Cover Story

Music for A New Age

Jazz and rock are the musical languages of our time, expressing global ideas and feelings about the issues of today. Do Armenian musicians have anything to say? Who's banging the drum for a modern Armenian sound?

Interview

Terms of Betterment

He is Armenia's first vice president and now also its prime minister. An economist by training, he is also one of the few ex-Communists in the new republic's top leadership. Gagik Harutunian discusses his government's short- and long-term plans.

Special Report

Bandages or Bullets?

In just a few short weeks, Armenians around the Diaspora have raised millions of dollars to assist the people of Karabakh. Campaign organizers say the cash will buy humanitarian aid. But is some really going for guns?

Mosaic

Kurds? No, Yezidis...

Until recently, one of Armenia's most colorful and mysterious ethnic minorities did not officially exist.

Focus

Politics of Remembrance

Across the Diaspora, participation in the commemorative events surrounding the 77th anniversary of the Genocide has dwindled. Is it a general trend in increased public apathy? Or is the rivalry among the three political parties the cause of the lackluster observances this year?
From the Editor

As this issue of AIM was ready to go to press, Los Angeles began to burn. The anger and frustration of a subcommunity that has more young men in jail than in school was manifested in seemingly irrational violence. Couldn’t the resources that will be spent during the next 20 years to clean up the inner wounds and external damage have been invested 20 years ago to build the community?

Both of our managing editors are from Lebanon. Beirut started just this way, they said. I hadn’t seen the destruction of the last Capital of the Diaspora. I’d always lived in this new one.

The parallel image in my mind these last few days has been the frustration in that other place—the real capital. Will Armenia, too, explode? It doesn’t require a great stretch of the imagination to see that anger directed inward—at the social and political disorder, or resentment directed outward—at a West not sufficiently thoughtful, generous nor committed—can inflame more than speeches.

What is it going to take for us to mobilize? “Lives, man, lives,” says a friend from Boston. “Even then, it’s not enough.”

She is somewhat cynical, this friend, but what she says is true. We need to wake up, and soon, to the dangers. Armenia’s problems to a large degree are our problems too. And we have not yet started to think—much less act—seriously about them. Just like in Los Angeles. Will we be 20 years too late in Armenia too?

Our Special Report this issue examines the tenor of this last round of fundraising and donating. Who is giving the money? To whom? For what? Is the money getting there?

Not that money is the sole prescription. In future issues, we will also be looking at Diaspora leadership and decision-making processes. Have the attitudes and policies changed in accordance with the crisis in Armenia?

What are we doing? Who are we kidding?

Sagi Narekian
Tony Halpin is enjoyable to read. His writings and observations are realistic. I would honor him with the Armenian "Pulitzer Prize" for "Chi Kidem" (Essay, March).

One month every season in Armenia by Mr. Halpin will give your readers the truth of the modus vivendi there.

Norayr Melkisian
Glendale, California

Staff writer Tony Halpin left for Yerevan at the end of April for a more extended stay.

Heritage house
I was pleasantly surprised by your article about the Armenian Library and Museum of America (Heritage, March). The collection of Armenian artifacts and the efforts expended in their preservation is quite impressive.

At the present time we are in the process of building the Armenian Heritage Museum, a 4,000-sq.-foot adjunct on the grounds of the new 10.2-acre Ararat Home and Convalescent Hospital of Los Angeles.

The museum will consist of a large gallery, a historical research library, a stage, a vault, and an office for the sale of duplicate Armenian coins and books. Among other things, it will house a collection of ancient Armenian coins; 500-year-old maps; newspaper clippings and books on the Genocide; General Antranik’s tunic and sword; needlework and costumes.

Robert M. Shamlian
Chairman, Board of Trustees
Ararat Home and Convalescent Hospital of Los Angeles

Watermarks
In Moorad Mooradian’s article, “Wars Over Water” (International, February), the map accompanying the article showed Israel, including the occupied Golan Heights, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip without referring to them as occupied territories. This is not only reprehensible but inaccurate, since no country, not even the United States—Israel’s staunchest ally—recognizes these territories as anything but occupied.

I find this mistake not only personally offensive but an affront to our Arab friends, who, more than 70 years ago came to our rescue, opening their homes and borders.

AIM should have been more careful in this matter. Armenians cannot afford to antagonize any country or people, especially now when Armenia is independent and needs the help of the international community (including the Arab World) to survive and prosper.

Vatche Sarkisian
Falls Church, Virginia

Moorad Mooradian’s article was most interesting. It would have been more enlightening if he had mentioned that both rivers Euphrates and Tigris rise from the heights of Armenia in Turkey. This is a historical and geographical fact.

Sebouh Zarch Tashjian
Amman, Jordan

Author responds
In his excellent review of my book, The Serpent and the Bees (Book Review, February), Dr. Fred Assadourian notes that it is regrettable that my stay in (then-) Soviet Armenia was too brief for me to meet also with distinguished Armenians outside the cultural field, such as computer specialists and scientists. As an example, he mentions Viktor Hambardzumian.

The fact is that I did meet Hambardzumian, but not in Armenia. It was in Budapest in 1968, where the eminent astronomer had been invited by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

An invitation was sent by the president of the academy (who knew my ethnic heritage) to my office in the American Embassy. Every prominent Hungarian scientist was present in the packed auditorium of the academy to hear the lecture, which Hambardzumian delivered in Russian with a simultaneous translation into Hungarian.

Later, after admiring scientists finally left him alone, I approached him with an Armenian greeting and his eyes lit up. We chatted for some time, and while his manner had seemed dour during the presentation, our conversation appeared to transform him. He said gleefully that the last thing he expected to meet in the Hungarian People’s Republic was an American-Armenian diplomat and his Armenian wife.

While the occasion itself was unforgettable, the most memorable thing about Hambardzumian’s lecture was his omission of any mention of Armenia’s debt to the Soviet Government for his or Armenia’s contributions to Soviet science. At a time when such expressions of gratitude were de rigueur and their omission unforgivable, the famed Armenian astronomer displayed a
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A suggestion...

We all hear, read and participate as much as we can in the collection of funds and donations for Armenia and Artsakh. Much is needed and continuous help is a must.

I have a simple suggestion: If only half the Armenian population of California (around 300,000) donates $10 a month, that will make a million and a half each month. It's not much, but collecting that amount each month will make a difference, and this is only California. If all Armenians in the U.S. make this a habit, a considerable amount would be collected which can buy much of the food and the medicine so desperately needed over there.

Ten dollars a month won't hurt any of us, but will make a difference in the lives of our brothers and sisters in the homeland.

Rita Mesrobian
Omaha, Nebraska

And an irony...

I am a second-generation American of Armenian ancestry. The Armenian religion, like that of the Armenian people, is a "member" of the Eastern Church. The history of our two people run remarkably along a similar path. Both suffered for 500 years under the Turks yet somehow survived, as did our customs, traditions and faith. We also fell under the thumb of Communism, which was no great benefactor to our ways. But what is most ironic to me is that we, in the freedom of the Western world, were able to do to ourselves what the Turks and the communists tried but failed—we divided our houses.

Things for the Serbs are now changing. The year 1991 has shown promise in reconciliation of the two factions. We look forward to 1992 as a year of full recognition of both factions by each other and of total unity. It took a lot of "Christian turning of the cheek" to get this under way. Unity is necessary for strength, security and freedom. With us in the diaspora, in solidarity, strength spills over to the "old country." With such strength, our Serbian people will never again be led to the killing pits like sheep, as they were in the genocides of the past.

Unity starts, like the longest journey, with a first step. Two strong Armenian communities may be good, but one community with the strength of the two is the best way to secure the future and to prevent a repetition of the past.

Nikola Taraino
Crown Point, Indiana

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The Fall of Shushi: An Accident of Timing

By TONY HALPIN and VARTAN OSKANIAN

The attack on Shushi and its subsequent capture just when Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan was talking peace with Azerbaijanis in Tehran is curiously reminiscent of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor at a time when two Japanese emissaries were discussing the Ten Point peace plan with Secretary of State Cordell Hull. History records that the emissaries had no clue about the impending attack on Pearl Harbor.

It is doubtful that the same could be said in this case. Or is it? Advisors to President Ter-Petrosyan said they had been given no warning by the authorities in Karabakh that an attack was imminent. This left Ter-Petrosyan in the embarrassing position of trying to explain why a major offensive was taking place at the same time as peace talks aimed at halting the conflict. He told reporters in Iran that neither his nor Azerbaijan’s government had any control over the situation in Karabakh.

The whole debate is about whether the Karabakh conflict is the result of an irredentist or secessionist movement. Where secession is an attempt by an ethnic group to withdraw (with its territory) from the authority of a larger state of which it is a part, irredentism is a movement by members of an ethnic group in one state to retrieve ethnically kindred people and their territory across borders.

The Karabakh conflict has elements of both irredentism and secessionism. From the Azerbaijani perspective, the Armenian government is the irredentist state, trying to retrieve the territory of Karabakh, which lies in Azerbaijan but is populated mostly by Armenians. The Armenian government, on the other hand, has made clear that it has no territorial claims from Azerbaijan and that the conflict in Karabakh is one of national self-determination for the people of the autonomous territory. The people of Karabakh, meanwhile, have expressed their willingness to either become an independent state or incorporate into the Armenian Republic.

Despite Armenia’s official position, a number of unanswered questions arise. Was the timing coincidental or deliberate? Did Yerevan favor or oppose the action? Are events now beyond the control of the republic, and if so, can it prevent sliding into war?

The official Armenian version of events was presented in a May 9 Foreign Ministry press release. It said Azerbaijani forces had launched a major offensive against the capital Stepanakert and had reached the outskirts of the city. In response, the statement said, the President of the Karabakh Parliament called the Karabakh Defense Council into emergency session on May 7. The Presidency “disagreed with the Defense Council’s strategy of defensive tactics to counter outside Azerbaijani aggression.”

Instead, “it called on the Defense Council to put an end to Azerbaijani army attacks.” The statement added: “In its late-night meeting, the Defense Council determined to counterattack Azerbaijani army positions.”

The following day, Armenian forces launched one of the largest and most important military operations of the four-year war.

Turkey has not lost sight of its pan-Turkic ambitions. In 1933, during border negotiations with Iran, it successfully acquired a 6 km border stripe with Nakhichevan in exchange of other concessions. Today, the notion of linking Nakhichevan to Azerbaijan through the region of Zangezour in southern Armenia is being advocated by some circles at the State Department and more recently it was expressed by Turkish President Turgut Ozal. The exchange of Zangezour region with Karabagh and the corridor to link it with Armenia is seen as a permanent solution to the Karabagh problem.

Seemingly, this was planned and organized in a single night. Yet, talk of an attack on Shushi had circulated in Yerevan for weeks; it was viewed as the most logical move after the recapture of Khojaly. Disagreement between the Armenian and Karabakh governments over whether and when to undertake the operation was also well known.

Only a week before the attack, Karabakh’s official representative in Armenia, Manvel Sargisian, told a press conference that “Armenia still doesn’t seem to fully grasp what Karabakh is.”

As for where decisions about the region were made, he replied: “All decisions originate in Karabakh itself. There are powers who would like to interfere. There are groups who come from Armenia, they obey Karabakh of course, but they also listen to those who have sent them.” He did not elaborate.

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation/Dashnaktsutun party holds sway in Karabakh, while the Armenian National Movement governs Armenia. “We do our best to try to be above” party rivalries, said Sargisian. But the fact remains that Shushi was attacked while President Ter-Petrosyan was out of the country, in Iran, leading Armenia’s most senior foreign delegation to date, for a meeting with Azerbaijan’s President Yagub Mammadov.

Armenia acknowledged the serious significance of the takeover of Shushi to the peace process by casting the incident as a purely defensive response to Azerbaijani aggression. “The agreements reached with Iranian mediation in Tehran... offer special hope,” Foreign Minister Raffi Hovannisian said in the May 9 statement. “Unfortunately, while the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan
were engaged in talks in Iran, Azerbaijanis had launched a major attack against Stepanakert which threatened the city’s very existence.”

“When the first information about Shushi came, the Iranians had thought that maybe their mediation was a failure,” said one Armenian presidential aide at the Tehran talks. “But after they talked to the two presidents and after they heard more details, they still had hope that the agreement would remain in place.”

He described the fall of Shushi as an “accident of timing,” adding that “it was perhaps unwelcome timing for the Armenian government.”

The “Armenian government was not responsible for the attack” but we thought that anybody could use it against us,” he continued. “It is not so easy for the government in Yerevan to influence the one in Stepanakert. We can’t say for certain that, even if the President and government tried to do it, they (Karabakh) would agree.”

The position that Armenia has no territorial claim from Azerbaijan has played extremely well on the international scene, putting both the Azeri and the Turkish governments on the defensive.

Asked whether Turkey would link the improving of its relations with Armenia to the latter’s withdrawal from Karabakh, Turkish Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin replied that that was out of question because no formal invasion of Karabakh by Armenia has taken place. And so, whether Ter-Petrosyan knew of the attack or not, Armenia’s Karabakh policy continues to get high marks.

