

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA

A STUDY OF ARMENIAN NATIONALIST DISCOURSE AND SOCIAL MOBILIZATION.
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF 'SHARJUM' (1988) AND 'NO' MOVEMENT TO
ARMENIAN-TURKISH PROTOCOLES (2008-09).

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Abstract

Given study aims to explore the social mobilization around nationalist discourse during ‘Sharjum’ (1988) and ‘No’ movement to Armenian Turkish Protocols (2008-09). It modifies the ethno-symbolic and modernist frameworks of studying nationalism to develop a more ‘suitable’ model for studying Armenian nationalist discourse. It is hypothesized that discourse of the 1988 ‘Sharjum’ responds to what may be labeled as pragmatic type of nationalism, whereas the discourse of the ‘No’ movement seems to fit more into “ethno-symbolic” (Hutchinson, 1987; Smith, 1986) type of nationalism with some elements of everyday nationalisms incorporated in it. To analyze the nationalist discourse the study looks at sampled newspaper articles, historic documents and fragments of popular culture using the methodology of discourse analysis. Later with the help of comparative method several connections are drawn between the two movements and similarities such as the collective memory of past traumas and quest for historic justice are found. Also it is found that hypothetical categorizations like pragmatic, ethno-symbolic or everyday nationalisms being more of ‘ideal type’ descriptions emphasize the relative importance of some prevailing elements of discourse in a given time and space. This means that 1988 ‘Sharjhum’ also contains elements of ethno-symbolic nationalism simply those were brought to surface by pragmatic rather than ‘irrational’ means.

Introduction

Despite the wide variety of theories aiming to explain the emergence of nationalism and its social functions, there is still a serious gap in studying transformations of nationalism in an environment where comparative analysis of nationalist discourse of post-soviet Armenian context is almost nonexistent. The 1988 Sharjhum for the constitutional right of Nagorno Karabagh to demand a referendum and the ‘No’ movement to Turkish-Armenian Protocols in 2008-09 constitute two different moments of social mobilization in Armenia and Diaspora. Despite that two decades separate each event in common they have a strong nationalist discourse as a vehicle of mobilization; something that the given study aims to explore.

1988 ‘Sharjhum’ was largely a spontaneous rise of discontented masses in the Soviet Republic of Armenia that sought to resolve its territorial dispute with Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan over the region of Nagorno Kharabagh. By the spillover effect ‘Sharjhum’ eventually brought demands of independence of Armenia from the Soviet Union. The ‘No’ movement in contrast largely originated from different Armenian diaspora communities abroad and were directed against the political decision of President of Armenia to sign ‘The Protocol on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations Between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Turkey’ and ‘The Protocol On the Development of Relations Between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Turkey’¹.

¹ See the full texts of Protocols in <http://www.mfa.am/en/country-by-country/tr/>

Thus, as the hypothesis of the given study goes, the nationalist discourse of the 1988 ‘Sharjum’ responds to what may be labeled as pragmatic type² of nationalism, whereas the discourse of the ‘No’ movement seems to fit more into “ethno-symbolic” (Hutchinson, 1987; Smith, 1986) type of nationalism with some elements of “banal” (Billig, 1995) or everyday nationalisms incorporated in it³. The above mentioned categorizations being more of ‘ideal type’ descriptions emphasize the relative importance of some prevailing elements of discourse in a given time and space. This means that 1988 ‘Sharjum’ also contains elements of ethno-symbolic nationalism simply those were brought to surface by pragmatic rather than ‘irrational’ means. Thus the above mentioned hypothetical categorization is operational as it is based on the nature of the mechanisms and motives that activate a certain type of nationalist discourse. The study will thus ask about the factors that explain the 1988 ‘pragmatic’ type of Armenian nationalist discourse and the ‘ethno-symbolic’ type of the ‘No’ movement.

As the main unit of analysis is the nationalist discourse, methodology used in this paper is the discourse analysis of newspaper articles, interviews as well as the analysis of historical documents and events in general.

The study consists of two chapters devoted to the 1988 ‘Sharjum’ and 2008-09 ‘No’ movements respectively. The first chapter gives an overview of the historical, political, economic, ideological origins of ‘Sharjum’ aiming to explore the underlying factors that

² Nations are considered as real sociological communities: they are conceived of as historical communities with the right of self-determination, carrying sole source of political power. This approach has been articulated by many scholars who view nationalism as largely a rational force (Hardin, 1985a; Laitin, 2007).

³ In the context of this study everyday nationalism is defined as constant interpretation and reinterpretation of symbols of collective past which are perceived by a given generation as having the same meanings as they used to have for previous generations. Such perceptions are often unexpressed, sometimes even unconscious but always ready to be mobilized in the wake of catalytic events. An important characteristic of everyday nationalism is that there is no political state elite’s control in there.

contributed to the mass mobilization in 1988. It also looks at the dynamics of ‘Sharjum’s’ nationalist discourse and analyzes its connections with the theoretical proposition made in the hypothesis. The second chapter discusses the mobilization factors surrounding the ‘No’ movement, the patterns of diaspora participation and the role of collective memory symbols in the nationalist discourse of the ‘No’ movement. In the conclusion, some links are drawn and patterns of development are identified based on the findings.

Literature Review

Despite the wide variety of existing theories of nationalisms, most scholars agree that nationalism is a peculiarly modern phenomenon. What those theories question is the causes of nationalism, its relationship to modernization and political power, whether it is weak or a strong agent of change. With respect to these, three main antinomies rise inside the nationalist discourse: the essence of nations as opposed to their constructed nature, the antiquity of nation vs. its modern character and cultural basis of nationalism contrasted with its political aspirations and goals (A. Smith, 1998). Smith (1998) later goes on to say that depending on which side is taken by the specific school those may be very generally synthesized as objectivist, who press the role of culture, more specifically language and subjectivist theories for which nations are formed by popular will and political action. One implication of this theoretical debate is that for objectivists nations and national sentiments are found as far back as the 10th century, whereas for subjectivists both were products of the 18th century. (Guenée, 1985; Guibernau, 1986; Renan, 1882; Tipton, 1972).

However incomplete and simplistic once compared with reality, these clusters and categories help to systemize and synthesize the enormously wide variety of existing mosaics of theoretical debate, which in turn give an opportunity to draw links and conclusions and imply those to specific cases.

Located in the objectivist camp Elie Kedourie's approach (1993) may be viewed as one very much affected by the Kantian conceptions of human beings as autonomous, which in turn has brought the replacement of religion with politics. Once synthesized by Fichte (1988) with Herder's (2002) doctrines about natural language differences within humanity, these ideas gave birth to 'mature' romantic doctrine of nationalism. This implies that individuals achieve an

independent and autonomous state through the unique culture of their natural community. Meanwhile, Kedourie regards nationalism as an extremely powerful force: its appeal is explained by social breakdown occasioned by a collapse in the transmission of traditional values, and the rise of a secular, educated generation willing to gain power but deprived of opportunities to attain that power (Kedourie, 1993). Much of the features mentioned by Kedourie are relevant to the Armenian 1988 movement as the deep sense of uniqueness of national culture has historically been one of the main features of Armenian nationalist discourse. Nevertheless cultural component alone is not sufficient to explain the movement of 1988: that is why some elements of modernist argument are relevant as well.

