavar Azadagan* (Democratic Liberal) party, Constantinople, 1921. Armenian political party organization cells in their embryonic form operated in a number of communities in the United States by 1892. Soon, as part of their organizational activities, the political parties established their own official organs – for example, the ARF, *Hayrenik*;

the Hnchagian party, *Yeridasart Hayasdan*; the Veragazmial Hnchagian party, *Tsayn hayreniats* (Voice of the Fatherland) and *Armenia*; and the Ramgavar party, *Azk* (Nation) which was succeeded by *Baikar* (Struggle) in 1922.⁶⁵

These political parties also organized community events for the celebration of Armenian culture and heritage, cultivation of collective memory concerning the homeland, and fundraising campaigns to assist the homeland. They also dispatched a number of intellectuals and activists to refortify Armenian nationalism and identity. In 1892, for instance, one of the leading Hnchag activists, Karekin Chitjian, toured the Armenian communities to strengthen the party organization. In 1899, Arshag Vramian, a leading figure of the Tashnaktsutium, arrived for a similar objective.⁶⁶

In nearly all party activities, the nation, as the idealised collectivity, remained at the forefront of their rhetoric and articulation of aspirations. The term '*azk*', the inaugural issue of *Azk* editorialized, possessed a profound political and cultural significance for Armenian national objectives and for the modernization of Armenian culture and identity. The term signified the sharp distinction between the archaic Ottoman notion of the ethno-religious '*millet*' and the modern Western secular conceptualization of the nation.⁶⁷ The 'nation' for the Armenian people suggested transformation from subjugation and victimhood in the feudal structure of the decrepit empire to modern citizenship and jurisprudence, modern statehood. The Armenian communities were to propagate the nation's values and aspirations for a homeland.⁶⁸

Similarly, *Hayrenik* urged the community to support the Armenian cause. Its contents included news articles on American politics and Armenian cultural events, announcements for community meetings and fundraising, and letters depicting the situation in the homeland. *Hayrenik* and most other Armenian publications paid particular attention to the

triangular relationship between the homeland, the major powers, and the diasporic communities. Small nations had to rely on the major powers for their physical security, one article argued.⁶⁹ Events in the homeland demanded immediate action across the United States and Europe for such support. The situation in certain Armenian regions, as in Mush, had so deteriorated, another article noted, as to compel Armenian revolutionaries into direct action.⁷⁰

Tashnagtsutiu underscored the moral imperative of the Armenian cause. Although the community apparently failed to respond favourably to its calls for action, its nationalist campaigns certainly found fertile ground in the United States, as its membership increased from seventy in 1898 to 1,200 in 1907. Yet, a circular in July 1903 expressed the party's protest against apathy. The defence of the homeland, the circular stressed, in addition to fundraising, also required volunteers for the organizational and liberation activities there.⁷¹ The massacres in Adana in 1909, which claimed about 25,000 Armenian lives, underscored the urgency of such appeals.

The Tashnagtsutiu leadership found the lack of community response to calls for homeland return particularly disconcerting. Soon after the Young Turk revolution, Tashnagtsutiu launched a campaign to urge American Armenians to return home. The famous poet Siamanto (Adom Yarjanian), while visiting the United States, briefly served as editor of *Hayrenik* and published his book *Hayreni hraver* [Invitation to the homeland]. Tashnagist activists Harutiun Chakmakjian and Etvart Agnuni (Khachadur Malumian) toured the United States for this 'return home' campaign.⁷² They maintained that Armenians at last could enjoy the democracy and freedoms established by the revolution under the reinstated Ottoman constitution. Yet, many Armenian immigrants must have received such claims with deep suspicion. They had left behind their homes and families to join thousands of migrants on their perilous journey to an unknown world largely as a result of the Ottoman

repressive regime. The Adana massacres had served to validate their views, and their refusal to return to the homeland was further reinforced after the genocide, their nostalgia and yearning notwithstanding.