Indeed, the attack came suddenly and without warning. Just as swiftly, the Azerbaijani stronghold of Shushi fell to Armenians in Karabakh. More than 100 Azeris and less than 30 Armenians were reported killed, according to initial television accounts of the action on May 8. As news of the Armenian success spread through Yerevan that Friday, a sense of elation gripped the city. All weekend, at concerts and dinner parties, in the cafes and on the sidewalks, the only topic of conversation was Shushi: “Shushi is ours” was on everyone’s lips.

Repeatedly, people pointed out that this was the first time in 600 years that Armenians had increased the territory under their control, so used have they become to reversal and retreat. The psychological release was palpable.

Some worried about possible consequences of the victory—that it would unleash a terrible retribution. But most were simply relieved that the citizens of Stepanakert had at last been freed of terrible Grad missile attacks launched from Shushi in recent months. Very quickly, a new topic of conversation emerged: were the Armenians in Karabakh going to push all the way to the border with Armenia and create a corridor through Azerbaijan territory for supplies of food and fuel? And would this mean full-scale war?

Indeed, as of this writing, Karabakh’s forces had moved into Lachin, establishing a vital link between Karabakh and Armenia, reopening land transportation routes to the blockaded population.

“Shushi is ours” was on everyone’s lips. The Karabakh parliament has declared the independence of Karabakh from Azerbaijan, which was rejected outright by Azerbaijan. But with the fall of the last Azeri stronghold in the region, Karabakh could be viewed as a de facto independent territory from Azerbaijan. Under such circumstances, any encroachment by Karabakh Armenians into Azeri territory will not be viewed as an exclusively Azeri problem, legitimizing Azerbaijan’s request for Turkish help, by invoking Article 51 of the UN Charter, to repel an invasion of its territories.

The same advisor pointed out that Azerbaijan had been trying for months to “trap” Armenia into a war, and had renewed shelling of border regions inside the republic. But he doubted that an Armenian corridor would provoke a full-scale war because “neither Armenia nor Azerbaijan is ready for that war.”

The most dangerous aspect of this situation is that Turkey may use this historic opportunity to help Azeris reciprocally capture the Zangezour region in Armenia to link Nakhichevan with Azerbaijan—an idea floating around U.S. State Department circles for some time as a solution to the Karabakh problem, and more recently was subtly expressed by Turkish President Turgut Ozal.

Public pressure for action is mounting on the government in Turkey and may become intolerable in light of a corridor opened from Karabakh to Armenia through Azerbaijan territory. Further instability in Nakhichevan may also provoke a military response, although the cost to Turkey’s international image may act as a deterrent.

Nevertheless, Armenia was taking no chances. Alarmed by statements from Turkey about possible intervention after fighting broke out along Armenia’s border with Nakhichevan, Ter-Petrosyan appealed to the UN Security Council to hold an emergency session to hear an appeal for the dispatch of peacekeeping troops to the region.

A ceasefire was agreed with Nakhichevan’s President Gaidar Aliyev, and both sides agreed in principle to place independent observers along the frontier. Armenian said Aliyev has been pursuing relations independently of Azerbaijan, and it blamed Azeri forces hostile to him for violating the ceasefire. It added that “extremist” elements in Azerbaijan wanted to bring Nakhichevan back under Baku’s control to obstruct the normalization of relations with Armenia.

The next few weeks will be critical. Iraqi mediation is in full swing and trusted by both sides, but the litmus test will be its ability to enforce a ceasefire.

The UN Security Council has agreed to send a fact-finding mission, and the peace conference arranged by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe draws nearer. Perhaps most decisive is the growing instability within Azerbaijan, where a struggle for political power is paralyzing the decision-making process in Baku. Elections are scheduled for June 7, but it is unclear who, if anyone, will take decisive control. The military momentum has swung in Armenia’s favor after Shushi. Paradoxically, Armenia now needs strong Azerbaijani leadership in Baku if a diplomatic agreement that will stick is to be found.

With reports from Karnik Badalian in Yerevan.
Armenia’s Way Out

By GOURGEN KHAZHAKIAN
AIM Yerevan Bureau

AIM: Are you more a vice-president than a premier?
HARUTUNIAN: Perhaps more of a premier. On November 25, when I entered the Council of Ministers building, I realized more fully that the situation is so complicated that traditional methods would be insufficient to overcome it, and we must quickly move to an emergency system of government. Every evening since then we have held a session where we analyze the problems of the day, project an evaluation for the next two or three days, and determine what to do to control the situation, because the influence of external factors is quite great, and changes occur with such speed that often they necessitate a re-evaluation of previous decisions. So, those decisions must remain quite flexible.

I devoted all my energies and abilities to the problems of governing, and fundamentally adopted the functions of a premier. One of the major difficulties is that it is not possible, even under the heavy burdens of the day, to forget tomorrow. It is therefore essential that the premier finds ways to deal both with that day’s problems and to integrate them somehow with solutions to global problems in all areas.

Is the government planning ways out of this energy crisis so that next winter there will be light and heat in people’s homes?
The fundamental step in that direction will be a change in the way energy resources are received and used. We are developing a plan to utilize Armenia’s hydroelectric stations more effectively.

This year, even before such changes, a considerable portion of capital will be invested to make it possible to utilize effectively the water reservoirs at Eghvard and other places, thus enabling the creation of resultant capabilities. We are taking steps to create mobile electric stations with 200 mW capability which use diesel fuel.

In order to provide stable service, we are also trying to change the geographic location of our supply centers, and to acquire fuel from non-traditional sources.

It is imperative that there be essential changes both in the infrastructures, which determine the way energy resources are received, and in the structures which utilize them.

Could a re-opened nuclear power plant save us?
Since the power plant closed, it has been essentially “deserted.” To reopen it under existing circumstances would present an even greater danger, unless serious action is taken. And of course, international agencies will have to evaluate the situation and determine whether it’s possible to reopen the power plant.

There has been only talk about this, and even today no one is really able to say whether the cost involved would make it worthwhile. There has been no precedents anywhere in the world where a power plant was restarted after a similar shutdown.

This is a complicated technical problem, not just a political one. To place our hopes today solely on the atomic power plant would be a form of self-deceit.

What plans does the government have for relations with neighboring countries, particularly in the area of economics and transportation?
The problem lies in reviewing not only transportation issues but all economic issues, to try to avoid one-sided dependence. If we want to enter the world market, we must pay great attention to our relations with our neighbors.

Today, we are in a position to significantly increase the breadth of transportation links with Turkey. Those issues are even now under negotiation. It is possible, for example, to construct a rail station for freight at Akhurian, one that would be able to handle up to 150 wagons a day.

Also on the agenda is the opening of a highway through Iran, and a rail line through Nakhichevan.

And what steps are being taken to create incentives for attracting foreign—and especially diasporan Armenian—capital into the republic?
Today, one of the cornerstones of Armenia’s economic policy is the development of an environment that stimulates outside investment, and the introduction of new technologies in the republic.

In this regard, the government has already forwarded legislative bills which provide tremendous opportunities and freedoms for business transactions in hard currency. Production enterprises even have the option of paying salaries in hard currency, and importing and exporting goods and services.

Admittedly, this doesn’t constitute an adequate incentive for foreign investments, and we are working on several other proposals in this direction. First, in consideration of the cost of new investments there is a plan that takes into account existing [public-sector] industrial production facilities that are anywhere between 10 and 80 percent developed but would not see completion in the present situation. The idea is to involve foreign and local investors, whether they are full or ghost partners, the right to acquire the titles to those facilities and to import the necessary material for the completion of their construction and starting operation. The enterprise then becomes a mixed-ownership joint venture, and when production starts, it is administered jointly by the government and the private investor.

Another version of the plan envisages selling the partially completed facility to the individual, who pays only for the existing edifice.

We are considering establishing a tax rate on income from such investments which is half of that in Russia and the other republics. Production facilities in the earthquake zone are mostly exempt from taxation.

Usually we have found that the most fundamental concern of individuals who are considering investing in Armenia is the existing guarantees for protecting their investment capital. The government has sent a draft bill to the parliament outlining safeguards for foreign capital; we expect it will soon pass into legislation.

In effect, there is quite a considerable number of inducements for investing in Armenia, and I should point out that we are encouraged by the serious interest of foreign businessmen. The number of joint ventures which are currently in operation has surpassed 80. The major difficulties they currently face is the unstable energy supply, an outdated transportation system which
needs an overhaul, and the shortcomings in the existing banking and financial institutions, which do not have credits in foreign banks—an essential ingredient for free enterprise. But all of these problems are being addressed by the government.

**What does Armenia stand to gain by membership in international economic organizations such as the International Monetary Fund or the EC?**

I would like to reflect on this question in some detail, because today there are few people who have a full and realistic picture of our economic situation. At first glance, one sees the blockade, the energy crisis and so on, but in reality, Armenia’s economic situation is much more complicated and the problems go much deeper.

We are attempting to solve simultaneously two huge problems,

But our condition is further compounded by the absence of a national, independent economy.

The European countries I mentioned at least had their own national economic systems, while Armenia is integrated in a system 99 times larger than itself—and an unstable one at that—from which our country must pull out and create its own economy.

We will not free ourselves from destructive outside influences if we are unable to solve the key problem: After achieving political independence, our economy must be transformed into a system which characterizes an independent state, and that requires deep structural reforms. That is the second problem.

The effort to concurrently solve these two compound problems entails serious complications. It is possible to achieve success only by taking into account both the outside forces and the legal means, and special situations which we cannot circumvent.

It is of course possible that the reforms would be endlessly postponed, producing serious social tension. I want to underline the fact that a continuation of this situation means that our economy will forever be dependent on external ups and downs. If conflicts arise, for example, between Turkmenia and the Ukraine, Armenia is immediately affected. If Yeltsin issues a decree on the rising price of fuel, again, Armenia is rippled.

External aid and assistance is essential and will make it possible for us to resolve these two problems—to implement deep structural reforms and to quickly move to market relationships.

**Where does the process of privatization stand today?**

Privatization is an issue which concerns many people, and any effort at economic reform is effectively measured by the progress of the privatization process. Indeed, it is a pivotal issue.

The proposed approaches are quite varied. I personally find that this process is progressing particularly slowly here. After land reform, it was not possible to successfully privatize the production sector, the service arena, and obviously, there developed a rift between privatization and the possible ways of implementing it.

After privatization of an industry, a corresponding arena must exist for developing private relations. But here, that arena has not yet been created. Therefore, two principles are thrown forward. First, that privatization is harmoniously achieved with the development of market infrastructures; secondly, and parallel with that effort, mechanisms for the protection of social rights must be created. Otherwise, we will face dire and extreme circumstances—on the one hand, economic non-productivity, on the other, social tensions.

There are two extreme approaches to privatization: One is the explosive method which calls for privatization to be completed within a 2- or 3-year period; the other is a continuous stage of privatization to last 10-15 years. I feel that the most appropriate would be an approach between the two that might be called a “soft-radical” approach.

Soon, the Supreme Council will pass a law on privatization which will direct the government to first privatize agricultural institutions, small establishments within the service industry and light production, a large part of those institutions in heavy industry which employ up to 300 workers, the state’s residential agency and the agencies dealing with incomplete construction.

That stage may be called light privatization. In 1993, we would begin heavy privatization, which would include all large industrial institutions.

For the moment, institutions involved in the production of energy, metallurgy, chemical production, transportation—all of significant strategic or tactical importance for Armenia—can not become the objects of privatization.

We are facing a dilemma of two extremes and we must find intelligent and wise avenues of harmonizing the two. To what extent can the state maintain control of those agents which ensure structural changes, and to what extent must the production base remain free of all intervention in order for free enterprise to effectively progress and develop?
FAX machines and sushi, car phones and AIDS, drive-bys and BMWs. Modern Armenian music has yet to say a word on any of these. And yet they are all around us and we around them.

We are in the thick of modern life, like everyone else. We’ve contributed to the rape of Amazon rainforests and the wealth of the Middle East, the breakup of the Soviet Union and the slaughter of blue whales, but our musicians are still singing vapid songs.

In its entirety, modern Armenian music is a wonderfully uneven art form. It has all the basic components to move to a higher and more original tier. Yet those who sing and write it have retreated to the redundant, the obvious and the facile.

In Armenia and the Diaspora, our ears are polluted by argot pop tunes called rabiz (blue-collar pop) and the yawn estradayin (literally, of the street). In both genres, what is missing is substance and authenticity.

At the opposite end of rabiz and estradayin is the wanna be cutting-edge maverick, experimenting with traditional Armenian music. This alternative camp is swept by the currents of Russian, British and

By ISHKHAN JINBASHIAN

NEW SOUNDS

KARTALIAN TRIO
"We play because we are musicians; we have to play."

AIM, May 1992
American pop music. It is difficult to look at this hybrid-pop group as genuine Armenian. But at least the music it generates builds on social indignation, existential discontent and Armenian variations of the New Age sensibilities.