The founder of the modernist school in the studies of nationalism, Ernest Gellner, holds just the opposite position from that of Kedourie. While Kedourie emphasizes the power of ideas which act as a homogenizing force, Gellner argues that it is the need of cultural homogeneity amongst modern societies that creates nationalism (Gellner 1964; 1982). Nationalism thus becomes attached to modernity, and is seen as a weak force by itself that results from the transition of ‘agro-literate’ societies, regulated by structure, to industrial societies, integrated by culture. Important components of Gellner’s complex and ambiguous explanation include the unevenness of industrialization, the leading role of excluded intelligentsia in the invention of the nation, mass public education, and the discrepancy between the romantic aspirations of nationalists and the utilitarian outcomes (Gellner, 1983).

Tom Nairn, a Marxist thinker, combines Gellner’s modernization perspective with that of Gramsci in order to provide a ‘materialist’ explanation of the dynamism of ‘romantic nationalism’ and its ability to mobilize large scale inter-class support. Nationalism arises in threatened and underdeveloped ‘peripheral’ societies whose intelligentsias ‘invite the people into

history' and then use and modernize their cultures. In this way they are able to mobilize the masses around the developmental goals of a local bourgeoisie (Nairn, 1977). Nairn, unlike Gellner, regards the cultural project of nationalism as an important agent of social change. Nationalism he thinks is of populist nature and its effect is to involve masses into politics.

Once applied to the case of 'Sharjum' in 1988 these modernist frameworks also seem to be not of direct relevance. Mass industrialization period in Armenia started with the Soviet period where elite mobilization seemed meaningless at least due to obvious reasons of their carefully planned elimination policies. Though 1988 may be viewed as elite initiated but still those elites were guided not only by the romantic ideology of the past but by the same pragmatic utilitarian views. Thus there was actually no real contestation as the modernist paradigm suggests, simply because most of intelligentsia happened to be the power holder during the industrialization period and especially after that. Nevertheless, the modernist paradigm provides insights into the underlying motives of marginalized intelligentsia's behavior.

As famously articulated by the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm (E. Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) modernist frameworks provide an 'instrumentalist' approach to nationalism. Hobsbawm (1983) argued that the nation was one of the many traditions 'invented' by political elites in order to legitimize their power in a century of revolution and democratization. The study of elite competition and manipulation is thus the key to the understanding of nationalism but some scholars admit that elites are constrained by mass cultures and institutions (Brass, 1991). In the case of 1988 movement the logic of elite mobilization around national sentiments, collective memory and the idea of justice determined the logic of elite competition. Meanwhile, it is completely the case that at least in the beginning, the movement was actually constrained by the institutional framework of the Soviet Union and elites were trying to find solutions staying

exactly in that framework. Nevertheless that institutional framework failed in its flexibility and ability to predict the course of human action.

Benedict Anderson also, like Hobsbawm, regards the modern nation as an artifact, by putting forward his idea of ‘an imagined political community’ (Anderson, 1991a). According to it one should understand national distinctiveness in terms of its style of imagination and institutions that make it possible. The most eminent ones among the latter are print capitalism and the new genres of newspaper and novel that portray the nation as a sociological community moving along ‘homogeneous, empty times’. According to Anderson (1991) the very possibility of imagining the nation arose when fundamental cultural conceptions lost their axiomatic effect on men’s minds. If in the case of European nationalism this axiomatic shift was a denial of medieval values, then in case of the 1988 movement it was the sense that the axiomatic structure of Soviet value system started to show cracks especially in the light of Soviet ‘perestroika’ and ‘glasnost’.

In addition to the above mentioned, several theorists identify the rise of the modern bureaucratic state as a central factor in the genesis of nationalism. John Breuilly (Breuilly, 1982) argues that a conflict began to emerge between the claims of the state and civil society in the seventeenth century to which nationalism seemed to offer a superior, historicist solution: state is an outgrowth of a historical community. This is exactly what people had in their minds back in 1988. Anthony Smith (A. Smith, 1981) also prescribes a pivotal role to the modern scientific state but the problem of legitimacy is more far reaching. Nationalism he thinks arises out of moral crisis of ‘dual legitimation’, where divine authority is challenged by secular state power ; from this situation, three solutions-neo-traditionalist, assimilationist and reformist - emerge, all

of which are conducive to different forms of nationalism. The 1988 movement initially can be labeled as assimilationist in nature though later gained many aspects of reformist mode as well.

Smith also refutes the common idea that modern nationalism is simply the later politicization of purely cultural or ethnic sentiments, and that the distinctive feature of modern nations is their sovereignty as mass political communities. In the study of Armenian nationalisms such a separation is much more feasible. The debate around this separation has taken many different shapes. John Breuilly wished to reduce the use of the term ‘nationalism’ to a purely political movement; and Eric Hobsbawm also argued that nationalism’s only interest for the historian lay in its political aspirations (Breuilly, 1993; E. Hobsbawm, 1990). Smith finds such a usage very restrictive. According to Smith it underestimates important dimensions of ‘nationalism’ such as culture, identity and ‘the homeland’, and pays little attention to the character of the object of nationalist strivings, that is the ‘nation’. The result is a serious underestimation of the scope and power of nationalism, and of its ethnic roots. This is the point made also by John Hutchinson in his analysis of cultural nationalism.

However Hutchinson does not deny the importance of ‘a political nationalism that has as its aim autonomous state institutions’. But he thinks that we cannot overlook the significance of cultural forms of nationalism; despite their much smaller scale and often transient character, we must ascribe proper weight to “... a cultural nationalism that seeks a moral regeneration of the community” (E. Hutchinson, 1994, p. 41). Under the influence of Herder, this kind of cultural nationalism was present especially in Eastern Europe in the mid to late nineteenth century. “It could be found both among populations that existed only as ethnic categories, without much self-consciousness, such as the Slovaks, Slovenes and Ukrainians, who had few ethnic memories, distinctive institutions or native elites; and among well-defined nations with definite borders, a

self-aware population and rich memories, like the Croatians, Czechs, Hungarians and Poles; or among peoples with religious memories and institutions like the Greeks, Serbs and Bulgarians” (E. Hutchinson, 1994, pp. 17–18, 21–22).

Hutchinson draws three conclusions from his analysis of the dynamics of cultural nationalism. The first is ‘the importance of historical memory in the formation of nations’. The second is ‘that there are usually competing definitions of the nation’, and their competition is resolved by trial and error during interaction with other communities. And the third is ‘the centrality of cultural symbols to group creation’, which are only significant because ‘of their power to convey an attachment to a specific historical identity’ (E. Hutchinson, 1994, pp. 29–30).