The *Asbarez* newspaper adopted a more pragmatic approach concerning homeland return. *Asbarez* first appeared in Fresno in August 1908, the year of the Young Turk revolution as if to signify Armenian hopes and expectations regarding the homeland. *Asbarez*, however, did not consider the revolution a homeward invitation. Its inaugural issue editorialized that Armenians in Fresno had left the Ottoman empire with hopes of securing a better future, had grown roots in the new country, and were unlikely to return to the homeland. They represented an extension of the homeland.⁷³

In addition, the Armenian political parties also established organizations for women to enlist their support for the Armenian cause.⁷⁴ While in the United States in 1910, Etvart Agnuni urged women to organize the Armenian Red Cross (subsequently renamed the Armenian Relief Society). During World War I, the activist Sophia Daniel-Beg in an article called on Armenian women to contribute to the war effort by supporting the soldiers and to volunteer to fight alongside them. With their enormous moral strength, she noted, Armenian women could inspire the Armenian communities to aid the soldiers defending the homeland.⁷⁵

In August 1918, *Asbarez* published an extraordinary missive by the famed poet Hovhannes Tumanian to the equally famed General Andranik Ozanian. Tumanian expressed his willingness to allow his four sons to fight in the Armenian military in any capacity the general deemed necessary, as well as his four daughters to assist the Armenian soldiers on the battlefield. Armenians were engaged in a struggle for their very survival, Tumanian wrote, and all Armenians were obligated to contribute to this effort to secure national freedom.⁷⁶

The Armenian political parties in the United States established a united defence committee to mobilise volunteers for the war effort, but interparty disagreements concerning administration and strategy eventually doomed such efforts to failure. Nevertheless, according to Manug Hampartsumian, a leading Tashnagist, about 800 men volunteered to join the Armenian forces in the Caucasus.⁷⁷ In addition, a volunteer unit comprised of about 1,200 men (far short of the expected 5,000) were attached to the French *Légion d'Orient* for the Allied war effort in the Middle East in hopes of liberating Cilicia from Turkish rule.⁷⁸

The party newspapers uniformly supported certain policies while vehemently disputed other issues. For example, during the public debates concerning the Wilson administration's policy regarding the American mandate, the Armenian newspapers consistently insisted on a separate mandate for Armenians. Yet, they also voiced intense interparty conflicts on other issues, particularly in matters concerning the international boundaries of the Republic of Armenia. As Richard Hovannisian has noted, the New York *Gochnag Hayasdani* (Voice of Armenia) expressed hostility toward the Tashnagsutiun party amidst the power struggles between two factions that emerged within the Armenian delegation at the post-WWI peace negotiations in Paris. Avedis Aharonian of Tashnagsutiun, the head of the delegation representing the Republic of Armenia, opted for territorially smaller but militarily defensible borders, while Boghos Nubar and his National Delegation insisted on more extensive territorial claims inclusive of Cilicia.⁷⁹ These tensions proved particularly intractable as Yerevan failed to satisfy the different groupings both at home and across the diaspora.

The Armenian ethnic press also routinely featured articles that voiced criticism of the various shortcomings in the immigrant community. Particularly noteworthy was the fact that prior to the genocide, the newspapers, *Hayrenik* among them, frequently published highly critical articles about the backwardness of the Armenian people and the church.

In its issue of 2 March 1901, an article in *Hayrenik* stated that the long history of subjecthood had demonstrated the Armenian inability to modernize themselves in the homeland, even after nearly a century of cultural renaissance. The public all too easily succumbed to the dictates of local personalities rather than champion national ideologies and aspirations. The Armenian people could benefit from the curative properties of the freedom of education in the New World, the article averred.⁸⁰ Such unflattering commentaries, however, nearly, albeit not totally, disappeared soon after the genocide as national survival priorities eclipsed all other issues.