Somewhere in between the two poles is classical music. Despite its technical excellence, classical Armenian music has—like a broken record—reproduced itself. But unlike the genre draws substance from traditional Armenian music and remains a rite of passage for bolder efforts.

The fundamental problem with Armenian music today is its spirit. Like our history, it is an escape from tragedy or a helpless confirmation of it. Given this condition of pathos, it is easy to read the subtext in Armenian love songs as a messy and shrilling run from an unjust world.

This escape is not just from one person; it is from a hordes of them, or an army, or an entire nation. It is a collective lament—very egalitarian, very literal, very ridiculous.

While this kind of music describes the tragic, it makes no effort to transcend it. It verifies and satisfies the psychology of the victim, yet fails to expose the various nuances and contradictions inside the victim’s psyche. The result is a universe of nostalgia and black-and-white monotonous under the jurisdiction of a ruthless enemy—dead or alive. Take your pick.

Armenian music has yet to perceive the relativism of human existence. Our inner chaos and sexuality have yet to find expression in Armenian songs. Our urge to question absolutes has yet to find its way into lyrics.

A few bands have already started work to derail Armenian music from its headlong rush into the predictable. A number of compositions since the early ‘70s is proof that our spiritual and artistic liberation has begun.

Into the Modern

So far, only a handful of artists have made a successful entry into modernism. Singer Tatevik (Hovhanessian), pianists Davit Azarian and Artashes Kartalian have no pretensions of turning our music upside down, but they have at least stepped out of the groovy ghetto into the world of jazz.

All of these artists, together with the members of their respective ensembles—double bassists Gevorg Gevorgian and Rouben Parkhoutarian and percussionists Alexander Grigorian and Grigor Palakian—are natives of Armenia.

In Yerevan they all lived under the chilling grip of communism, where talent faced the danger of turning brittle. But incredibly they kept their fascination with jazz fluid and alive. Despite run-ins with Communist officials, all of them have received kudos in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Today, they all live in America.

The longing for environment

Jazz is a spontaneous art form born in the street. It is the music of the urban mob shrouded in night, and of shady whores and giddy patrons whispering, out of sight. Jazz is a city’s throbbing pulse. Take the city out of jazz and you strip it of its essence.

“You development as a jazz musician in Yerevan is completely dependent on your inner world,” says Azarian. “You isolate yourself in this inner world. You sit in your home, you develop yourself. As an artist, my place is where my art will grow the most.”

In 1986, the Davit Azarian Trio released in America “Stairway to Seventh Heaven,” a tightly knit collection of works composed mainly by Azarian. The record is a fusion of traditional jazz and European and Armenian melodies. The scores are inventive and serene.

A resident of Providence, Rhode Island, Azarian has become something of a roving musician. He hops from club to club playing in trios, quartets or quintets. His mobility is well suited to the thriving jazz clubs that dot the length of the East Coast.

Jazz takes its uncharted soul from improvisation—the chaotic fusion and deconstruction of notes. It is flexible enough to share and borrow, wise enough to distill.

“Today I play here, tomorrow somewhere else, the third day over there,” says Azarian. “You’re among different musicians, and all this precipitates artistic maturity.”

It was this restless American environment that sparked the imagination of Azarian and other musicians.

JAZZ WITH AN ARMENIAN SOUL:

Davit Azarian fuses medieval melodies with modern jazz.
early on. American jazz inspired their art, and from a distance suggested a vague promise. It also gave their experiments a kind of anchor they were pulled to.

Under communism, Armenia’s musical milieu was dominated by classical, *estradayin* and *rabiz*. While interesting works surfaced during the early years of *estradayin*, this genre soon turned toward mediocrity and monotony. Meanwhile, artists forced underground dabbled in alternative modes of expression.

Tatevik’s music is a spit at our traditional understanding of the mawkish female singer. In Yerevan, Tatevik avoided *estradayin* to sing jazz in English and released a collection of songs in 1984 called “Daydream.”

Later on, composer Artur Grigorian introduced her to the idea of singing in Armenian. Her collaboration with Grigorian and songwriter Vahan Antreassian spawned “Dner” (Doors). Grigorian was well aware of Tatevik’s musical vision and the unique possibilities of her voice.

“Dner” is nothing less than a total revamping of Armenian pop in structure and world vision. Using elements from rhythm and blues and American pop, Tatevik injected a distinctive and unpredictably quirky flutter into Armenian songs. She now lives and performs in New York.

Rouben Parkhoutarian of the Kartalian Trio believes that international jazz—much like international art—is suffering from inertia. Innovations are always taking place, he says, but these are new rearrangements of old discoveries. Listening to the Kartalian Trio in Los Angeles, it is tough to swallow his words. There is nothing in the works of this group that suggests inertia.

Their compositions (especially those that fuse Armenian music to jazz) sound refreshingly unorthodox and modern compared to most of what we have heard since the late '70s.

“When we play, we’re not conscious of any innovations,” says Kartalian. “We play because we are musicians; we have to play.”

Kartalian talks with the unfeigned confidence of an artist who has broken out of the confines of national art and assumed a larger, more complex vision. “I don’t think of jazz as concrete American folklore,” he says. “I think of jazz as a genre, an immense vocabulary.”

So long to the ghetto.

**Everybody’s language**

What does all this mean for Armenian music? Kartalian believes that as long as Armenian artists create, irrespective of genre or geography, and as long as they produce is good, Armenian culture will benefit from international recognition.

On the other hand, Tatevik, who is careful to distinguish between modern authentic Armenian music and the kind which “invades from outside,” contends that the Armenian language is fundamentally disobedient to the demands of jazz.

“It is not as though you can create contemporary music by taking a melody and orchestrating it,” she says. “True folk music can only be born from popular sources and a peoples’ experience.”

Both rhythm and blues and gospel share a spiritual concordance with Armenian traditional music, she says.

Reflecting on the possibility of whether a hybrid West-Orient musical texture can be appreciated by an American, Arab, Chinese or German, Azarian says that it can be done if the Armenian idiom does not take over the compositional search.

Aside from their achievements as jazz musicians or Armenian experimental artists, Davit Azarian, Tatevik, and Ardashes Kartalian reveal an often dizzying ability to break out and dream. They have the courage to present Armenian artists with a challenge—of opening up to the world while exploring and redefining the very sources of Armenian music.

“Individuals from different national backgrounds who do not speak each other’s language come to the stage and salute each other with a simple hello,” says Tatevik. “They know no other language. They ask ‘What do we play? This blues?’ They set the tonality. It is moving. They are playing.”

Translated from the Armenian by Taline Voskerichian and Viken Berberian.

**MODERN POP**

Tatevik’s music is a refreshing spit at our traditional understanding of the mawkish female singer...
Rocky Road

By GOURGEN KHAZHAKIAN and HASMIK HARUTUNIAN

When performers talk about rock in Armenia today, the conversation invariably drifts to the summer of '77. During those sweltering months, Yerevan was buzzing with excitement. Rock in Armenia was alive and well, thanks largely to Arevadzak, a hip band that surfaced during the Brezhnev '60s. Like a pendulum gone wild, the '77 Arevadzak concerts offered a curious range of music from Deep Purple to more traditional Armenian songs.

The '70s were the glory days of Armenian rock. Groups milling around in the margins moved center stage. They broke out of their high schools and research institutes to perform to legions of youth. Who were these maverick artists influenced by the music of the West?

Enter guitarist Boris and Rafael Antreassian, pianist Davit Azarian, songwriter/singer Artur Meschian, and vocalist Elvina Magarian.

In just a few years, they would line up—not to buy bread, but to make an exit. Today, all of them live in America. And rock bands such as Melomânér and Yerazgoñnhér can now be found in the graveyard of music history.

By the late '70s and early '80s, rock in Armenia was in a state of inertia. "The vacuum was also the result of changing technological conditions," says one musician. New bands were unable to enter musical life because the demands on rock had become more stringent. "You had to know much more than three chords," he adds. "In order to go on stage, a band needed state-of-the-art musical instruments and equipment, especially digital synthesizers." Emerging groups were once again forced to play in restaurants and at weddings to generate the funds for buying the new hardware.

Rock suffered another setback when Armen Hovanissian's pioneering television program "22-30" was pulled off the air. The show had greatly advanced rock's crusade, bringing the Beatles and Black Sabbath into Yerevan homes.

With the advent of glasnost, rockers reappeared. You could see their monikers painted along the city's walls, but everyone knew that the heyday of the '70s were long gone. Groups such as Asbarez, Maximum, Ayas, Darêrk, 36 Plus 6, and Soma found themselves with Neanderthal musical gear competing with futuristic music videos.

More than hardware

Musicians in Yerevan say that if Armenia had hi-tech equipment, it would easily produce first-class rock musicians. They cite the example of veteran guitarist and former Asbarez member Yuri Mayilian, who now lives in Yugoslavia.

Mayilian left one of the better-equipped rock groups in the country. Originally a student band, Asbarez has played in several Soviet music festivals. One of the tracks from its 1989 release, "Anathema," includes a fine song inspired by the Karabakh rallies.

Asbarez has also developed a hybrid texture described by German rock magazine PopCorn as "Oriental heavy rock." It too weaves Armenian medieval music into its songs.

But Asbarez recently sold a recording to PEKO International, a Los
Angeles-based Armenian-owned music distributor that deals in kef or festive music. Ironically, the sound is glaringly non-Asharez, a group that usually meshes somber Armenian melodies to classic rock. Financial considerations could help explain the band's decision to target the Los Angeles crowd, which usually thrives on sloppy Armenian pop produced on hi-tech machines.

Yerevan musicians are enthusiastic about the possibilities of rock. They have begun serious trials fusing the seemingly incongruous melodies of the Orient with that of the West. The two traditions are kept intact, so that they actually complement each other.

One of the best rock groups in Armenia today is Vosdan Hayots. It was the only rock band that flew twice to Karabakh in wartime to give concerts. Thousands of young people flocked to their performances to hear rock amidst bomb blasts in Stepanakert.

Another maverick rock band, Ayas, searches for texture in secular and religious medieval hymns. Armenian sharakans are rich in "blues-like intonations," says Artur Midinian, who plays keyboard for Ayas. A cutting-edge composer with formal training, Midinian is a tireless champion of fusing church hymns to rock.

Technical prowess aside, the quality of these bands will depend on their level of commitment to Eastern and Western traditions. This means that rock—with its expression of revolt less relevant in post-Communist Armenia—will have to deliver more on its artistic than ideological appeal.

After several years of underground concerts for a small circle of rock fans, Vosdan Hayots in 1991 finally managed to release its first record, "Zartir Vordyak," a popular nationalist song. If in the beginning the band was influenced by Anglo-American groups such as Pink Floyd, Deep Purple and Andrew Lloyd Weber's rock opera "Jesus Christ Superstar," the first release shows that the band has already found its musical identity.

Today Vosdan Hayots searches for inspiration in medieval spiritual music. Areg Nazarian, the group's leader, song writer, vocalist and bass player, is backed by Hovhannes Kourghinian on vocals. It is Vache Khatchaturian, a professional pianist who graduated from the Yerevan State Conservatory, and new bassist David Mushchian who make the fusion of Western rock and Armenian pop elements happen.

"Music is at a complete standstill in Armenia," says Nazarian during a phone interview, "In a situation where fuel is scarce, it's absurd not only to give concerts but even to rehearse."

Live concerts and studio recordings can bring in the money for buying the necessary gear and for promoting the art form. Yet, the absence of a network of music personnel to handle the logistics of putting on a concert places tremendous burdens on the musicians. "We have to do everything ourselves, by hand, immediately before the concert," says one of the musicians of Maximum, the oldest rock band in Armenia. "Then, we have to get on stage and sing and play," he adds. David Ohanianian, the leader of Ashez, is more specific. "The Armenian rock musician dies three times: first, after he has installed the equipment for the concert; second, at the conclusion of his live performance; third, after the concert, when he has to dismantle the equipment and put it in the car or truck."

As in the past, when they were forced to sing in restaurants and at weddings, today's rock musicians have to find ways of surviving and generating income. "In order to be able to buy instruments, we have transformed ourselves into a cooperative," says one of the musicians of Maximum. "The government encourages cooperatives, but there are still very few sponsors," he notes.

Armenian rockers believe that their music is strong on content. But the only hope they see is the possibility of performing and producing in the West. Only that would permit the groups to finance their artistic projects in the new and unusual context of an independent Armenia.

Gourgen Khazhakian is a member of AIM Yerevan bureau. Haamik Harutunian is a Los Angeles-based journalist. Taline Voskerichian contributed from Boston.

BLUES & SHARAKANS:
Ayas searches for texture in church hymns and rock
or a Los Angeles musician, the road to rock is full of hazard signs. Along the way, many are exploited, jeered at and, like a bad accident, eagerly forgotten. Under these conditions, it is easy to see why most of us choose well-paying and "practical" careers.