This does not mean that cultural nationalism is a regressive force. It may look back to a presumed glorious past but it doesn’t stay there. Certainly, Armenian nationalism of 1988 though being ethno cultural in its origin was certainly not oriented towards past. Following Hutchinson I believe that in Armenian case of 1988 those memories of the golden age were meant to be used as modernizing and integrative device which can offer an alternative political model whenever the statist type of political nationalism has failed. If we take into account the nature of soviet political nationalism it becomes obvious why a more culturally oriented type of nationalism was flourishing back in 1988. But it is also true that we often find the two kinds of nationalisms alternating in strength and influence; as political nationalism weakens, cultural nationalists take the opportunity and try to address frustrated and oppressed community needs.

A much later case of Armenian nationalism studied here is the ‘No’ movement which is also discussed within this general framework of ethno symbolism (E. Hutchinson, 2005; J. Hutchinson, 1987; Smith, 1986, 1991) though with a different emphasis. With some

modifications of an ethno symbolist approach, in this context I define nationalism as a constant interpretation and reinterpretation of symbols which are perceived by a given generation as having the same meanings as they used to have for previous generations. This definition relates to but at the same time differs from that of Billig's 'banal nationalism'. Billig (1995) paid special attention to the rhetoric of nationhood and its capacity to mobilize western societies. He questioned the proposition that the word 'nationalism' refers to something that is not located on the periphery. According to Billig reproduction of nationhood occurs daily based on a whole complex of beliefs, assumptions, habits, representations and practices. He introduces the term banal nationalism to cover the above mentioned complex of ideological habits. He argues that those habits are not removed from everyday life; daily the nation is indicated or flagged in the lives of the citizenry. Thus Billig talks of unconscious habitual patterns of collective behavior (1995) while my definition will be stressing the role of unconsciously perceived but consciously interpreted symbolic structures of everyday life.

Nevertheless, I take Billig's famous concept as an important synthesizing, intermediary tool that may help to fix blurred demarcating lines between different types of nationalisms. It is, I claim, best suited to describe the 'No' movement against Turkish Armenian Protocols. It will be argued the transformation of nationalist discourse from a pragmatic, towards more ethno symbolic, 'banal' type of nationalism is quite logical. One of the basic assumptions of this study is that everyday life of a group is closely associated with an ongoing search after non fragmented identities. We couple this with the fact that in contrast with 1988 movement 'No' movement was mainly initiated by Armenian Diaspora for whom collective memory is one of the main means to keep the continuity of identity. Everyday nationalism reflects various important aspects of that permanently ongoing process. Once Billig's tool is applied rational (Hardin, 1985b; Walzer,

2002) and more irrational (Greenfeld, 2005), objectivist and subjectivist interpretations of nationalism seem arbitrary as all these aspects manifest themselves in everyday, banal life depending on the given symbolic context.

Chapter 1

The Rise of ‘Sharjum’

Since February 1988 Kharabagh Movement was perceived as a national movement that included all strata of the population. Among the deep motives of the movement were the motive of complaint against national persecution and the motive of rebirth. It has been asserted that these two inter helpful motives gave an astonishing spirit of resistance and nobility to the Armenian people (Ghazaryan, 1989).

Fueled by new anti-Armenian incidents and by the perceived sense of willingness of the Soviet leadership to review the situation, Kharabagh Armenians organized a massive petition drive to the Supreme Soviet of USSR, followed by a formal request to be attached to Soviet Armenia⁴ voted upon by the government of the NKAO. By the third week of the February, 1988, when the petition had been rejected in Moscow, demonstrations broke out in Kharabagh and soon after in Yerevan, reaching unprecedented proportions (Libaridian, 1988b, p. 86). Deep rooted identity issues and general concerns with the Soviet system were gradually added to the demand for Kharabagh’s reunification: language, pollution, democratization and official recognition of Armenian genocide of 1915 (Chorbajian, Donabedian, & Mutafian, 1994) all were united to form a huge melting pot of grievances. In December 10, 1991 a referendum in Nagorno Kharabagh indicated its desire not to be part of Azerbaijan and proclaimed its own independence, later that month USSR collapsed. On September 21 1991 95% of eligible voters went to polls and voted for independence.

⁴ See the full text in Sovetakan Kharabagh, February 21, 1988.

However, complete independence was not something that was on the immediate agenda in 1988. In an interview conducted by Vazgen Manukian on March 1990 he said: “It is not incidental that even the Kharabagh question, which is not a simple territorial problem, brought our people to the idea of independence, wittingly or unwittingly. In dealing with the issue of the reunification of Kharabagh, every radical step we were taking brought us closer to the behavior of an independent state” (Libaridian, 1991, p. 40).

While discussing the immediate objectives of the national movement of 1988 Gerard Libaridian writes: “The national democratic movement, first known as Karabagh Movement, led by the Karabagh Committee and institutionalized by the Armenian National Movement (ANM), questioned the validity of the paradigm based on fear, raised serious doubts on the imminence of Pan-Turkic danger, reestablished the right to determine a national agenda, and reintroduced rational discourse as the means to answer questions (Libaridian, 1991, p. 2).

These objectives were widely believed to be attainable within the structure of the Soviet state though many argued for the incompatibility of those objectives and Soviet state. Rafael Ishkhanian in his article “The Law of Excluding the Third Force” argued that the reliance on Western, European, Russian or other governments has failed to resolve any aspect of the Armenian question. Such a strategy has had tragic consequences for the Armenian people. The lesson that can be drawn from history asserts Ishkhanian, is to adopt a strategy that relies on Armenian’s strength and resources, not those of other powers. He thought that in the context of Armenia’s national movement, the logic offered leads to a redefinition of national interests and Armenia’s relations with its neighbors (Libaridian, 1991, pp. 9–38).

Ishkhanian discussing post-independence objectives very insightfully notes: “We must prepare for independence so as not to be surprised by it as we were in 1918. First, the Armenian

nation must attain sovereignty and independence psychologically, mentally, morally. That is why we must eradicate the idea of relying on the third force and we must establish relations with our five neighbors. And it is necessary and very important today that we re-Armenize today's russified Armenia, considering that many of the independentists cannot even sign their names in Armenian, that others don't know Armenian in general and write in Russian only and are shouting independence (Libaridian, 1991, pp. 34–35).

Thus we see that nationalist discourse back in 1988 was largely referring to the deep rooted symbolic identity elements, had clear cut objectives like democratization and quest for justice in general and sometime later already clearly and openly articulated quest for an independent state. Nevertheless clear and long term strategies of the independent state were not largely prevailing in the discourse of 1988 'Sharghum'. This, among other factors, was first and foremost connected to the growing violence in Karabagh, and the need to address the devastating consequences of the earthquake that hit the country in 1988.

Ethno symbolic or pragmatic nationalism?

Culture creates a homeland,
culture turns people with no name into a nation,
and geographical area is turned into a Homeland.
(Matevosyan, 1989)

These words of the renown Armenian writer synthesize centuries long reliance of ethno-symbolic structures like language, myths, rituals, religion, traditions, customs and struggle to protect those as main sources of national unity and survival. Quest for the restoration of national identity has been claimed to be the underlying cause of many conflicts (Kelman, 1995; Rothman & Olson, 2001). ‘Sharjum’ as the ideological base and institutional arrangement preceding the conflict was largely a strong identity based discourse accompanied by rebirth of national consciousness, quest for historical justice, as well as elimination of everyday unjust treatment. One may trace various justifications of these trends in 1988 public discourse which among other things was also directed against Azeri falsifications of history, demanded the revival of national language (Erekoyan Erevan, 1989; Ishkhanian, 1989; Meliq-Baghshyan, 1989) and elimination of everyday unjust treatment (Ayvazian, 1987; Paskevichyan, 1987) .

