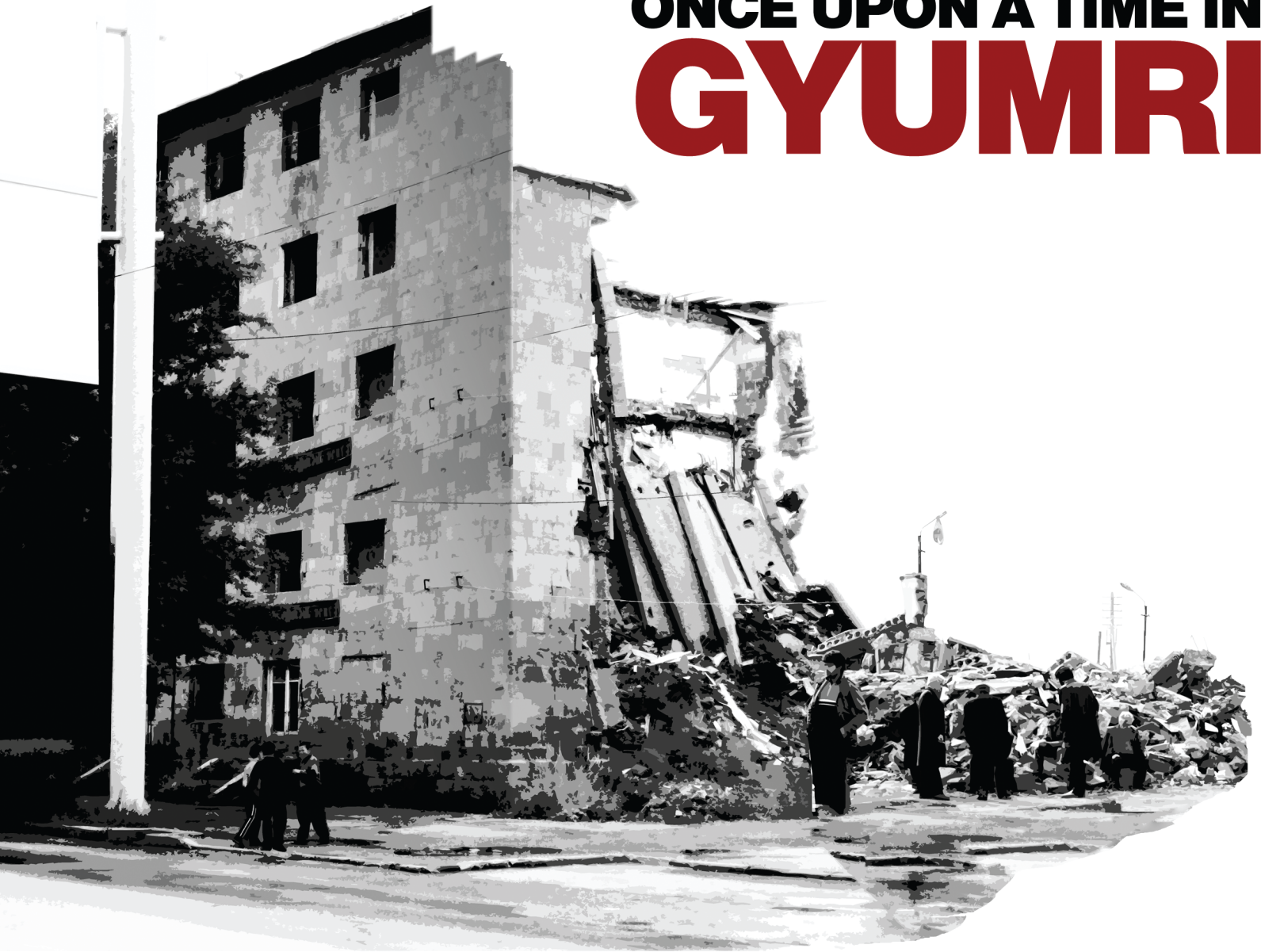


HAYTOUG

**THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE ARMENIAN YOUTH FEDERATION WESTERN UNITED STATES
WINTER 2011**

ONCE UPON A TIME IN GYUMRI



COST OF LIVING
A LOOK INSIDE GYUMRI

INTERVIEW SPOTLIGHT
TATUL SONENTZ-PAPAZIAN

RWANDA
16 YEARS LATER

CLIMBING
MOUNT ARARAT



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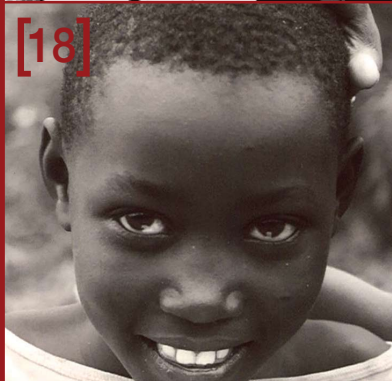
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No matter where we may be in the world, caring about the **future** and well-being of **Armenia** is an ancestral obligation that we cannot escape. If we are serious about this obligation, we need to be **rooted** in reality and view the challenges facing our **people** with candor.

EDITORIAL

Unfortunately, a sober look at our current conditions is not always the order of the day, even among thoughtful and committed Armenians. Too often, we have a tendency to view our homeland through a sentimental lens; one that is hesitant to confront its uglier hardships.

Thinking honestly about Armenia today means acknowledging the disparities between Yerevan and the rest of the country, as well within the capital itself. It means identifying the disturbing inequity of genders within the country. It means recognizing the widespread poverty, corruption, social injustice, unemployment, and economic exploitation taking place at the hands of a super-rich elite. This is not the nation of our people's hopes and aspirations.

We need to come to grips with the harsh reality that many Armenians continue to flee their homeland simply because they see little prospect for a better future. They are not leaving their loved ones and native soil behind because they are unpatriotic or lack so-called "Armenianess." Rather, they are leaving for the same practical reasons the *bantukhts* of yesteryear fled the *yergir*: financial hardship, corruption, lack of security, and a desire for a more meaningful future.