Still, a few have opted to plunge into pop music careers.

"I do this because it is fulfilling," says guitarist David Ajian. "I suppose I could be a real estate agent making $75,000 a year, but who cares? I'd rather make $250 a week and play music than have a big empty castle."

Such is the philosophy of a small and struggling group of musicians who work during the day to play music at night.

Kevin Mooradian and his seven-man band, The Collective, mix Western pop with Armenian lyrics. The result is a strange, affected, pseudo sound, blaring through Trans Am speakers in the grotty streets of Hollywood, where he has a strong following. Mooradian, who uses the stage name Kevin George, made his debut in the early '80s playing in Los Angeles night clubs and touring different cities nationwide.

His career was given momentum in 1989 when his band, then known as The Touch, performed in Yerevan to legions of teens and raised 150,000 rubles for earthquake relief. It was the first time a diasporan Armenian group performed Western pop music in Armenia. Mooradian's first album sold 1,000 copies within two weeks in Armenia. His second album is expected to be available this month.

George is not the only Mooradian on the Los Angeles Armenian pop music scene. Brothers Steve and Ara also have music in their hearts, but their approach is different. While they share the contemporary pop sound, they sing in Armenian. Called Ararock, the band tapes its background music in their home recording studio and then uses the tape during concerts.

If you want to see decent slam dancing, fists flying in the pit, and fans screaming, you can either go to a European soccer match or a Mindless State concert. "Our music brings a lot of energy and a lot of fans to venues that don't have enough room to handle them," says drummer Patrick GHarian. It also leads to police interference to break up the ruckus, which has brought the band some notoriety.

"Metal artistry straight from the mind" is how GHarian describes the band's music. He formed the group in 1986 with bassist Paul Boghossian. After several lineup changes, it now features Levon Sultanian on guitar and Rafik Ohanian on vocals and guitar. Mindless State is a Bacchic metal band, "and not heavy or hard rock," Sultanian emphasizes. Members admit having Armenian influences in their lives but not in their music. They all agree that there is a need for young and resourceful Armenians to stand up and express themselves.

The group will play in the Golden Autumn International Festival at the Pasadena Rose Bowl this summer.

Brothers Vahe and Zareh Marzakelum have played electric guitar and bass together in bands since high school. They later formed an all-Armenian rock/heavy metal band, initially called Red Snow. When Donny Sarian took the rhythm helm, it was renamed Mach 1. Although Mach 1's Armenian heritage is not reflected in its music, it is in its lyrics.

David Ajian's Rings of Saturn formed in 1989. Although this hard-edged rock band has since split up, today Ajian is pursuing a solo career. He just finished recording a five-song cassette that is heavy on keyboard and tambourine. There is a smattering of Armenian influence in Ajian's music and lyrics.

NEW VOICES:
Kevin George (left); Goukan L.A. (top right), getting ready for Armenia tour; Zartong, a seminal band from Paris.
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To make it in business, you have to have the right connections.
Ajian’s music, “but most people wouldn’t recognize it,” he says.

Self-taught Edwin Alplanian has plucked a gritty guitar with his bandmates since junior high school. Calling themselves The Strange Tongues, they play progressive hard rock throughout the Los Angeles club circuit. The Tongues appeared on cable television recently and won first prize in alternative rock radio station KROQ’s contest for a loony jazz tune.

No outlet for fresh sound

Formed two years ago in Los Angeles by young Armenians who have left family and friends overseas, Goukan L.A. (They Come to L.A.) is high on nostalgia and, refreshingly, strong on melody. This jaunty pop band held several of its first concerts at the Los Angeles Night Rock Cafe. Their first and only album produced in 1990 sold 1,000 copies—not bad for an unknown band’s first release.

“Getting to the audience is the most difficult challenge in America,” says Alex Bessos, who writes most of the band’s material. There are no Armenian radio stations to promote new music, he says, adding that their target audience of 18- to 30-year-olds, seldom listens to the handful of radio programs that feature traditional Armenian music.

In addition to the second album, which is set for release this fall, Goukan L.A. also plans to record a music video soon to promote their music in Armenia as a prelude for future performances there.

Mixing rhythm and blues with rock and jazz is Aram Haroutunian’s forte. Haroutunian, a guitar genius for The Vicious Suaves, thumped the dumbeg as a child. He traces his strong rhythmic nature to Armenian records he listened to while growing up. Vicious Suaves members describe their music in jest: “It is kind of rhythm and blues, kind of jazz, kind of fast Armenian music.”

Pianist Gary Simonian plays keyboard in Mind Design, a polished and primed rock band. Simonian, a classical-trained pianist, feels that Mind Design allows him to mesh classical motifs with progressive rock. The band plays in Los Angeles and has a tape under the name of Lestat.

Paris-based Zartonk (Renaissance) merits attention for their original style, instrumentation and experimentation with traditional Armenian folk music. Although now disbanded, there was a time when Zartonk turned 20th-Century composer Gomidas on his head, only to hurl him back into history. In this sense, it is an alternative band.

Founded in Paris in 1975 by young physicist Lorys Tildian and professional musician Stepan Akian, Zartonk marries Gomidas to the sound of the electrified kamancha (spiked fiddle), the santour and synthesizer keyboards. Both learned to play the instruments by themselves. Tildian got hold of the kamancha while studying in Yerevan. A composer and a professor of music at the Sorbonne, Akian introduced teaching courses for playing the santour there. The santour itself is an ancient Armenian instrument with 80 chords—a hydra of a guitar if ever there was one. Since it had disappeared from Armenian music for centuries and was only played in Iran, Akian introduced a new approach that marks a departure from the Iranian technique, which gives priority to melody and improvisation.

After being joined by Lorys’ brother, bassist Franck Tildian, and drummer Richard Tonelian, Zartonk started playing Parisian cafe-theaters and radio stations, introducing modernized Armenian traditional music to the French. The group quickly attracted a considerable following.

In 1976 the band released its first album. It would be also their last. Zartonk disbanded in 1977, but Lorys Tildian, today a successful computer businessman, is working on new compositions with the use of computerized samplers and synthesizers. When this avant-garde Armenian folk music is soon released, it will be in line with the plans of bandmate Stepan Akian, who died in 1989.

“The fact that we can introduce new techniques in our music means that we are alive as a nation,” Akian had said.

L.A. METAL:

Mindless State (top left); cover of Asbarez’s 1989 LP, “Anathema” (top right); Mach 1’s song, “Our Forgotten Cry,” paid tribute both to their late father and the Genocide
Requiem to Marx

By HASMIK HARUTUNIAN

Two decades before Armenians thronged into Freedom Square, Artur Meschian was already singing his requiem for communism. Together with Levon Melikian and Grigor Nalbantian, he formed a rock band called The Apostles.

During the late '60s, The Apostles were competing against officially sanctioned popular music called rabiz or art for the masses. Ironically, the disgruntled masses were turning their ears to the likes of The Apostles.

The songs of Meschian, Ruben Hakhverdian and Eduard Zorikian embody a generation’s belief in the West and their rejection of Soviet social realism. The crowds they commanded were in tune with the beatnik zeitgeist, and their songs drew from their politics of discontent.

Today, Meschian lives in the United States. The soft-spoken artist says he left Armenia three years ago to focus on music—and focus he does. During a Los Angeles concert in 1990, Meschian played solo guitar to a stunned audience. His voice trembled with emotion. Between songs, he told the audience that in spirit he felt as though he was still in Armenia.

Meschian’s music resembles his nature—clear, poignant and accessible. It is also modern. There are only a few musicians who can skillfully play the works of early 20th-Century composer Gomidas on an electric guitar.

The lyrics to many of Meschian’s songs are drawn from the poems of Lebanese-Armenian poet Mushegh Ishkhan. Put to music, they can drive an uncouth stoic to tears.

Ruben Hakhverdian is a Rimbaudesque rebel raised in Yerevan’s streets. He lived his youth as a Bohemian and his earlier songs reflect his contempt of the bourgeois.

The Apostles derived its inspiration from Armenian liturgy and sharakans.

The lyrics of these songs are nothing less than biting social commentaries on Soviet life. In one of his songs, “Zoo,” Hakhverdian lashes out at communism for stifling creativity and the arts. It is no wonder that authorities did not allow him to give concerts. They did not even allow him to practice his profession—directing. The patent Hakhverdian style is the serene, solo guitar. It is reminiscent of Jacques Brel, Vladimir Visotsk and George Brassens. His first album, “La Vie” (Life) was released in 1987, followed by “Gazarianotse” (Zoo) in 1990. Many of the tracks on these albums are about the artist’s fragile inner world, and about love, which makes one forget that in the not-too-distant past he was the rebel who spit on the world.

Eduard Zorikian might not seem like a musician at first sight. A geologist by training, he gave up stores long ago to become music director of Triangle, a Yerevan-based theater company.

Zorikian completed a rock opera recently based on Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tale The Emperor’s New Clothes, which he plans to adapt to film. Last year he released “Imprisoned Dreams.” The album contains two poems by François Villon set to music.

Three years before all this artistic frenzy, Zorikian was busy composing his requiem for communism, soon to be officially proclaimed dead. It was so searing that during a 1989 concert in Paris, local community leaders ignored the rapture of Zorikian’s young audience and complained that it was just too much.
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Tark of the Big Leagues

Once named the winningest coach in America, Jerry Tarkanian last month entered professional basketball by accepting a coaching job with the San Antonio Spurs of the National Basketball Association. Ohio-born Tarkanian, 61, has been coaching college basketball for 32 years, ever since he graduated from Fresno State University. He is most famous for coaching the Runnin’ Rebels, the team of the University of Nevada at Las Vegas. It was a marriage that lasted 19 years, and resulted in the best winning percentage in college basketball (.837).

Chef of Many Brews

Only 70 of the over 300,000 restaurants in the United States have graced the prestigious Gault Millau Travel Guide with a 16-point rating or more. And of these elite restaurants, only one is run by an Armenian. That restaurant is Lalime’s in Berkeley, California, and the chef/owner is Haig Krikorian. Lalime’s cuisine blends Armenian, Lebanese, Italian, French and American flavors, reflecting Krikorian’s background, travels and training.

Born in Baghdad, Krikorian was raised in the Baabda neighborhood in Lebanon. Every weekend, up to 10 families would gather to enjoy each other’s company and food. Haig learned the wonders of good food during these weekly events, and also from his Aunt Shoshig. “Her doughs were magnificent,” Haig says. “The filo dough we know today is a nuisance compared to hers.”

When the fighting broke out in Beirut, Krikorian moved to England, but later settled in Northern California. He met Khajag Sarkisian, owner of the Orient Express restaurant and catering in San Francisco who encouraged Haig to attend the prestigious Culinary Academy. Upon graduation, the Orient Express welcomed Krikorian as its head chef—and also to 15-hour work days. That excellent training period enabled him to open his own restaurant. Lalime’s (his wife’s maiden name) fame spread by word of mouth, and is now one of the most popular restaurants in Berkeley for quality cuisine at moderate prices.

As the highest rated Armenian chef in America, Haig Krikorian offers this advice to those considering a life in the restaurant business: “Do it right. Many people who are in the business haven’t found the definition of what they’re trying to do. It doesn’t matter what part of the culinary field you want to get into, but choose something and stick with it.” He cites Zankou Chicken in Los Angeles as an example of great success for specializing in one thing. A computer to simplify bookkeeping is also recommended, but having a reliable chef is essential “if you want to have a life outside the restaurant.”

—Michael Krikorian
Donors, Guns and Money

By TONY HALPIN

As the fighting intensifies over Nagorno-Karabakh, so too do the efforts of Diaspora Armenians to help the region's embattled population. In the United States and across Europe, campaigns have been organized to raise millions of dollars for Karabakh.

Fund-raisers proclaim the urgent need for medical supplies and food for people in the region, which is undoubtedly true. An unstated but implicit message of some appeals is that the population also needs guns.

By far the most successful campaign has been that organized jointly by the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America and Medical Outreach for Armenia, which has garnered close to $5 million thanks largely to a $3 million donation from Kirk Kerkorian's Lincy Foundation. A telethon during which $700,000 was pledged, together with a $300,000 donation from Louise Manoogian Simone, President of the Armenian General Benevolent Union, contributed to the total.

The fund-raising central committee has said it intends to put the entire amount raised "at the disposal of the government of Karabakh" for humanitarian purposes. Priorities, according to committee member Mary Najarian of Medical Outreach, are "medicine, number one, and food, number two."

To this end, the committee announced it was sending 100 tons of meat, margarine, rice, and sugar to Karabakh from Europe at the end of April, as well as four portable X-ray machines, 20,000 baby bottles, and a communications system.

It added, in a statement, that quantities of antibiotics and other medicines, "medical scanning equipment," electrical generators, 55 tons of powdered milk, and 5,000 boxes of food were also being sent.

Mrs. Najarian was the only committee member who responded to inquiries about the fund. Archbishop Vatche Hovsepian, of the Western Diocese, declined to answer further questions about the committee's work, and other members of the committee did not respond to repeated requests for interviews.