Moreover, research shows⁵ that most Armenians believe that the memory of the genocide contributes to the Armenian national identity along with the language, culture and history. In the Armenian collective memory, the Turkic speaking Azerbaijanis do not possess a unique ethnic identity and are considered part of the “genocidal” Turkish nation, responsible for massacres, ethnic cleansings and the destruction of Armenian culture. As a consequence, Armenians also feared for a genocide threat to the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians (Gamaghelyan, 2010), in case

⁵ See in detail <http://www.acnis.am/survey/>

NK become part of independent Azerbaijan. The nationalist public rhetoric of the Azerbaijani authorities often directly called for war and ethnic cleansing⁶.

Regarding this issue Libaridian says in an interview just at the beginning of ‘Sharghum’ in February 1988 “Now the description of the situation as strictly territorial or nationalist makes it a very abstract issue. People don’t become nationalist just because they are Armenian or Turkish or Russian. They do so because they have serious grievances. So in order to understand why several hundred thousand people in Mountainous Kharabagh are appealing to the Soviet authorities in Moscow, or according to the reports, a million people in Yerevan are demonstrating in the streets, you must realize it is not just a question of abstract nationalist aspirations. It is a question of survival, particularly for Armenians who experienced the total disintegration of their community during the genocide in 1915. Armenians refuse to see another region of historic Armenia under cultural, economic and political pressure, become disintegrated, as it is now becoming. The region has lost significant part of its Armenian population during the last fifteen years. It used to be 95% Armenian. In this context it is more than just an abstract question of nationalism” (Libaridian, 1988a, p.161).

The relatively quiet years of Armenian and Azeri coexistence after annexation of Kharabagh to Russia at the beginning of the 19th century may be considered as such only at surface while the hope for justice (Grigoryan, 1989; Karapetyan, 1989) and collective memory and the quest for recognition of Armenian identity have been bubbling underneath the surface. One justification of the above mentioned statement is that as soon as the Soviet system created some opportunities for the expression of grievances in 1987, legally well-defined packages of Armenian complaints came directly afterwards. Both in Armenia and in NKAO largely spontaneous rallies were

⁶ One typical instance of this is Azerbaijani president Elchibey quoted in saying “If there is a single Armenian left in Kharabagh by October of this year the people of Azerbaijan can hang me in the central square of Baku”. See in detail <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld199798/ldhansrd/vo970701/text/70701-19.htm>

organized that gathered hundreds of thousands of people demanding the unification of Armenia and NKAO. In February 1988, the soviet of the NKAO passed a resolution (Sovetakan Kharabagh, 1988a) requesting secession from the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) and its incorporation into the Armenian SSR proceeded by number of other decisions.

For example the decision⁷ of the Soviet of NKAO made on November 4th, 1988 “On the amendments and changes in the constitution of USSR and the election of USSR people’s deputies” (Sovetakan Kharabagh, 1988b)⁸ was mainly highlighting the following points:

- The Soviet in the line of the policy of ‘perestroika’ mentions the timely nature and the extreme necessity of political reform, amendments and changes in the Soviet Constitution.
- Soviet of NKAO finds that in the situation of tense interethnic relationships reform is possible only through synchronized development of one united multinational state based on free self-determination of nations and the principle of social federalism.
- The Soviet mentions that the current structure and hierarchy of our political administrative system doesn’t correspond to the theoretical model of harmonically operating democratic state and to its reasonable logic of development. Current Constitution by declaring the equality of nations and nationalities actually defines the superiority of the Union republic as compared with autonomous regions. Such political system fixes the possibility of one nation being ruled by the other. Therefore we find it necessary to amend the Constitution of USSR with articles that will allow national autonomies of any level to have an alternative to the existing situation (particularly, the right to be directly ruled by the state government).

⁷ The decision was based on the article 113 of the Constitution. See in more detail <http://www.constitution.org/cons/ussr77.txt>

⁸ This and all proceeding excerpts from Armenian language sources are the non-official translations of the author.

Another decision of the Soviet of NKAO “On the measures taken to foster socio economic development of NKAO from 1988-1995” (Sovetakan Kharabagh, 1988c), states that Azerbaijan continues to hinder interests of the autonomous oblast and creates premises for the clash of two nations. For example, events initiated by the people of Khogalu, forcing Armenians out of Shushi, massive inhabitation of Shushi, Askeran, Martuni for the purpose of changing the demographic picture, massive self-initiated constructions, which also include construction of industrial plants. Therefore the Soviet found that the decision number 371 regarding socio-economic development of NKAO is not being enforced properly.

Underneath the official, well written and polite language of these decisions not only romantic ethno cultural nationalism but the basic everyday survival and the long oppressed economic grievances are traceable. Some even consider the movement as the most natural reaction: “From an economic point of view I consider Kharabagh Movement to be the most natural reaction as during times of dramatic increase of goods and monetary relations when various circulation processes are multiplied, meanwhile significantly increasing people’s cultural and linguistic commonalities” (Ghazaryan, 1989, p. 3).

However, it is obvious that economic factors solely would not be enough to explain the complex reality of 1988. In addition to already above mentioned determinants of nationalist discourse Staravoytova (1989) emphasizes more modernist elements like the general civilizational impact of industrialization. In her article while discussing the revival of ethnic self-consciousness of nations living in post-industrial society, she suggested that it may be caused by unconscious resistance against modern technologies and ways of life in general that threaten cultural traditions and national self-consciousness. She harshly criticizes the explanatory frameworks used by the press is either the vulgar economic determinism or conspiracy theories

that view people as irrational infants incapable of their own conscious mind activity. Referring to ‘Kharabagh Movement’ Staravoytova makes the social science informed argument stating that the administrative-beaurocratic rule more than the growth of literacy contributes to people’s quest to return to their origins.

The argument put forward was quite relevant to the case of ‘Sharghum’: unclear and complex administrative division of SU and injustices deriving directly from that type of system had had significant impact on the formation and development of 1988 ‘Sharghum’. Armenians were claiming to restore justice and reestablish their suppressed identity, independent statehood being only a much later byproduct of the whole process. For example in weekly newspaper ‘Hye Ghyanq’ [Armenian Life] published since 1985 we read “A people that doesn’t consider itself defeated is in the right. We [Soviet Armenians] are not considering ourselves defeated on this issue. If for no other reason than that without Kharabagh we cannot live on this rocky piece of land physically, spiritually, historically; it is difficult to visualize our future without Kharabagh...You see the land of our historic fatherland remains occupied and we are gathered in a small place and we cannot continue like this. Therefore patriotism for us is a struggle in the real meaning of the word, but we should not equate patriotism with nationalism, where one is disdainful of others and places oneself above others...patriotism first of all is struggle in the name of the fatherland, thinking of the future because we are here today, gone tomorrow, but the fatherland must continue to be there...We must wait for the right moment, but not passively so that something is offered us on a tray. (Paskevichyan, 1987). Yet in another periodical “To struggle and to serve... the fatherland; the Armenian people is capable of this. Armenians also have the ability to comprehend foreign policy issues. But why is it that it has been impossible in our land to solve the commonest and most essential problems? So many sacrifices for a socialist

commonwealth yet to have to leave its millennia fatherland in Eastern Armenia?” (Ayvazian, 1987).