At the time, such contentual mutations perhaps represented an inevitable consequence of reactive long-distance nationalism in response to the genocide. This humanitarian catastrophe, however, was compounded by the shock of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, followed by the Bolshevik overthrow of the first Republic of Armenia in 1921. Moreover, the Espionage Act (1917), the Trading with the Enemy Act (1917), and the Sedition Act (1918) further compelled the Armenian press, along with other newspapers and publications in the country, to shed any pretensions to socialist ideology and to embrace political, social, and economic conservatism. The press and community leaders constructed a firmly interwoven mix of deepening conservatism and reactive nationalism, a mixture which extended beyond the first immigrant generation, throughout the Cold War, and post-Soviet Armenia. In the process, the American Armenian community transformed from the earlier 'exilic nationalism' of the first generation to the diasporization or institutionalization of the American Armenian 'cultural congruence'.

The Construction of American Armenian ‘Cultural Congruence’

John Bodnar has noted that the immigrant *‘mentalité’* encompasses ‘an amalgam of past and present, acceptance and resistance’.⁸¹ The Armenian press contributed to the construction of such a *mentalité*. They reflected and propagated a constellation of Armenian and American ideas and values and in doing so constructed American-Armenian ‘cultural congruence’, an ideological worldview or an ideological metastructure predicated upon American principles and ideals as they furnished meaning to the individual immigrant’s everyday life and to the collective community life in their new environment. The Armenian press considered themselves representatives of the immigrant community and interpreters of its relationship with the American society. As they fashioned nationalist discourses regarding the homeland, they also echoed the dominant socio-political and capitalist predilections in the host society. The Armenian press also served as institutions for socialization of the immigrant. Nearly all publications contained some element of Americanizing objectives in their pages and promoted acculturation and social-economic integration. Through their Americanization efforts they also enhanced the legitimacy of the Armenian community and the individual within American society.

The principal proponent of the construction of cultural congruence was the English-language *Armenia* journal, whose ultimate objective was to mobilize American support for the It was published under the editorship of Arshag Mahdesian in Boston and subsequently in New York from 1904 to 1913, briefly as *Oriental World* (1913-1914), and subsequently as *The New Armenia* from 1915-1929, under the editorship of Arshag Mahdesian.⁸² A fairly sophisticated publication, *Armenia* enlisted as honorary members of its editorial board Armenophile, reformist luminaries, including Julia Ward Howe (president of the ‘Friends of

Armenia'), Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Alice Stone Blackwell, Professor Albert S. Cook (Yale University), and Rollo Ogden (Editor of *The New York Evening Post*). The journal distributed an estimated 2,500 complimentary copies to public figures at different levels of government, including President Theodore Roosevelt and William H. Taft.⁸³ *Azad* (Free) bi-monthly newspaper referred to *Armenia* as an 'Armenian propaganda' publication.⁸⁴ It sought to convince American policy makers either to co-operate with European powers in implementing reforms in the homeland, or to take the initiative and intervene unilaterally, as 'champions of Justice and Liberty' and 'international morality', to combat Turkish atrocities.

In this campaign, the construction of American Armenian cultural congruence relied on cataloguing parallels between Armenian and American cultures and values. Accordingly, the journal sought to fashion a political discourse and a program by employing a specific set of key, legitimate symbols and slogans designed to attract American audiences. It frequently featured Armenian history and the adoption of Christianity and made frequent use of specific positive symbols such as 'justice', 'liberty', 'democracy', 'civilized world', and 'civilized humanity' in its articles to highlight ostensible similarities between Armenians and American cultures.⁸⁵

For example, Alice Stone Blackwell, in an effort to counter nativist views regarding Mediterranean immigrant groups as culturally inferior, praised Armenians for their intellectual capacity and moral progress. Blackwell noted that Lamartine considered the Armenians 'the Swiss of the East', while American missionaries viewed them as 'the Anglo-Saxons of Eastern Turkey'. Such views, however, diverged considerably from Armenian historical realities. As I have argued elsewhere, the Armenian people had lived under foreign – Persian, Ottoman, and Russian – rule for centuries, and although Armenian intellectuals advocated cultural enlightenment and democratization, the cultural and

political environments of these empires were not particularly conducive to the cultivation of democratic values and practices.⁸⁶