But a measure of control is being maintained. One million dollars has already been placed in the Cathedricos' bank account in Switzerland, in the name of the government of Karabakh. To make use of that money, government officials must gain prior approval from Archbishop Hovsepian for the purchases they wish to make, explained Najarian.

"They first contact here and with his permission they can go ahead," she said. The remaining $4 million would go to Karabakh "in different forms" and would all be spent within one year, she added.

Committee members Dr. Vartkes Najarian of Medical Outreach, and Rev. Berdj Djambazian, senior pastor of the United Armenian Congregational Church in Los Angeles, traveled to Karabakh to assess the emergency needs on April 21.

The Kerkorian gift was less of a clear cut donation to Karabakh than many press reports have indicated. Under U.S. law, a private foundation may not require that a donation be spent for foreign purposes. It may, however, make an unrestricted gift to any domestic charity, which is what the Lincy Foundation did.

Its check for $3 million was made out as a gift to the Western Diocese to be used for humanitarian purposes to help the Armenian people. The church then applied the gift to its Karabakh appeal, though in theory it is free to use the money as it chooses. "It can be used for any humanitarian need as determined by the Diocese," said a source at the foundation.

However, the donation came after Archbishop Hovsepian told Lincy that the church was holding a telethon for Karabakh, and that the Bishop of Karabakh, Primate Pargev Martirosian, would be attending.

Separately, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation in the United States has raised close to $1 million in seven weeks for its Artsakh Fund. A military commander from Karabakh, Antranig Haroutunian, has been instrumental in drumming up support for this appeal, with a 23-city speaking tour.

The ARF western region, which so far has raised $500,000, has already sent $400,000 directly to the Karabakh authorities in Stepanakert, according to the fund committee's chairman Khajag Dikijian. He said he did not have information on how the money would be spent.

"The money will be at the disposal of the government of Artsakh and they can use it as they best see fit," he said. Information on how they spend the cash has been requested so that donors can be told, he added.

Publicly at least, Haroutunian insists that money raised will be spent for humanitarian purposes, to buy food, medicine, and clothing for the people of Karabakh. He says he tells those who ask why he doesn't use their gift to buy guns that it isn't the responsibility of people in the United States to aid them in this way.

"My response is simple—I tell them Ankara provides the weapons," said Haroutunian, indicating that Armenians seize guns and ammunition when they take Azeri stronghold, which they believe were supplied by Turkey.

But with nods and smiles, there seems to be an unspoken but clear belief among many donors that their money will indeed buy weapons and ammunition for fighters in Karabakh.

"I presume that the money donated so far through our fund-raiser is given with a cer-
Many of those involved were conscious of having separate and competing campaigns for money, but none believed it hindered the effort to raise cash.

"It is unfortunate that things started out this way," said Khatij Dikijian, "but I don't see any real problem with it. Prospective donors always emphasize that it is not important where the donation is given as long as it is a reputable organization or church or benevolent organization. They are all ultimately for the same goal." He added that the ARF was not asked if it would like to join the Diocese/Medical Outreach campaign. "I think we would have taken part if we had been asked."

Mary Najarian, of Medical Outreach, said they did consider asking other organizations to join but decided against asking any of the political parties. "We did not want it to be a political issue, this was to be absolutely humanitarian," she said.

Odette Bazil, who said the Armenian Relief Society was making a separate collection in Britain, saw no problems either—"The more the better."

There seems to be little shortage of Diaspora cash to aid the struggle in Karabakh, even if the intent behind the donations is sometimes shrouded in a fog of euphemism and unasked questions on the part of donors. Many [see story next page] clearly want their money to be used at least in part for military purposes, and in this they would be no different from, say, some Irish-Americans' aid to Ulster.

Though never explicitly stated, those receiving the cash in Karabakh will have little difficulty if they decide that buying
Excuses, Excuses

LEVON JERNAZIAN

It should have been so simple—indepedence. And it turned out so complex. If post-communist Armenia is the answer to our prayers, how does one explain the Diaspora’s inactive majority? Why is there so little aid for Armenia? Where are the legions of volunteers?

There are the obvious explanations—the absence of effective organizational structures in the Diaspora or the politics of partisanship. These have to do with power or group interest.

Then there are the psychological reasons—the multiple layers of rationalization and self-justification. These allow us to remain passive with our conscience intact. Despite a glamorous exterior facade, however, the fortress is a fortress nevertheless, and the swamp is still a swamp.

So, what are the layers of excuses?

**LAYER 1: Earthquake relief efforts showed that assistance doesn’t get there.**

This is perhaps the most popular rationalization and not completely unfounded. But even if an organization does not merit trust, how difficult is it to find another? Are they all untrustworthy?

If you want to do something, you find a way. If you do not, you find an excuse. It is easy to convince oneself that inaction is the result of someone else’s dishonesty. A Layer One type who accuses others of dishonesty may be projecting his own shrouded dishonesty. What you end up with is self-deception.

**LAYER 2: I’ve already done my bit. Now it’s other people’s turn.**

Who is to decide the necessary measures and limits of aid? How is assistance rendered by one person dependent on others? The subconscious logic of this rationalization says, “I’ve done enough to look good in my own and my friends’ eyes. I don’t feel the need to do more.”

What you have here is self-assertiveness and egotism masked as altruism. But who determines standards of assistance and need? Perhaps the problem lies with the community’s standards.

**LAYER 3: I can’t do anything by myself. Let them get organized.**

In the language of the subconscious, read this as “I’m too small, inconsequential and weak to bear the burden of responsibility.”

Gather a few Layer Three types and you end up with responsibility so diffused that it becomes nobody’s responsibility. But responsibility that belongs to everyone, really belongs to no one. And so, two problems are resolved simultaneously. The individual’s irresponsible, womb-like peace is preserved, and the burden of responsibility is kept at a distance.

“Let them get organized” assumes the need for leadership and control. Isn’t it high time that we rid ourselves of Fathers and Big Brothers? In Armenia and Karabagh, it certainly is.

We could replace the naive logic that demands that we be led, with the mature thinking of independent-minded people who don’t wait, but themselves lead — leading even those who have not learned to make their own decisions.

**LAYER 4: The policies of the Armenian government are wrong.**

This is the case of the inner dictator speaking. For the Layer Four type everything is predictable and nuance is non-existent.

The Layer Four type quickly forgets that it’s not possible to plan and predict everything, because a populace evolves according to its own laws, which assumes a certain state of chaos. Besides, it makes little sense to bitch when bombs are blasting.

The Layer Four type often rationalizes in a pompous political tone. His subconscious says, “I’m a person of serious political convictions, so I can hold back support when the government pursues the wrong policies.” The result is “actively convinced” inaction.

**LAYER 5: Whatever we do, it’s no good. We’re not organized; that’s how we’ve always been and that’s how we’ll always be.**

What you have here is national devaluation and self-hate, feelings that are prevalent among ethnic minorities. Self-hate results from one’s awareness of one’s own national weakness in the face of great external forces. It is often a source of childish rage.

Self-hate seems to say, “Why aren’t we strong enough so that I can have a secure sense of belonging, without having to suffer or work?”

The Layer Five type finds it hard to mesh with ‘other’ cultures, but feels uncomfortable with his own. His struggle for identity and belonging makes him furious and judgmental. By judging others, he elevates himself.

The Layer Five type stresses his superiority over others often to break free from them.

**LAYER 6: The absence of rationalization**

The layer six type has no need for self-justification—his conscience has been effectively silenced. His ties to things Armenian have probably been severed. He has no need for a defense because there is little to fight for or against.

The Layer Six type harbors foreign, flashy, seductive and easily-appealing values. At some point, he might desire a return like some third-generation Armenian-Americans. But it’s difficult to re-assume an assimilated identity.

It’s impossible to understand every flight of the imagination and layer of rationalization. But it’s possible to explore if we resist the last convenient excuse, “All of this applies not to me, but to my neighbor.”

And then, who knows, maybe we can find other means of self-justification....

Dr. Levon Jernazian is a California Licensed Clinical Psychologist. He has been active in the Karabakh Movement and has studied its social psychological aspects.
Cents and Sensibility

By ANI HADJIAN

We wanted to find out who gave to the various Karabakh fundraising campaigns and why. Several dozen people in California were polled on the telephone. It should be noted, however, that the opinion poll is neither a representative sample of Armenians globally nor is it a replicable pool; it is a swatch of prevailing opinions and consequential attitudes held by ordinary diasporan Armenians on the recent Karabakh-related fundraising efforts.

Despite the international media coverage of events in Karabakh, a small margin of Armenians—U.S.-born and immigrants alike—had not heard of Karabakh nor knew anything of the recent political turmoil. Others were deeply troubled and acknowledged the state of emergency.

Participation in Karabakh fundraising efforts was mixed. A little under half of those questioned had not donated. Many Armenians who considered themselves patriotic and felt connected to the Armenian community lacked information on any fundraising campaign. Lack of publicity contributed to lack of giving. Those who do not watch Armenian TV programs or subscribe to a political newspaper are excluded from information on a Karabakh fund. Individuals had not donated money simply because they had not been asked. "There is not enough publicity... They only reach the same people, one surveyee commented." Those who were aware of fundraising efforts but did not give, pointed to reasons of organizational fragmentation. "They have no central objective," Others distrusted the ability of the organizations to use funds wisely and wanted to know the specific use of funds. Some had lost faith in organizations’ use of funds for stated purposes.

Those who donated said they gave to a certain organization as a matter of convenience. That particular organization had done the legwork to achieve visibility and accessibility, and therefore received funds from the public. A larger number said they had donated to the ARF campaign than to the Diocese-Medical Outreach effort. In most cases, political and religious affiliations were unimportant, they said. Instead, the survival of Karabakh Armenians spurred the giving. Many had donated money to church-related organizations. Surprisingly, some frequently hesitated when asked specifically to whom they sent their checks. Most recalled the TV or newspaper ad to which they had responded. "I think it was the Karabakh committee. Was there a committee? Or was it through the AYF?" It was unclear whether it was a joint effort by several organizations, a central body or a single organization.

A considerable amount of donors and nondonors alike believed that the Karabakh issue is of primary importance. "This has to be dealt with first. This problem will determine a lot for Armenia, much hinges on this," one said. Cynicism had seeped in, however, since a majority of those who gave said they were not convinced that their giving "would really make a difference."

And what did they think their money would be used for? Most said humanitarian needs—food, shelter and medicine. A very small percentage said for guns, "certainly for guns." Others considered both a great necessity, while some insisted that their money should be used for other purposes, mostly to schools.

Ani Hadjian, a Los Angeles-based social activist and writer, organized, conducted and tabulated the survey for AIM.
Of Stone and Steel

Oshin Yeghiazarians, 46, is chairman of Chene (pronounced ‘shen’) France and has visited Karabakh seven times in the last three years. An architect by profession, he spends more time rebuilding border villages around the enclave than he does drafting suburban Parisian homes.

By VIKEN BERBERIAN

What is Chene and who are the founders?
Our work is primarily focused on Karabakh and the border villages at the edges of the enclave. Chene has 12 founders, most of whom were student friends at Yerevan’s Polytechnic Institute. One day they decided to move to Karabakh and rebuild an abandoned border village east of Zankezour called Spitakashen.

By 1988 the gang of 12 had grown to 36 and decided to settle in Karabakh after rehabilitating Spitakashen. They are now all registered residents of the region. They have built six homes in Spitakashen, dug out an irrigation system, and brought electricity to the village. With the exception of indigenous stones, all of the building material was brought from Armenia by helicopter.

It was the inhabitants of the surrounding villages who asked that the students stay. They considered Spitakashen a buffer zone between Azerbaijan and the interior of Karabakh.

If only six homes were built, where did all of the students live?
The students decided that whoever among them got married first could move into one of the newly built homes. Meanwhile, the rest of them would live in the village’s existing dwellings.

There is no one living there now. The inhabitants of Spitakashen retreated into nearby villages seven months ago because of Azerbaijani attacks, but the village is still standing and the students still visit now and then.

When did Chene organize in France?
It all began with my trip to Armenia following the earthquake. The most organized group that assisted in relief efforts was a legion of 600 volunteers from Karabakh. In Leninakan, I stayed under their tents for three days where I made my first contacts.

I returned in March 1989 as an envoy of Médecins du Monde. I was one of the first Armenians to officially visit Karabakh when tensions were beginning to simmer.

During a four-day trip to Stepanakert, I met Arkady Volsky, who was the Soviet representative to the enclave, and negotiated with him to allow foreign organizations to have an official presence in the region.

Nearly a month later, I returned to Karabakh and stayed for a month. All in all, I’ve spent more than three months there. During all this time, Chene existed de facto in Armenia and had an unofficial presence in France.

We are a group of 16 activists in France. Two of us are publishers, one is an engineer and another is a doctor. We provide financial assistance, technology and knowhow. For instance, we’re teaching more efficient agricultural practices to villagers in Zankezour and Karabakh, so they can become self-sufficient.