The above mentioned excerpts are indicating the line that exists between nationalist and patriotic discourses⁹ the former having clear negative connotations attached to it in the Soviet context. That version of patriotism included all the past grievances engraved for years in collective memory coupled the strong quest for justice and ‘struggle for the real meaning of the world’. The main concept that dominated the discourse was fatherland rather than an independent state thus once again reasserting the fact that the full independence of the country was more of a spontaneous spillover effect rather than a carefully constructed project.

Another indication of the fact that the independent statehood was not at least directly articulated during first two years of the movement may be seen in an interview conducted by Ara Khalajian where Zori Balayan said: “I am waging this struggle in the name of justice, in the name of the motherland, and in the name of inseparable Armenian Mountainous Kharabagh. I swear to my people and to the people of the world that I shall continue my struggle until such time when the Mountainous Kharabagh Autonomous region is once and for all rejoined with Armenia. ...I swear that I shall conduct this struggle in accordance with my socialist rights and with an exceptional respect of law and order. (Khalayjian, 1988).

In another piece: “My optimism is also based on the truthfulness of the question. It is impossible to hide the truth, in any case it will reveal itself. After all, democracy and glasnost as main tools of reconstruction will be void concepts if Kharabagh question will not find its just solution (Baghdasaryan, 1989).

⁹ The way nationalism is defined (see page 2) in this study doesn’t presuppose that nationalism has an embedded sense of national supremacy. Therefore, there is no clear demarcation line between nationalistic and patriotic discourses in virtue of both concepts referring to unique ethno-symbolic structures of the past.

Meanwhile, this almost naive search for truth and mentioning of the sacrifices of Armenians made for the SU perceived as extra arguments in favor of Armenians were clear indicators of the first romantic stage of the movement and the reliance on state institutions which couldn't last long as disappointment and deep disenchantment were on their way.

However, 1988 was also the time when strong nationalist sentiments coexisted with sober calls for rationality: from the one side there was growing tension because of insufficient means, from the other side there was still some hope and reliance on the state structure and basic human relations. For example, in *Sovetakan Kharabagh* we read: "It is time to act. "During subsequent months after the decisions nothing is done for the development of Armenian residencies, and an extensive construction of Azeri villages continues. There are 1000 families in Stepanakert and only 340 temporary houses are available" (*Sovetakan Kharabagh*, 1988d).

Nevertheless, other types of messages and patterns of behavior¹⁰ were also prevalent "We have to be wise as never before. We will not answer. We believe that if not today, then tomorrow Azeri will apologize" (*Sovetakan Kharabagh*, 1988e). What is also prevalent in this message is the basic identity component-Christian understanding of confession and apology.

Also quests of rationality and tolerance and the search for solution with all possible legal means have always been prevalent at least in the official circles of the movement. For example, then the head of the "Miacum" council R. Khocharyan said at an open meeting just before the arrival of the Commission on ethnic questions. "I am sure we will meet members of Commission in the friendliest manner and will create all the conditions for their efficient work. But we will demand rather than ask. We have already solved our question back in February 20, 1988, the proof of which is the decision of NKAO people's deputies council. Let us be rational, not to

¹⁰ Such as organization of scientific conferences that called for rationality and interethnic tolerance (*Armenpress*, 1989).

allow the further exacerbation of the situation and don't give in in face of provocations (Khorhrdayin Kharabagh, 1989a).

Others have been emphasizing the pernicious consequences that hatred and intolerance can have. We read: "The most distressful thing is that animosity and intolerance has become part of everyday life of many of Armenians. It is clear to me why it is so. But it is more than obvious that it is not something that our ancestors have inherited to us, and we don't have to bring up our children like that. It is extremely important to overcome the terrible temptation of revenge and don't allow illegal action. We have to struggle passionately and deliberately for our own interests, and protect our dignity. It is terrible to think that at some moment the belief in the just nature of our struggle may be vanished (Ghazaryan, 1989).

Meanwhile those rational quests could not resist long in face of growing violence and pain. Here is a letter written by a group of people from Kirovabad: "During the most important years of perestroika whose greed has opened for other's land, and why Azeri are not striking? The answer to these questions is one: it is the Armenians of Stepanakert that initiate the clashes and then blame Azeri for that. They stop the factories to the detriment of the state. This is done on purpose so that to produce weapons and explosive materials in there. Armenians are sitting on Azeri soil, meanwhile insulting Azeri. The destiny has sent them an earthquake, they should have remained salient afterwards, but not, even while mourning they don't stop their fraudulent plans to obstruct perestroika, damage the country, hinder the work of the Commission. In Kirovabad Armenians and Azeri have always shared bread. The whole responsibility for the slaughter lies on Stepanakert extremists. (Khorhrdayin Kharabagh, 1989b). A response to this letter came from Maksim Hovhannisyanyan in the same issue of Khorhrdayin Kharabagh: "People of Stepanakert are not extremists, but people who have been driven to extremism and who are

demanding to reestablish Artsakh's historic rights". He concludes by calling on reason and justice.

Thus what we actually see here is the indirectly accepted extremism of nationalist discourse based on violence where none of the sides can rationally go back to the discussion of grievances and when one side's own pain is misleadingly thought to be relieved by offending the other.

Chapter 2

The ‘Transnation’ Mobilized

Early scholars such as Karl Deutsch, defined mobilization as ‘the process in which major clusters of old social, economic and psychological commitments are eroded or broken and people become available for new patterns of socialization and behavior (Deutsch, 1961, p. 494). This definition of social mobilization may be questioned once applied to the ‘No’ movement as it is exactly the continuity and the sense of unified identity that brought the movement into existence. While some scholars argue that the cultural differences between internal cores and peripheries would dissolve with modernization and industrialization or that mobilization along ethnic lines dissipates with modernity (Enloe, 1986; Rothschild, 1981), the opposite trend is distinctly observable as well. The underlying assumption here is that social mobilization requires a homogenous and unified gathering of the people sharing the same aspirations and needs for the given period of time. It seems that a clarification is needed whenever studying the mobilization of Armenian diaspora.

Whenever one is undertaking a project of studying Armenian diaspora immediate and not unequivocal questions are rising: can Armenian diaspora be considered as one distinct unit of analysis? I believe that the answer to this question depends mainly upon two factors: the nature and the content of the specific question that is on the diaspora agenda, and the elements of the diaspora identity that the question under study touches upon. Before turning to the analysis of the two factors in the upcoming subchapters I would like to discuss some features of ‘Armenian Diaspora’ and how those relate to the factors that, as I argue, unify the diaspora Armenians worldwide. This discussion also will contribute to the restoration of a certain balance to the wider general discourse on diaspora today.