Similar to Mahdesian's approach, Vahan Cardashian, a graduate of Yale Law School, established the Armenian Press Bureau in New York for the dissemination of information regarding the Armenian cause. He also led the American Committee for the Independence of Armenia, intentionally limiting its membership to non-Armenians as a means of enhancing its credibility and legitimacy. Its executive committee included former New York Supreme Court justice and U.S. Ambassador to Germany James W. Gerard, former Secretaries of State Charles Evans Hughes and Elihu Root among others.⁸⁷

In sharp contrast to these approaches, some newspapers debated various aspects of Armenian cultural issues and historical experiences with an eye toward encouraging cultural modernization. In *Hayasdani gochnag* (Call of Armenia), V. M. Kiurkjian, in an article entitled 'The secrets of Americans' success', criticized what he termed the Armenian habit of risk avoidance. Armenians should emulate successful leaders of industry, such as Andrew Carnegie and Charles M. Schwab, who were willing to take risks and able to identify profitable opportunities. Further, focusing on the achievements of the British empire as representative of the Anglo-Saxon people, Kiurkjian attributed British economic, military, and diplomatic successes to the intellectual power of the British people, their ability to self-government, and the virtues of objective analysis, accurate assessment, and rational logic.⁸⁸

In an article entitled 'The Armenian press in America,' H. S. Jelalian stressed the significance of the press in society. The profession of journalism, he argued, had gained in status on a par with the legal and medical professions. The press reflected the community culture and affairs as well as contributed to its cultural development and enlightenment. In a free society such as the United States, objective

reporting and impartiality with respect to political party considerations would be key to successful journalism. According to Jelalian, the Armenian press shouldered the elementary responsibility of introducing the immigrant to American business practices, the political institutions and procedures, and the economic system and customs. Jelalian encouraged cultural and economic integration into American society and contended that Armenian immigrants, whom he characterized as essentially Orientals, must overcome local cultural obstacles to advance in society. Acclimation to the new environment necessitated enlightened newspapers and leaders who possessed the requisite familiarity with American ways and thought. Such a leadership and concerted efforts to educate and assist the Armenian immigrants, Jelalian maintained, could enable them to release themselves from factory work and enter business careers and various professions for more profitable endeavours. The possession of wealth enabled home ownership, enrolment of one's children in higher education, and finally securing a respectable status in society.⁸⁹ The first immigrant generation, unversed in American habits and customs, could hardly heed his counsel. The second and successive generations, however, familiar with American culture, economy, and politics, and fluent in the English language and without a foreign accent, emerged as the enlightened and knowledgeable community leaders Jelalian had envisioned.

Conclusion

From its earliest formations, the Armenian press in the United States performed a number of functions in the immigrant community. It cultivated long-distance nationalism and promoted cultural preservation as it sought to mobilize community support for the homeland. It also sought to construct a cultural congruence between American and Armenian cultures, values, and identities, which

ineluctably gravitated toward assimilation and Americanization. Over the decades, forces of Americanization eventually secured future generations of American-born Armenians a dominant position in the social, economic, and political life of the Armenian community. Immigrants arriving in later years sustained the nationalism and nostalgia articulated in the Armenian language by the first generation of immigrants in the early phases of the 'exilic nationalism'.⁹⁰ In the long run, however, many Armenian-language newspapers, unable to survive the generational changes in culture and language, were supplanted by the English-language papers, which represented the second and successive generations born and assimilated into American culture. The Armenian experience simultaneously, and paradoxically, negated and reaffirmed Zangwill's melting pot model. The cultural congruence which the English-language press aspired to forge eventually superseded the cultural and political utility of the Armenian-language press.⁹¹ The English-language press enjoyed far greater public visibility and prestige in the hierarchy of Armenian diasporic cultural productions, and thus set the agenda in various areas of community life – a topic for future research.

Endnotes

¹ Charles K. and Elisabeth M. Kenosian Chair in Modern Armenian History and Literature, Department of History, Boston University. This paper was presented at the 31st Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism (ASEN), 5-7 April 2022, Antwerp, Belgium. I thank an anonymous reviewer for SNM for the valuable comments which substantially improved this article. I would like to take this opportunity to express my intellectual debts to the following scholars whose works have greatly shaped my thinking about the Armenian diaspora and diasporas in general (in alphabetical order): Anny

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