How many new homes has Chene built?
Today, we oversee three villages in Zankezour. Construction has already begun on five new dwellings in Nerkin Khndzoresk, two new homes in Khozov and five damaged houses in Maghanjough.

How much does it cost to build a home and do the villagers actually own them once they're completed?
It costs $5,000 to build a new house and all of them belong to Chene. The homes are leased for 10 years for 1,000 rubles a year. The rent money is collected by the village’s collective council and used to improve public works projects. After 10 years, Chene transfers ownership of a house to the tenants.

Who are your contributors?
The Armenian Relief Society recently donated $20,000 to our fund, and the Armenian General Benevolent Union contributed $4,000. We have used all of the institutional donations for construction.

The board of directors has also poured in a lot of money into Chene, and we’ve set up a system for donors in France where monthly withdrawals are made from their bank accounts.

We’re also tapping into institutions in the United States.

How much has Chene contributed in dollars to Karabakh and Zankezour?
Between 1988-1990 our aid from France to Karabakh was very hush-hush. No one knew what we were doing or what we took. The contributions came strictly from our tightly knit group of 16 directors. Our initial shipments included photocopying machines, paper, post-ers, Swedish automatic jack hammers totaling $50,000. All of this aid was for Spitakashen.

We became official in 1990, and since then we have shipped an additional $30,000 in supplies and material to Zankezour and Karabakh.

Have you delivered military hardware or communications equipment to officials in Karabakh?
No, but independent of Chene, a few of us have taken hundreds of military flashlights, radio-scanning equipment and walkie-talkies from France. You must understand that this activity takes place independent of Chene.

What we’ve done is take these supplies directly into Karabakh, because there isn’t an infrastructure there to attend to the basic needs of people. You know that, for example, there is no electricity there. It’s total darkness. It’s a war zone.

The flashlights we send help soldiers get around. And you know that communication is very difficult because there are no proper phone lines, and so the walkie-talkies will connect otherwise isolated villages and residents.
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Yezidis and Kurds: The Two Faces of Armenia's Largest Ethnic Minority

By ARMEINEH JOHANNES and ANI KLTCHIAN

Life can be a little rough when you're popularly viewed as a devil-worshipper, but then the Yezidis have always had something of an identity problem.

Until 1988, they were officially considered part of the Kurdish population. Today, they speak such good Armenian that it is often hard to distinguish them from Armenians—some have even adopted the "ian" suffix at the end of their names. But the Yezidis have a distinct religion and a well-developed social structure.

There are about 200,000 Yezidis, living mainly in the Sinjar and Seikhan regions of northern Iraq. Lalesh, in the Sinjar region near Mosul, is considered to be their Holy Land and is the site of the tomb of their principal saint. In Turkey they live in Tour Abdin, Maksin, Diyarbekir, the upper valley of the Tigris River, Mush, Sasun, Bitlis, Van—in short, on the territories of Western Armenia.

The first migration of Yezidis to Armenia took place in 1830-1840, from Iraq. Since then they have spread to other parts of the Caucasus as well. But the greatest diaspora of the Yezidis is in the Armenian republic: there were 5,190 Yezidis in Armenia, according to the most recent census in 1989.

No one really knows the origins of the Yezidi religion, which holds that they were created quite separately from the rest of humanity, not even descended from Adam and Eve. Their belief system denies the existence of evil and, therefore, of hell.

One Yezidi myth tells how Satan, or Melek-Tavous, repented his sin of pride and was forgiven by God, who reinstated him as chief of all the angels. This has often led people mistakenly to label the Yezidis as devil-worshippers.

Melek-Tavous (King Peacock) rules the universe with six other angels, all of them represented by the image of peacocks. Seven bronze peacocks called Sanjaq are kept at Lalesh and worshipped by the Yezidis. Each year the Sanjaq, the largest of which weighs almost 700 pounds, are paraded around Yezidi neighborhoods by religious leaders, and through them the believer is supposed to receive a share of wealth.

The Holy Bible of the Yezidis—the Kitabi-Jalwa—was discovered in Lalesh at the end of the 19th Century by Anastasis Marr, an Arab Catholic scientist. It is entirely dedicated to Melek-Tavous, who calls on his people not to succumb to other religions and to remain honest. He promises prosperity to the faithful and threatens the disobedient.

Marr also deciphered the 33 letters of the Yezidi alphabet, which is based on the Loukotka, in his "The Development Of The Written Language," which includes illustrations of the Yezidi letters.
Yezidism bears traces of Iranian Zoroastrian, Christian, Buddhist and Islamic influence. In the eastern world, peacocks represent beauty and grandeur and have occupied an important symbolic position in the Sufi religion. Muslims see peacocks as a bird of paradise, symbolizing pride and vanity.

But although God, or Zwade, is seen as the creator of the universe, he has no direct concern for his creation and is not viewed as its protector or patron. Each morning, Yezidis pray to the Sun as a source of life, so that there will be prosperity and well-being in the world, according to Hassan Hassanian, a representative of the Yezidis in Armenia.

Yezidis generally remain separate from their neighbors and do not attempt to make converts. They are mainly farmers in rural areas, although nomadic tribes do exist. Wednesday is the Holy Day and Saturday, the day of rest.

Their society is a rigid religious hierarchy of four main layers, which are kept separate by rules requiring them to marry only within their own sub-group. At the top are the Mires, who are elected in the families of sheiks. Below them are the Sheiks and the Pires, who inherit their positions and are said to be descendants of Melek-Tavous. Sheiks at-tend funerals and weddings, say prayers, baptize male children, and offer spiritual guidance. Pires assist in wedding ceremonies and funerals. Next come the Merides, or believers. Every community of Merides has its Sheiks and Pires, who visit their homes and receive gifts. Marriage to non-Yezidis is rare.

Baby boys are baptized on their first birthday, when a Sheik takes a handful of the child’s hair, recites some prayers, then cuts the hair.

Some Kurds speak the same dialect as the Yezidis—Kourmanji—but the majority of Yezidis consider themselves a separate nation from the Kurds. Some believe themselves to be that part of the ethnic Kurds which has retained the original pre-Islamic religion.

The Yezidis and the Kurds were registered as different nationalities, even in the early Soviet years. The 1926 All-Union census, for instance, put the number of Yezidis in Armenia at 12,237 and the Muslim Kurds at up to 3,000. In 1931, the Yezidis were entered under the same category as the Kurds and until 1988 were considered part of the same ethnic group.

The Kurds themselves strongly oppose the idea of “separationism” among the Yezidis, which is part of the rising feeling for self-determination throughout the former Soviet Union. The Muslim Kurds consider the Yezidis as part of their nation, and do not recognize their claim to distinct nationality, just as they are acknowledged as a distinct nation by the government of Turkey.

During the national democratic movement in Armenia from 1988 to 1990, however, most Kurds left the republic and very few remain in Armenia today.

AIM Paris correspondent Armineh Johannes was in Armenia in September. AIM Yerevan Bureau staff member Ani Kitchian is now based in Los Angeles.
Kurds and Yezidis: Two Voices

Until the upheaval of the national democratic movement in 1988, some 4,200 Kurds lived in Armenia. Now only a handful remain, most having left the republic. Kurds (in Arabic, "nomad" or "herdsman") have often been confused with Yezidis, so we interviewed a representative of each community, in Armenian, to discuss the similarities and differences between them. Shakro Mhoyan, a Kurd, is a corresponding member of the Armenian Academy of Sciences. Hassanei Sheikh Mamoud is chief editor of the Yezidi newspaper Dinge Yezidisa.

By ANI KLATCHIAN

AIM: Who are the Kurds and Yezidis?

MHOYAN: The Kurds and the Yezidis belong to the same nation. During the Muslim Arab expansion, many nationalities in the region, including Kurds, were converted to Islam. A few, the Yezidis, retained the old religion.

Thus, the Kurds and the Yezidis are part of the same nation, separated on religious lines. Yezidi is not an ethnonym, it is the name of a religious group of ethnic Kurds.

MAMOUD: Some Yezidi intellectuals identify themselves as Kurds, although most of them are registered as Yezidis. They consider it advantageous to be part of the Kurds, who number 20 million in the world. This is a matter of individual approach. It is their attempt to force their point of view on others that is unacceptable.

We have been told by our ancestors that we are Yezidis and that the name of our religion is Sharaffuddin, named after a historical individual, just as Christianity is named after Christ. The term "Yezidi" cannot be considered the name of the religion only, because no nation in the world is named after its religion, and secondly, there are no religious alphabets. The Yezidi alphabet is the alphabet of the Yezidi people.

Are there any linguistic differences?

MHOYAN: Absolutely none. I am a Yezidi Kurd. I speak the same language as the Muslim Kurds in Turkey.

MAMOUD: There is no such language as Kurdish. The Kurds speak different dialects, such as Kourmangie, Soranie and Kouranie. Kourmangie is the dialect also spoken by the Yezidis. A Kurd never says I speak Kurdish. It is a term attributed to them by others.

Why did the Kurds emigrate from Armenia? Were any threats made? Were they forced to leave?

MHOYAN: We haven't recorded any such cases, but the term "discomfort" might explain the situation. There might have been isolated cases of insults. But I would like to stress that there has never been a policy of oppression or deportation by Armenians against Kurds.

MAMOUD: The reality is that the Kurds used to live together with the Azeris in Armenia. Their children attended Azerbaijani schools and there were marital ties between them. Naturally they followed their kinsmen when they left. Isn't it strange that they should leave with the Azeris, instead of staying with the Yezidis, whom they consider as one people with themselves? The Yezidis and Armenians sent delegations asking them to stay, but in vain.

What are the social conditions of Kurds and Yezidis in Armenia today? What are their social aspirations and political demands?

MHOYAN: Several Kurdish national cultural centers have been recently established in Europe — in Sweden, Germany and France, and Armenia is no longer the only such country. But we cannot deny the fact that the Kurdish national cultural system created in Armenia since the 1920s was the first, both in the Soviet Union and abroad. It must be said that this was established at a time when Armenia itself was in desperate need of resources to restore its collapsed economy and to feed its starving population, as well as thousands of orphans and refugees — the result of the Genocide.

The efforts of the Armenian intelligentsia to create Kurdish cultural centers were very valuable at a time when we didn't have our own intellectuals. The system is still active. There is the Kurdiological Department of the Institute of Oriental Studies in Yerevan, one of the seven equal branches within the Academy of Sciences of Armenia.

We also have a special department of Kurdish writers in the Writers Union of Armenia. We have our newspaper Ria Taza (New Way), which has been published since 1930. The first editors, translators and publishers were Armenian, so Armenians actually established Ria Taza.

There are daily radio broadcasts for Kurds which I believe have been one of the most important stimuli for our cultural life. Kurds all over the world, especially those in Turkey, have often expressed their gratitude for these broadcasts. During the past 30 years, when the threat of assimilation was imminent, those programs from Yerevan played an important role in the national survival of the Kurds.

MAMOUD: From 1931 to 1988, Yezidis were represented as Kurds. The Karabakh national independence movement stimulated the awakening of our own national self-consciousness. As a result, Yezidis throughout the former Soviet Union are now registered by their own nationality.

The first Yezidi newspaper, The Voice of Yezidis, began in Yerevan in 1990. It is in Armenian, since we need to introduce ourselves to our Armenian brothers. We have also been promised a cultural center.
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Stamp of Approval

By MARIA ARMOURDAN
Special to AIM

It was the first time that a single person was honored by two major countries on a postage stamp,” says Los Angeles artist Ren Wicks about the William Saroyan stamp he designed. “It was also the last commemorative stamp to be issued by the now-defunct Soviet Union, so it was very historical."

Regardless of the joint effort, however, the stamps simultaneously issued by the two countries a year ago this month were not identical to each other. The Soviets tampered with Wicks’ artwork for their version, darkening Saroyan’s face in order to make him appear more ethnic. While Wicks was initially disturbed about the adjustment, after a while his reservations subsided as he came to a realization. 

“In a sense, the Soviet Union’s reflection of Saroyan’s character was probably more realistic than the American version. Saroyan was a brooding, controversial, iconoclastic man; and their interpretation accentuates that.” Although Wicks had never met Saroyan, he gathered information from an documentary film and photographs, both obtained from Paul Kalanian in Fresno, California. From these sources, in two months Wicks painted five acrylic-and-gouache comprehensive preliminaries for the U.S. Postal Service’s Stamp Advisory Committee. While Wicks wanted to depict Saroyan’s character accurately, that intent was apparently not shared by the committee, which, according to Wicks, wanted to portray Saroyan as very “Americanized.”

It chose Wicks’ least favorite design comprehensive, the least dramatic. “Saroyan had a very craggy face, with very heavy, chiseled and rugged features,” Wicks elaborates. “This portrait didn’t show that. He also looks like a very nice man in the portrait that they chose, which he was not. He was actually very irascible and difficult, kind of a nasty guy, and I wanted to show that.”