Scholars have long been mentioning (Tölölyan, 2000) the ongoing transformations inside the Armenian diaspora, and have made some generalizations. The general observation is that communal elites along with the diaspora institutions, organizations and associations, have been extremely important for keeping the community unified. Those institutions widely use modern communication channels, funds transfer, enabling the exchange of data, ideas, and cultural products to stay in touch with like-minded groups elsewhere in diaspora and in the homeland, to recruit new constituencies and contributors to their discursive practices, and to adapt and sustain shared transnational agendas that differ greatly across generations¹¹. Meanwhile as it concerns some elements of ethno-cultural nationalism remained the same.

The variety of diaspora agendas include: totality of diaspora communities viewed as the permanent Armenian transnation, in which the key mobilizing points are: grater engagement with the ‘host nation’, the ‘homeland’ now easily accessible and the ‘global’ (Tölölyan, 2000, p. 115). The first component of grater engagement with host communities has been the main tool of survival and simultaneously has provided a channel through which diaspora communities has furthered their transnational agendas. Gradually those channels became institutionalized which do the work that is simultaneously philanthropic, cultural and political¹². Those institutions also have productive power in the sense that they are involved in extending social services, on one hand, and the discursive production of meaning and identity, on the other (Tölölyan, 2000, p. 127). In case of the ‘No’ movement both functions are intertwined as the political event presented a direct threat to the important identity components.

¹¹ In the context of the ‘No’ movement one such effective measure of communication was the website <http://www.stoptheprotocols.com/> that performed its unifying functions quite effectively.

¹² Some diaspora institutions have power in the narrowly political sense; they influence political events in the host nation and dominate major communal institutions (Armenian Assembly of America, Armenian National Committee of America).

This productive power has required material resources and communal hierarchies, and has combined selfless volunteerism with organized persuasion and socially coerced participation, all in the name of nation in exile. Second, it has been argued (Tölölyan, 2000, p. 107–08) that this Diaspora is undergoing an accelerating transition from exiling nationalism to diaspora transnationalism which means more thorough engagement with the global dimension present on the agenda. While largely locally oriented, a few of diaspora institutions – religious, philanthropic, political-also retain explicitly transnational agendas and seek to foster shared, multi local, and therefore properly ‘diasporic’ values, discourses, ideologies, orientations, and practices. And third, this transition is challenging the agendas, discourses and resources of existing institutions, causing changes and occasionally leading to the creation of new organizations (Tölölyan, 2000, p. 107–08).

Having this inherent tension and intertwined relationships between the old and new agendas, having this fragile peace between local and diaspora identities each external component that is going to challenge the identity component or threaten to shift the already established agendas is going to be opposed and rejected on all possible levels. Ironically, such external events may even have extremely important functions for the reproduction of unified diaspora, as they have strong catalytic effect on the mobilization around nationalist discourse and identity continuity as such with the concept of historic homeland acting as a symbol of mobilization. The political decision of signing the Armenian Turkish protocols was exactly the kind of external catalyzer that threatened the diaspora agendas, and the very existence of unified diaspora.

Thus in a sense then the diaspora community sustains a paradoxical combination of both ‘ethnic’ and so called ‘diaspora’ cultural identities and political practices; the struggle between them strains but also helps define diaspora as such. Like some other diaspora elites, Armenians

exhibit a preference for a carefully chosen and circumscribed exclusion on their own terms and for the right to draw some communal boundaries, to nurture and maintain certain differences, to interpret and reinterpret their ethnic identities. This exercise requires institutions and structures that involve both political and mass cultural practices.

Ethnicity, Collective Memory and Political Identity: the possibility of coexistence and the 'No' movement

There is little consensus regarding how and why ethnicity becomes an important form of political identity. It has been mentioned by ethno symbolist school that scholars have paid a good deal of attention to modern nationalism they have tended to ignore the relationship between pre modern ethnic ties and modern nationalism (Smith, 1996). According to constructivist approach (Anderson, 1991b) ethnicity, as a form of identity, is imagined or manufactured over time, it is subject to change in terms of form and degree of solidarity due to: manipulation by state or group elites; changes in global and domestic communication abilities (Tölölyan, 2000), perceived threats to the collectivity or so on. However, the 'No' Movement is impossible to explain solely in constructivist terms as the ethnicity and collective identity are perceived as relatively constant entities through which given generation is directly linked to its ancestors.

Meanwhile, the role of collective memory is indispensable from the Armenian diaspora identity formation and transformation; it is also a decisive factor in explaining the diaspora mobilization. Scholars of ethnic mobilization have also noted that memory is an important component of identity (Esman, 1994, p. 14). Scholars of constructivist school point out the importance of memory in the development of group identities and collective 'myths' (Connerton, 1989; Gillis, 1996; E. J. Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1992; Walker, 1994).

However, ethnicity cannot be politicized unless an underlying core of memories, experiences, or meanings moves people to collective action. Therefore, the question at stake is to explore the mechanisms that provide the link from the abstract content of collective memory to unified collective action. There are several processes are important when evaluating this link. First, socialization or the way in which historical memory is passed down from generation to the

other is important in understanding why particular memories for particular groups have political salience. The way in which these memories are passed from one generation to the other is highly emotional, often containing intensified and to some degree 'mythologized' contents that arise mainly out of fear of forgetting. Those memories are of symbolic significance that define the identity of group members and provide necessary criteria for distinction from the given larger community that the group lives in. Despite collective memory seeming to be largely viewed as an innocent tool of identity preservation that is out of political context nevertheless, it is like a sleeping volcano capable of eroding any time any of its components are endangered, moreover it may be dangerous erosion as the underlying discourse is largely impossible to address with rational means. The last point brings us to the factor of the content of collective memory, which, as has been argued in the introduction, is nationalistic in a sense that the given generation looks at it as a rigid collection of meanings inherited from previous generations. The factor of collective memory being used by elites used for political purposes is not very relevant in the context of the 'No' movement as it largely proved to be a grassroots mobilization where diaspora interest groups and institutions regardless of their profile were united for the common purpose of preservation of collective memory and identity, which brought to political consequences only afterwards.

Anny Bakalian's ethnographic study (Bakalian, 1993) well supports some of the theoretical points made above. She found that Armenian-Americans' personal identification with the genocidal experience transcends generational differences. She concludes that the Armenian Genocide is a symbol of collective Armenian identity for nearly all Americans of Armenian descent. It provides Armenian Americans with a symbolic framework, supplying them with a sense of peoplehood, cultural rebirth and historical continuity. It was exactly that historical

continuity that was threatened by the Armenian Turkish Protocols. The memory of genocide of 1915 is also very important in Armenia as well, and provides part of the tie between the American diaspora and Armenians in Armenia and Nagorno Kharabagh (Paul, 2000, p. 29).

Discourse of Mobilization and Participation. ‘The nation, the proud legacy, and the tradition of sacrifice’

It has been argued that ethnic identity serves to increase loyalty to certain symbols and rituals which are easily maintained in the modern world (Gans, 1994), therefore formal participation in ethnic organization becomes less necessary. As shown in the previous subchapter for Armenians the very ethnic symbols which serve to preserve ethnic identity have also been largely used to enhance participation. Group historical trauma becomes the symbol that reestablishes or mobilizes ethnic boundaries for these groups. Elites are the key, as they use historical symbols to mobilize co-ethnics around the memory in response to contemporary events. Thus ethnicity may indeed be symbolic for Armenian Americans, but it has been asserted that when confronted with threat, that elites frame as similar to historical genocidal events, Armenian ethnicity becomes a salient point for politicization (Paul, 2000, p. 20).

A good illustration of the above mentioned statements were observable during the speech¹³ delivered by His Holiness Aram I, the head of the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia on October 10, just at the time when the protocols were being signed in Switzerland. Among other things explicit links were drawn between the Armenian genocide, the Kharabagh movement and the direct threat that signing of the protocols represented for the memory of the victims. Particularly His Holiness said: “No, and thousand times no to those few signatures that will threaten our memory of Kars and Ardahan, Ani and Sis, Western Armenia and Ararat ”¹⁴. The speech also emphasized the factor of unified Armenian people and called for continuation of active grassroots participation in the quest for justice.

¹³ <http://news.am/arm/news/7139.html>

¹⁴ This is the non official translation of the author.

Indeed Armenian diaspora organizations increasingly rely on grassroots mobilization at times of threat to the ethnic group-particularly when the very symbols of ethnicity (trauma, territoriality) are questioned. Because the very symbols of identity are tied to historical traumas, elite reference to these symbols is important in bridging the gap between symbolic, de-politicized identity and political activism (Paul, 2000, p. 44). The question remains whether it is the historical memory of trauma and history tied to a given territory (i.e. the symbols) that serves to unify ethnic groups or the contemporary conflict. It seems that both may be necessary conditions predicting mobilization of ethnic groups which might otherwise lack the motive for political participation. A contemporary threat is likely to be another. However it has been argued that neither of these is a sufficient condition for ethnic mobilization in the absence of ethnic elites who are able to focus and exploit the symbols of ethnicity, tying them to current conflicts (Paul, 2000, p. 44). This was exactly what happened when the infamous Armenian Turkish protocols were signed. The only thing that may be questioned is the degree by which the movement was an elite manufactured project, as it seems that the mass consciousness was more than ready to reorganize the drawers of collective memory pushing some contents into more visible locations. Thus elites just played their natural part of organizing and directing the movement.

The same collective memory particularly contained an explicit link between Kharabagh Movement and ‘No’ movement which contributed to the discourse of the unified Armenian ‘transnation’. For example, at a rally organized in Los Angeles when President of Armenia was visiting the city people were shouting: “...today Los Angeles is Yerevan. The protocols don’t

represent the collective will of our nation”¹⁵, they were also accusing the responsible officials in treason of the nation. In another place executive director of ANCA¹⁶ says:

“Through our long history, even when all around us, and even some among us, seemed intent on breaking our will, our grassroots always stood firm – confident in our strength, secure in our solidarity, and unbowed in the face of the forces that seek our surrender. That’s where our true purpose comes from: our grassroots. As a nation our strength comes from the powerful sense of heritage and identity in the beating heart of each Armenian. Multiplied through concerted grassroots action, this devotion translates into the service and sacrifice required of our nation’s future. This spirit thrives in millions of devoted Armenians, sons and daughters of our ancient tribe – living in the homeland and abroad. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the grassroots drive for justice for the Armenian Genocide – a movement that, alongside our struggle for Nagorno Karabagh, both honors our past and helps secure our future. All this was accomplished, against the powerful opposition of Turkey and its allies, by activists at the grassroots level, armed with the truth, inspired by morality, and driven by a commitment to justice and a secure future for Armenia. Our grassroots will, in the end, secure truth and justice and a fair and lasting peace between a free, independent, and united Armenia and all her neighbors (Hamparian, 2009b).

Unity of the nation, service and self-sacrifice are the defining components of this argument struggle for the recognition of the Armenian genocide being the symbol of its aspirations and goals. Here we also see how elites see the ‘No’ movement as a strong grassroots driven one. Among other things grassroots here also mean collective unification around symbols of past. The abstract concepts such as justice and truth eventually reduce the discourse to the biblical concept of heavenly justice rather than the pragmatic discourse of real political relations. However this pattern of inferences seems logical in the context where more long term and stable unification

¹⁵ Horizon exclusive. October 4, 2009. <http://www.stoptheprotocols.com/videos/>

¹⁶ Armenian National Committee of America.

strategies are absent and people have to rely on meta political concepts¹⁷ to keep the continuity and to ensure themselves against any external policy decision capable of threatening the very existence of the unified diaspora community in particular and ‘transnation’ in general.

In another piece emphasizing the unity of the nation we read:

“October 10th will be a date that goes down in infamy for all Armenians. It’s placed on the mantle next to April 24th, December 2nd, December 7th, March 1st, & October 27th. These protocols undid with the stroke of a pen, what generations of Armenian activists have fought for; it undermined the national interests of the Republic of Armenia; it undermined our political capital in Washington; it undermined the self-determination of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh. One thing was done very well: unification. The voice of the Armenian people was a unified ‘Voch’ (No). ...Because the real issue at hand is not the protocols, it’s the accountability of the Armenian Government to the Armenian people (DerGrigorian, 2009).

Though the extent of unification of Diaspora Armenians and Armenians living in Armenia is a matter of another discussion nevertheless in this context it will be useful to look at it as a political tool used not only by Turkish but by Armenian politicians as well. A good representation of Turkish position is observable in AK party deputy’s statement. He particularly said "The diaspora is projecting an extremely negative influence on Yerevan. If they manage to push this through I believe this would be a historic example how a small ethnic diaspora subverts United States national interests and causes great harm to a delicate region" (Kiniklioglu, 2009). Dr. Sedat Laciner, Director of the Ankara-based Turkish think tank USAK¹⁸ said in an interview given to Turkish Weekly “As long as Armenians keep bothering Turkey like this, Turks will try to defend themselves, and even prepare themselves for a counter-act”. Or “I think Armenian

¹⁷ Such as symbols of collective memory.

¹⁸ International Strategic Research Organization.

Diaspora is trying to take revenge from Turkey more than imposing anything on it. Second, they protect their Armenian identity via keeping the sorrows and hostilities of the past alive” (Aydemir, 2009). In another quite biased and one sided article that once again circulated the idea of Turks always being nice to Armenians we read “Hatred against modern day Turks and Turkey has become an identity strengthening tool, particularly employed toward young Armenians” (Fein, 2009).

For the official Armenian position in turn the emphasis on the perceived distinction between Armenian Armenians and Diaspora Armenians was used to gain some justifications for already failed policy initiatives. Nevertheless one thing is obvious: the socio economic conditions of Armenians living in Armenia have brought the country to the point where public disenchantment grew to a constant state of nihilistic denial and where an external push such as diaspora mobilization was needed back in 2008-09 for the sober realization of the consequences of the protocols.