At 73, Wicks has been a commercial artist for more than 50 years. Unfortunately, he is unable to retain any of his comprehensives, as the Postal Service takes possession of all related materials. He was compensated $3,000 for the work.

Only 900,000 Saroyan stamps of the Soviet version were printed, compared to 150 million issued in the United States. Like all commemorative stamps, the Saroyan stamp was slated for one year’s availability. Two months after its May 1991 release, most local post office supplies were depleted. When the Soviet version of the Saroyan stamp is officially announced as off-sale, all remaining stamps will be recalled and destroyed. The USPS Saroyan stamps are still available at Philatelic Centers in most cities (call the local post office for location) and by mail order from the Philatelic Catalog, put out by the Postal Service. It will be listed for the last time in its June catalog.
The German Connection

DIE HOREN: ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR LITERATUR, KUNST UND KRITIK
Published by Kurt Morawietz, Hanover, Germany
Fourth Quarter, 1990, pp 216, DM15

THE STORY OF THE LAST THOUGHT
By Edgar Hilsenrath
Scribners, London, UK
1990, pp 455, £14.95

DIE ERFOLGREICHSTEN ARMENIER DER WELT
Compiled by Sabrina Stepanian & Diran Baghdadian
1991, Vienna, Austria

By ALINE S. KASSABIAN

Three recent publications in German—a literary journal, a novel, and a reference book for general audiences—focus on Armenian history and letters.

"They are talking about Armenians again in Germany," writes Dr. Raffi Kantian in an essay that appeared in a back issue of Die Horen (Goddess of Seasons), a German review of arts and literature. Kantian—the special editor of that issue—is an author and a translator based in Hanover, Germany.

He has published several books, including Die Löwen (The Lions, 1983) and Literatur der Armenischen Diaspora '89 (1989). He has also translated the works of authors Zareh Khrakhani and Paruyr Sevak into German.

The 1990 issue of Die Horen includes more than 20 translations from Daniel Varoujan, Vahan Derian, Silva Kaputianik and Gevorg Emin. Kantian has some original translations that appear in the German language for the first time.

The issue features essays on watershed political events of the late '80s that redefined Armenia, and on literary life in the Diaspora and the influence of Soviet authors on Armenian literature.

Tessa Hoffmann, a Berlin-based Armenian human rights activist, contributed to the journal. So did Alexander Topschian, a translator and literary critic from Yerevan. The publication includes biographical information on all of the contributors and authors.

The 216-page issue is entitled, "Armenien: Macht Licht! & Freiheit" (Armenia: Turn on the Lights! & Freedom)—a tributary reference to two poems by Paruyr Sevak.

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Edgar Hilsenrath
THE STORY OF THE LAST THOUGHT

The Story of the Last Thought by Edgar Hilsenrath (the original German edition, Das Märchen vom Letzten Gedanken, was published in Munich by R. Piper GmbH & Co. in 1989) opens at the deathbed of Thovma Khatsian, the main character. In his "last thought," a wizened Thovma is transported back into scenes of the death marches, guided by Meddah, the novel's narrator. There, Khatsian meets the parents he never knew. He listens to tales about his native village, Yedi Su, and to harrowing stories of pogroms.

The first part of the novel introduces Khatsian to the public hanging of three Armenians. It then moves on to Thovma's father, Vartan, who, convicted of treason, is rotting in a Turkish prison.

Hilsenrath depicts the brutality of prison life through grizzly portrayals and the use of obscene language. These scenes are often interspersed with fantastical and symbolic images from a fairy tale.

As Thovma's "last thought" journeys through Yedi Su, the setting shifts to Armenian rural life in the late 1800s. In a style reminiscent of a folk tale, Hilsenrath recounts Vartan's passage to maturity and how he was tracked down as an adult by Ottoman authorities.

While telling the story of the Khatsian family, Hilsenrath describes the simple architecture, rustic lifestyle and daily activities of a community increasingly threatened by persecution.

The fate which awaits Vartan Khatsian in the last part of the book is sealed with the signature of Hilsenrath, a survivor of the Holocaust. The author steers the plot to mirror the trauma and collective experience of the Jewish and Armenian genocides.

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A bit of geography, some history, and a compilation of information about famous Armenians make up Die Erfolgreichsten Armenier der Welt (Successful Armenians of the World) by Sabrina Stepanian and Diran Baghdadian.

The authors explain that their publication is meant to highlight Armenian talent and promote an awareness of the contributions of Armenians to world culture. They believe that this subject has not received the attention it deserves.

The 112-page book includes some 235 listings of well-known individuals from around the world. Each listing includes a brief biographical sketch and a summary of the individual's professional and artistic achievements. For ease of reference, the names are classified under various categories, such as journalism, sports and politics. The book also features an index.

Successful Armenians of the World opens with a foreword by noted actor and activist Sos Sargissian.
The April 24 That Wasn’t

By ARA OSHAGAN
Special to AIM

As the morning of April 24, 1992, wore on, Armenians across the globe awoke to commemorate the 77th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. The day that faced them would be an important one.

Only a few weeks earlier, the fledgling Armenian republic had become a member of the United Nations; it was still knee-deep in the apparently intractable Karabakh conflict; its disastrous economy showed no signs of improvement, and its relations with Turkey had started to turn more toward hostility. The Armenian republic was reaching out into the world and looking to the diasporan communities for economic support and political influence.

More than any other event, April 24 commemorations have the ability to bring Armenians together to voice their demands in a unified and, more importantly, powerful manner, especially of the Turkish government and its supporters. Founding members of the Armenian Monument Memorial Council in Montebello, California, remember when all community groups and factions came together to build the monument and participate in balanced, strong, effective commemorations at the site. Michael Minassian, the ARF representative at the time, remembers the effect of the gatherings on American and Turkish government officials who often reacted sensitively to the impact of a strong program.

Set against this backdrop, the 1992 commemorations should have been momentous.

They were and they weren’t.

In some communities, people rose up to the challenge. In Tehran, 60,000 people took to the streets; in New Jersey, 2,000 gathered for the commemoration; one-half million paid their respects to the Genocide martyrs in Armenia; in Holland, a week-long series of commemorative events including a concert, several film screenings, lectures by prominent historians, an exhibition and a symposium drew a total crowd of nearly 1,000 in a community which numbers barely twice that.

In other communities the response was dismal. In some—Montreal and Sydney—there was, plain and simple, no effort to hold unified commemorations. In others—Boston and Fresno—minor initial trends toward unification since the 75th anniversary are now detailed. And worse, some communities—San Francisco and Los Angeles, where commemorations have been unified for many years—were plagued with division and infighting this year.

The ram did cut into the April 24 commemorations in Boston, but by then, other disruptive forces had done their work. Since the 75th anniversary of the Genocide, in 1990, the commemorations in Boston have been held in unison at the initiative of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation/Dashnaktsutian (ARD) and the Armenian Democratic Liberal Organization/Ramgarv (ADL)—the two major political parties. All churches, cultural, social and political organizations and other community groups participated. A trend was clearly being set.

Then came 1992. Beside the annual Massachusetts State House commemorations in which all parties participate, two commemoration events were held—one by the ARF and the other by the ADL.

Why this divisiveness?

The answer depends on who you approach. On one side of the wall is the ADL, where conspiracy theories abound. According to Kevork Marashlian, executive secretary of ADL Eastern U.S. and Canada, an attempt to hold a joint commemoration was made: three pan-Armenian community meetings were held, but they did not get very far. Why? The ARF, he said, wanted to do something political during the commemorations and would not disclose to the ADL its exact nature.

To the ADL, this was unacceptable and the meetings ended. The ADL had no choice but to organize its own commemoration.

“The ARF has a political agenda to be separate—a worldwide political agenda,” Marashlian added, “and that’s why practically nowhere in the world were the April 24 commemorations held jointly.” The reason for this, he speculated, were probably connected to Karabakh.

“We have no intentions of bringing Karabakh-related issues here or taking our issues there,” Marashlian said.

On the other side of the wall is the ARF. Vatche Proudian, editor of Haarenit, the ARF Eastern U.S. Central Committee organ, took part in the pan-Armenian community meetings. “We had a few meetings and then it all broke down,” he said. “The meeting wanted to separate the cultural, religious and political commemorations, and we had no problems with that.” The ARF then brought a program for a political event to the meeting. Proudian said the importance and nature of the program were fully explained in as much detail as was available. “The idea was to connect the 1915 Genocide to the genocide today in Karabakh.” After that, according to Proudian, “they [the ADL] never showed up again,” and the ARF could not wait, and went on to organize its own commemoration.

“It’s unfortunate,” he lamented, “that we still have to explain to some Armenians that the Genocide was a political act; its essence was political, so today’s message must be the same.”

What about a worldwide ARF agenda to derail joint commemorations? “I won’t even respond to that,” Proudian said. “We don’t want to waste time with such petty matters when the Armenian people are in a life-and-death situation.”

Disagreement and denouncement were also the playing cards of the political parties in all three major California communities. In Fresno, commemorations were affected by the fallout between the ARF and ADL over Karabakh fundraising. As a result, the Armenian Community Council, the two-year-old pan-Armenian committee, is in danger of a premature death. In San Francisco, commemorations have been held jointly for 15 years, but this year some community organizations did not participate.

Perhaps the most divisive and pitched battles were staged in Los Angeles. The ARF and ADL went head-to-head in their media. Nor Or, the ADL’s official newspaper in the western U.S., published a call from the ADL and the Social Democratic Hunchakian Party to the ARF to jointly commemorate April 24. Astazov, the ARF’s official publication, responded by saying the three parties last year had agreed that commemorations would be left up to the churches and other community organizations. The parties would support the event and organize in parallel other political-oriented activities.

There was dialogue ended.

Some community organizations took part in the traditional commemoration at the Montebello monument; an event which in years past had drawn 5,000-10,000 people according to the Memorial Council’s ADL representative, George Mandossian, this year drew less than 2,000. On the other side of
town, 500-1,000 people attended the Ramgavars and Hunchak political meeting at the Dickranian school.

Why these cat-fights after 13 years of cooperation?

Dr. Krikor Krikorian, president of the ADL Western Region executive body, said the 1991 declaration of the three parties was only for that single year. "We believe that political parties should distinguish between political and religious commemorations," he said.

Based on this, during a standard protocol meeting between the Dashnaks and Hunchaks, the latter (who also represented the ADL at the meeting) asked the ARF if they want to hold a joint political event on April 24. "The ARF simply refused," Krikorian said. "The ARF is doing this on purpose."

Echoing the free-floating conspiracy theory, he added: "A general directive has been sent to all communities to make sure commemorations are not held jointly.

Why would the ARF take such a step?

"The ARF wants to monopolize April 24 commemorations," Krikorian said. "They want to say that only the ARF remembers the Genocide, just as they have done with the struggle in Karabakh."

Speaking for the ARF, Kevork Santikian, chairman of its Western U.S. Central Committee, said there was no formal attempt to do a joint political event with the political parties. The other parties wanted the ARF to co-sponsor the event at the Dickranian school, but Santikian said, "We don't consider that a political event."

As to an alleged ARF directive to derail joint commemorations, he said the party works in a decentralized manner, and that the Central Committee makes all regional decisions in its jurisdiction. He conceded that the Montebello event was not as successful this year. "Armenians are not putting enough into it," he said, and added that "maybe the proper kind of leadership is not there." He speculated that he may even be part of the problem.

Amid the hustle and bustle of political muscle-flexing in the Diaspora, the new Armenian republic still waits to reap the harvest of the one advantage it has over the 1918 republic—the existence of an organized and potentially powerful Diaspora.

This year, however, the Diaspora whose numbers run to a half of the worldwide Armenian population, missed the opportunity to shout what Turkey's small new neighbor can only whisper—the injustice of the Genocide and the continuing refusal to accept responsibility are still part of our agenda.

At least for now, unified and concerted support from the Diaspora seems still a long way off.

Ara Oshagan is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.
Child of Chaos, Man of Light
Torkom Saraydarian Wades through the Religions of East and West to Find the Primal Source
By LEON FERMANIAN
Special to AIM

Fasten your seatbelts. Coming into contact with Torkom Saraydarian’s books can be an inspiring and cosmically shocking experience—simultaneously. Consider New Dimensions in Healing.

Torkom Saraydarian—assimilating the higher light

Saraydarian’s latest and 34th book. In it, he weaves a fabulous web of ideas, exercises and visualizations, until the open-minded reader comes to realize what Saraydarian calls “the divinity breathing within him, within others, and within all of Cosmos in Space.”

It is ironic that this book, which contains time-tested, holistic healing methods from all major civilizations, has been synthesized by this Armenian who was born in the Vilayet of Sivas during the hellish years following the Armenian deportations and massacres of 1915. Coming from that darkness where place on the many mysteries of life—the real relationship of man to man and man, to the group, and the group to the nation and humanity.

Charged up with these holistic ideas, Saraydarian left Turkey with some teachers and friends of his father, and began his quest for knowledge in monasteries, caves and temples of secret brotherhoods in the Far and Middle East.