However this doesn't mean that symbols of collective past do not have emotional connotations for Armenians living in Armenia. Mr. Kharibyan who lives in the lush border village of Margara in an interview pointed across to Ararat, saying "You see the mountain? A lot of our history is rooted there on the other side of the border, and it will be good to be able to go there again" (Esslemont, 2009). It is just that the conditions of attending the historic homeland are far more pragmatic. Thus however big the perceived gap between Armenia Armenians and Diaspora Armenians is nevertheless there is no actual or perceived gap concerning symbols of collective memory¹⁹. The only possible difficulty between the two is the indefinite strategies and mechanisms of rapprochement that may lead to unattended policy outcomes.

¹⁹ See Picture 1 on page 40 where the depicted man represents the aspirations of all Armenians and their strong emotional link to the symbols of collective memory.

Picture 1



Mustafa Ozer/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

An Armenian man looking across to Turkey. The countries border each other, but the historic gap between them has been wide²⁰.

Thus once the validity of the most important component of collective memory symbol, the Armenian genocide, was threatened by the protocols²¹ Armenians in diaspora and Armenia unified in the ‘No’ movement. On October 3, in New York, Armenian President Serge Sargsyan explained to the assembled representatives of the Armenian Diaspora organizations that the commission is not to judge whether or not genocide took place, but rather “to discuss the issues of Armenian heritage in Turkey, issues of restoring and preserving that heritage, issues of heirs of victims of Genocide” (Serge Sargsian, 2009). However, Turkish President Abdullah Gul

²⁰ Tavernise Sabrina. April 23, 2009. *The New York Times*. Skirting Thorniest Issues, Turkey and Armenia Move to Ease Tensions. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/24/world/europe/24turkey.html?_r=1

²¹ Protocols proposed to create a historical sub-commission “to restore mutual confidence between the two nations, including an impartial scientific examination of the historical records and archives to define existing problems and formulate recommendations”

defined the sub-commission's objective as one which will provide a historical judgment. On October 6, in Istanbul, he stated, "There are all sorts of allegations about what happened a century ago. It is clear that people who do not know what happened where or how are not able to take decisions on this matter. What we hope is that historians, archive specialists study this matter and we are ready to accept the conclusions of this commission. To show that we are sincere, we even said that if a third country is interested in this matter, if French historians, for example, want to take part in this commission, they are welcome" (Asbarez, 2009b).

These inconsistent and unclear definitions and at times even contradictory interpretations of basic functions of the sub-commission and the principal disagreement with the idea of historical sub commission brought further mystification and radicalization of the discourse around protocols.

Others (Tourian, 2009) have tried to rationalize the 'mythologized' discourse around protocols by taking it down to figures and economic arguments in defense of Armenian farmers. It was conceived entirely possible that Turkey could be willing to use a new type of warfare with Armenia through economic trade, by flooding Armenia with goods, destroying Armenia's agricultural sector, and then, when Armenia becomes dependent on Turkish goods in order to feed itself, changing the rules of the game to Armenia's detriment.

Again more than century long memory and distrust are revealing themselves ironically proving that economic analysis remains heavily dependent on past grievances of collective memory. Another major 'rationalized' concern was that the neoliberal dogma has become a major obstacle to the improved quality of life and a threat to the general wellbeing of the people with the economic performance of the country remaining dependent on foreign aid, without developing sufficient prosperity for the general population (Shirinian, 2009). These types of

ideological concerns having largely a legitimate ground nevertheless do not make necessary distinctions between the general ideological basis of the economic course, vulgar privatization and elite factionalism, factors which in case of post-soviet transition became external obstacles for the functioning of the neo liberal paradigm as such.

Nevertheless, the above mentioned rationalizing attempts didn't prevail in the public discourse underlying the 'No' movement, the latter being largely the consolidation around collective symbols such as Armenian genocide, restoration of historical truth and justice in general. For example, the hunger strikers that protested the visit of the president of Armenia to Los Angeles were all protesting the idea and going through the self-sacrifice all in the name of the unified nation in general and for the memory and unsatisfied quest of justice of their ancestors in particular. One of the hunger strikers wrote: "Most of us are starting to become delusional yet I'm still here. I thought to myself, if my great grandmother can walk across the desert with two kids in her arms, I should easily survive this. As tired/hungry as I am right now, I am ready to stay as long as need be for my country" (Jivalagian, 2009).

Thus the study of the 'No' movement shows that collective identity symbols combined with the quest for justice and national unity are its main structural components. Armenian nationalist discourse of the 'No' movement may be well summarized in a poem written by Alicia Ghiragossian (Ghiragossian, 2009) where primordialist claims combined with the idea of unified transnation form a unique mixture of quite 'irrational' yet controversially practical discursive tool that has served an important unifying function up to nowadays.

When we say Armenia	the entire race
we are not referring	spread around the earth.
to a piece of real estate.	We are talking
We are saying	about the same molecules

we inherited
from our ancestors;
about the DNA sprinkled
through our sweat and tears
all over the globe.
We talk about
the same torture and anguish
the same humiliation
hidden in our veins
blended with our losses:

family
intellectuals
homeland
possessions
identity
dignity...
Who needs protocols
to obstruct our existence
and bury our demands?

Conclusion

The examination of the discourse around the two movements showed that the main factors that contributed to the social mobilization in 1988 were the quest for justice defined in pragmatic terms of economy and security and rebirth of national consciousness. The ‘No’ movement was again based on quest for justice, that didn’t carry pragmatic components: instead it was more a demand for *historic* justice that did not relate at least directly to the elimination of everyday unjust treatment or physical insecurity. In turn the quest for historic justice was found to be one of the most important mobilizing factors of the ‘No’ movement as well as one of the key identity components of Armenian diaspora that keeps the diaspora Armenians unified. It has been mentioned by scholars “...that in a critical situation it is precisely the collective and historical memory of past crises that are drawn to the forefront and become a factor for the persistence and advancement of events (Marutyan, 2009, pp. 276–277).

Collective memory of the genocide becomes the factor that brings continuity between generations of diaspora Armenians and provides an important differentiating mechanism which helps the given community to define itself inside the host country. This well-defined identity actually fosters a fuller engagement in the host country as there are certain already established institutional channels (such as parties, lobbyist groups, clubs, churches, informal connections etc.) that make the socialization of ‘identity seeking’ youth and ‘identity redefining and reinterpreting’ elderly a smoother and a less painful process.

Moreover, historically the collective memory has proven to be a more stable and continuous channel of intergenerational communication than for example state institutions. Both ‘Sharjum’ and ‘No’ movement were heavily relying of collective memory images particularly those related with genocide, nevertheless Sharjum’s reliance on those images was largely

activated by ongoing social injustices, economic grievances, basic physical security and also by the institutional opportunities created in the result of centralized governments policy choices, while 'No' movement's nationalist discourse, despite several attempts of discourse rationalization, was largely an articulation of ethnos based primordialist claims with strong reference to such 'irrational' components of identity as blood, emotions, race, and unchanged transfer of the heritage of ancestors.

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