He also studied in the Armenian seminary in Jerusalem, and subsequently served in the Armenian Church as a minister for five years. “I think the Armenian Church is a very deep church and has a deep understanding of true Christianity,” Saraydarian said in a recent interview at the Aquarian Educational Center, which he founded in Agoura, California, 30 years ago. “But my own interest was to relate with many different religions and philosophies, because I wanted to expand my consciousness.

“I am holistically oriented and my consciousness is synthesizing all these thoughts.”

He has studied and assimilated all the major religions, from Christianity to the Trans-Himalayan Teachings, from Islam to American Indian traditions. What similarities has he found in them? “My experience is that all religions have one origin, one source,” he responds. “But people take the source and change it according to their mental, emotional orientations. So religions became more or less distorted. In my own opinion, the source of the light and wisdom is so immense and infinite that nobody can formulate it and turn it into a religion or philosophy. They all fall short.”

And how can one contact this force? “First, everyone must know their own religion,” Saraydarian responds, “but must go deeper into the meaning of the religion and try to actualize it. You have to practice it. To do so you have to meditate. Meditation is assimilation of the light in the principles. And eventually, the differences disappear, because you are dealing with the source.

“If you study deeper and you pass the jungles that they have created in the religions,” he continues, “you will see that they are all telling the same thing. Actually, the infinity in you is neither born nor dies, neither incarnates nor discriminates. It’s your body that dies. You eternally are!”

“In my essence, I believe that the only reality is endlessness. That’s why man is so beautiful, because he is not condemned to death after he leaves his body. He is an endless something, an expanding dynamism. That’s what makes me really happy that man has no limitations. Any man who puts limitations on himself is committing suicide. There is always possibility and opportunity and challenge to expand. Expansion is the realization of the treasures hidden within you.”

But can this be known without an enormous leap of faith? “That’s why I have written 41 books and I have another maybe 80 volumes to publish.”

Indeed, Saraydarian has published 34 major books and 15 booklets, some of which have been translated into German, Spanish, Greek and other languages. His seminal works include Science of Becoming Oneself (1969), and Science of Meditation (1971), which teaches how to approach life from multiple angles. The Flame of the Heart, the Lucid Purpose of Life, and the matter of Psychology of Cooperation and Group Consciousness could be considered some of his most accessible books.

In the latter he writes: “Members of a
group must have a common goal. Five factors are involved in this: They Know themselves; They know each other; They know what the common goal is; They know how to reach that goal; and They support, encourage, enthuse each other to reach that goal.

His more esoteric works include Other Worlds, Cosmic Shocks, and the 1,120-page, two-volume Psyche and Psychology. These books offer the adventurous reader conceptions of spectacular scope and depth, if he can make a quantum leap of faith and fuse with the notion “Energy follows thought.”

In Psyche and Psychology, for example, he shows the reader how to build a mental antenna, a rainbow bridge, which will connect him to the highest heavens of invention. He shows ways to harness the elusive muses, and to illustrate the point, he mentions Gomidas Vartabed, who would sit at the piano and the perfectly formed melodies would stream forth into his inner ear from the higher worlds.

Although Saraydarian’s head is often in the higher worlds, his feet are firmly grounded in the daily sorrows of our planet. When asked what practical advantages could any of the knowledge bring when we have all this global pollution and starvation, he responds: “I think that all the misery, suffering and pain are produced and manufactured by people who are body-bound, emotion-bound, self-bound and mind-bound, self-centered, self-interested, money-centered, property-centered.

“So, the practical results of this path that I talk about is that it takes you out of your limitation and self-centeredness and makes you a center of hope. You think about all, and you don’t have conflict with me, because I am you and you are me. And this is in all religions. But nobody practices it.

“But you must realize that you yourself are a cell in the body of the planet. Your interest lies in the global interest. There is no separation. Thus, nations are the organs of the planet, yet they are fighting against each other and killing the planet.”

Yet, Saraydarian remains optimistic. In his book The Year 2000 & After, he writes: “To change the world will take only ten years if all nations cooperate and use their wealth for the rehabilitation of the world.”

Torkom Saraydarian’s work offers a potent system of marshalling human resources, so that we may be ready for the challenges of the age. To be ready means to be in contact with our natural selves, which he describes thus in New Dimensions in Healing: “After a good night’s sleep, you must awaken with a smile on your face, joy in your heart, and optimism and vision in your mind. Your physical body will be energetic, your emotions magnetic, your mental body creative, your soul striving.”

Leon Fermanian is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.
Young Artsakh Leader Dead

Artur Mkrtchian, chairman of the Nagorno-Karabakh Parliament, was shot dead at his home in Stepanakert April 14. Immediately after the shooting, the Armenian Parliament called an emergency session to investigate the incident, but so far neither reports of accidental shooting nor assassination have been confirmed.

Mkrtchian, 33, led the Armenian enclave’s drive for independence after being elected president in January. Azerbaijan considered him an obstacle to the upcoming meeting in Minsk of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Azerbaijan denied allegations of assassination.

In an interview in the March issue of AIM, Mkrtchian said his main message to the world was that Karabakh was struggling for the freedom, independence and safety of its population. He argued that the media wrongly interprets the situation as an interethnic conflict or a dispute between the states of Armenia and Azerbaijan. “If we can speak about a conflict, then it is a conflict between Karabakh and Azerbaijan... We have no demands of the Azerbaijani leadership save for one—the recognition of the independence of Karabakh,” he said. When asked how long Armenians could “hold on” during the bloody strife, he replied: “Life will show.”

The Karabakh Parliament named Mkrtchian’s deputy, Georgy Petrosian, as a temporary replacement. A three-day mourning period was declared immediately after his death; Mkrtchian was survived by his wife and two children.

Seeking Space for U.S. Embassy

The chargé d’affaires of the United States embassy in Armenia is busy house-hunting in Yerevan at the moment—though he does not plan to stay there. Stephen Mann, 40, who established the American diplomatic presence on the eighth floor of the Hrazdan Hotel in February, is searching out a permanent home for the embassy as his first priority.

The Armenian government has offered several to choose from and Mann is sizing each one up to select the most suitable for the embassy’s needs. He is also establishing his contacts with Armenian society. “We have already begun relations with the leaders of the republic and this will continue. We are going to establish contacts in general society, and we will get closely acquainted with the situation in Armenia.

“The United States wanted to open an embassy as soon as possible. It was a great honor for us to recognize the independence of Armenia and to be the first country to have

AI Adopts Five Condemned Armenians

The international human rights group Amnesty International launched an urgent action campaign last month for five condemned Armenians in Azerbaijan.

Convicted of murdering three Azerbaijani soldiers and an Azerbaijani journalist in Nagorno-Karabakh last year are Hrachik Petrosian, Gagik Harutyunian, Arno Mkrtchian, Avrid Mangasarian and Garnik Arustamian.

Appeal and requests to have the sentences postponed were denied, although all death sentences have been stayed until May 2. Their lawyers were not present at the trial.

“Anything there’s a death sentence, Amnesty raises its voice trying to get people to object to it and to get a stay of execution; in this instance, we’re concerned that the trial probably was not fair,” says Miranda Elahi, a government program officer for Amnesty. Apparently a number of different sources reported the case to Amnesty, which is appealing to the acting president of Azerbaijan to commute the death sentences.

London-based Amnesty International’s Urgent Action campaigns adopt political prisoners whose situation is critical, and for whom world public opinion and pressure would result in a postponed or overturned verdict.

formalities, we have an office, some staff, so we can start work. There were two options: either to send people here for a short time and start or wait for the permanent staff to be organized. But that could have taken a whole year.”

Mann, who is married and has two children, lists his family as his principal hobby. He will be in Armenia until the ambassador and a permanent staff take over. Humanitarian aid is among the embassy’s top priorities, as is the long-term goal of building economic ties, says Mann.

“We want to assist the development of free-market relations. Our country is a good example of the success of a capitalist system, and we want to support its development here,” he says. “We would like to help those Americans who want to make investments here and to support the marketing of American products.”

Will the embassy also issue visas? “We are going to issue visas for temporary visits and business trips. Emigration visas will be handled by the Moscow embassy for the time being,” Mann says.

—Gayane Hambartzoumian
UN's Sevan Brokers Peace in Afghanistan

Cypriot-Armenian Benon Sevan was at the center of events last month in Kabul, where a loose coalition of army generals and rebel militia leaders joined to oust the government of Afghan President Najibullah. As United Nations special envoy to Afghanistan, Sevan accompanied the toppled president to the airport until they were stopped by rebel militiamen. Sevan remained in close contact with Najibullah within the UN compound where the pro-Moscow Communist dictator was confined. Sevan pressed for the release of the deposed president, and urged meetings between the army generals and rebel (moujahedeen) forces to "shelve their guns and work together" to form a coalition government. An alumnus of Columbia University, Sevan has been a respected official for the UN for 27 years. The Soviets installed Najibullah as president six years ago.
A Hitchhiker's Guide to Yerevan

ARTASHES EMIN

Yerevan has always been a tough place for visiting aliens. After seeing the Matenadaran manuscripts and perhaps the National Art Gallery (for a Diaspora Armenian, also visiting the relatives or those claiming to be relatives) there was not much to do around. Reeking public restrooms would quickly dull the enthusiasm of those exploring the city on their own. For tourists with strong bladders, there was the annoying lack of travel aids, absence of proper street signs and, above all, the language gap. Asking for directions was of little or no use, as the locals never think of directions in the familiar Western terms of north or east; in any case, there wouldn’t be a map handy.

Restaurant service in those days left much to be desired, and the substandard hotel rooms were beyond any criticism. Incessant surveillance by the KGB was quite vexing for those who developed an idiosyncrasy for bugged phone lines or cared to notice the plainclothes agents. The possibility for sharing your initial sentiments with the loved ones back home bordered on the impossible, as communication with the outside world was close to nonexistent. The only official bank in town offered a mere 0.55 ruble for one dollar, and black market exchange, although a far better deal, sounded scary and insecure. The few trivial souvenirs worth taking home instantly evoked apprehension for their secure passage through the notorious Moscow customs. Still, all this was fairly compensated by the excessive warmth and hospitality extended to visitors virtually everywhere, even by total strangers in the streets.

These days life in Yerevan has eased up on foreigners a little, and laws of conservation suggest that they might be treated with less sycophancy. Don’t worry yet—any adar in independent Armenia will still get preferential treatment anywhere from bread queues or ticket reservations to access to the AT&T satellite link!

Quite a few private and not-so-private banks in Yerevan now compete for your every cent, scores of new restaurants offer quality food with attempts at introducing diversity, there are toll restrooms that are clean, and even Cadillac hearses are available for rent. Direct flights link Yerevan with a couple of Western and Eastern capitals, and the KGB seems to have dematerialized or at least become less of a nuisance. (I am not sure about the phone bugging—it would be unwise to dump all the sophisticated equipment.)

The language gap is being bridged in many ways and by many. Although Russian still has a few strongholds in the executive branches of the government and in what remains of the Communist aristocracy, it is gradually yielding its status to English as a means of external communication. A host of new educational institutions, both state and private, assist in this peaceful takeover. The American University of Armenia is in the front ranks, successfully implementing TOEFL mentality among high school graduates by its mere presence. Satellite television is another exponent: the standard for good English accent is now set by Bernard (Baghdad) Shaw rather than the school’s class of ‘29.

But most ardent explorers of the lexical riches and inexhaustible flexibility of the English language in Yerevan neither aspire to enroll in the AUA nor tune in daily to CNN International. They represent the emerging class of private shopkeepers—long neglected but now proudly flashing their business signs in presumably Latin characters. The signs range from straightforward Gayane or Arto’s Second-hand Shop to hazy Mirage (pineapples 3,000 rubles apiece) or World Today (latest fashions). While Cloth is decipherable both in spelling and semantic, and you can reasonably expect to purchase some souvenirs in Prezents, still Razmik’s Saloon is by no means a replica of a Wild West bar, but a peaceful barber shop. A Firm Shop may prove to be a flimsy tin construction, Hall of Commerce is an aggrandized overstatement, and the merchandise at Industrial Goods can only be identified by trial and error.

Although numerous Video Rent Places offer a wide selection of pirated films of an explicitly erotic nature, the sexual revolution hasn’t gone too far in Yerevan. Customers will be greatly disappointed if they mistake Sendwiches for an escort service with a touch of black magic, or look in the Maniac for S&M accessories. The latter is simply a crude transcription of the Armenian word for necklace.

Still, visitors with an Italian background will have to be reminded: a Cazzino in Yerevan is most definitely a gambling lounge.

And finally, don’t forget to buy a couple of postcards on your last day, because, as the vendor promises in writing, “Pictures of Yerevan will jog your memory” when you are back home.

Almost forgot: hitchhiking in Yerevan is not free!

Artashes Emin is a writer, translator and the director of the William Saroyan Center of Yerevan State University.
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