In Armenia's second largest city, Gyumri—where the AYF has been operating a day-camp for underprivileged

kids the last 3 summers—these socioeconomic problems are blatantly evident. Rocked by genocide, epidemic, occupation, repression, earthquake, and economic collapse, the city is struggling to survive and return to its past glory. It is hampered in the process by the absence of basic services, poor infrastructure, widespread corruption, low investment, and a ruling elite that lacks the desire to tackle society's most pressing problems.

The only way forward is through the empowerment of the masses. Reducing inequality and improving economic conditions requires increasing democracy and public participation. Only by supporting and encouraging genuine democratic impulses for change, as well as assisting in grassroots efforts to heighten consciousness, can we overcome the marginalization of the population which has solidified the dire situation we see today.

Mere speeches or appeals to national pride are not enough; serious work needs to be done to improve living conditions, not only in the regions of Armenia, but also Javakhk, Artsakh, and all areas of our homeland.

If this occurs, there is no doubt that the modern-day *bantukhts*—who, as in the past, similarly dream today of when they can return to their homeland—will flock back to the *yergir*.

Երկրորդ Մեծ եղբայր, Ընկերուհիներ

Մինչեւ որ առնես վերջին շունչդ թող գրիչդ թուղթի մտերիմ մնայ:

Գրէ կեանքիդ մասին, գրէ երազներուդ մասին, գրէ ոչինչի մասին, բայց գրէ: Նոյնիսկ եթէ վկայական չունիս, գրէ: Նոյնիսկ եթէ Սիամանթօ կամ Տէրեան մը չես կամ չես իսկ կարդացած, գրէ:

Գրէ այնպիսի խոր տեղէ մը որ ամբողջ էութիւնդ պարպուի էջին վրայ:

Եթէ սեղան չունիս, աւելի լաւ. գրէ գետինը նստած: Եթէ լոյս չունիս, հրաշալի. գրէ մթութեան մէջ: Անտեսէ այն ձայները որ քեզ անարժան կը համարեն: Եւ չմտածէ՛ս որ զբաղած եմ «թերեւս վաղը»: Ո՛չ. հիմա, եղած վիճակիդ մէջ, խառն մտքերովդ, վախը մէջդ, նետուէ՛ գրութեանդ մէջ: Թերեւս անօթի ես ու աղքատ, բայց չըսես որ փորձառութիւններէդ չես ախորժած: Ընդհակառակը, քեզմէ կուշտը չկայ:

Ուրեմն գրէ՛ որ չընջուիս:

Գրէ՛, որպէսզի արձանագրես այն մտածումները որոնք չեն լսուիր երբ կը խօսիս: Գրէ՛, որ ապրիս ու ազատիս ձանձրոյթէն: Գրէ, որ ստեղծես: Ու երբ սկսիս կանխատեսելին գրել, երբ սկսիս նոյնութեան մէջ խեղդուիլ, գնա՛ լաւ մը գինովցիր, մղոն մը վազէ, քիչ մը լաց, նոր գրիչ մը գնէ ու պարտէզիդ խաղաղ անկիւն մը նստած նորէն սկսէ գրել:

Սանան Շիրինեան





A CRIME UNPUNISHED A CASE UNRESOLVED

INTERVIEW WITH TATUL SONENTZ-PAPAZIAN

For its Winter 2010 issue, the Haytoug had the opportunity to catch up with Tatul Sonentz-Papazian, a champion of Armenian advocacy in the US who has played a pivotal role in the advancement of the Armenian Cause since as far back as the early 1960s.

After graduating from the Mekhitarist School in Cairo, Egypt, he went on to study graphic design and worked as an illustrator for various newspapers and magazines in Cairo. In 1951, he joined the Foreign Service and worked

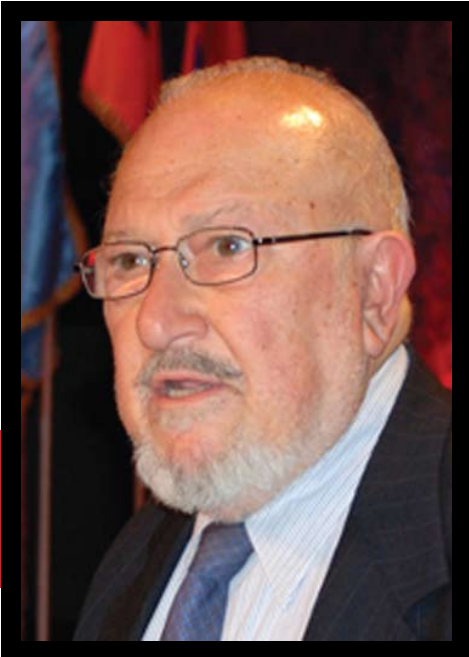
for the US Information Agency, as an art and publications director. Six years later, he moved to the US, where he was eventually asked to serve as the director of the ARF and first Republic of Armenia Archives and editor

of the Armenian Review.

He currently directs the Publications Department of the Armenian Relief Society and is working on a book covering the 100 momentous years of the ARS for its Centenary this year.

HAYTOUG: As a veteran Hai Tahd activist, can you take us back to 1965 for a moment and describe the impetus behind the movement that developed during that period? Why was the 50th anniversary of the Genocide such a turning point and what made Armenians suddenly stand up to demand their rights?

TATUL SONENTZ-PAPAZIAN: I was involved in ACIA (American Committee for the Independence of Armenia) activities after its revival by the ARF Bureau in the early sixties. In Vahan Cardashian's time, this select group of American personalities was trying to



secure an American Mandate for Armenia, and it failed because there was no oil in Armenia. Cardashian—the founder of ACIA—was a lawyer married to a wealthy American socialite of New York. Until 1915, he was an attaché on the legal staff of the Imperial Ottoman embassy in Washington DC. When news of the genocide reached the US, he resigned from his post. Being financially secure and well connected, he decided to form a high level lobbying group to promote the Armenian Case. He was the only Armenian on the Committee and served as Executive Director.

As to your question: "what made Armenians sudden-

ly stand up to demand their rights?" Armenians did not suddenly stand up in quest of their rights—there was a period of gradual recovery after the successive traumas of the 1915 Armenocide, the 1920 Kemalist-Bolshevik attack and destruction of the first Republic, and the 1930s Stalinist purges amounting to an attempt at "Houshaspanutian" (the eradication of collective memory, "memoricide", to coin a word) which almost succeeded in Soviet Armenia—through the re-writing of history, restructuring of the language with the infusion of foreign (Russian) words and changes in orthography, etc.—to wipe out our ancient and more recent memories, replacing them with a contrived history and bogus internationalist values of the "Homo Sovieticus" of a utopian future.

One must also remember Taleat Pasha's boast in 1915, that he would deliver such a blow to the Armenians, that they would not be able to raise their heads

ism on a global scale—eventually leading to another united effort to liberate Artsakh, alongside a newly independent, though somewhat battered, Homeland.

H. What do you make of the current state of Hai Tahd activity here in the United States? What direction do you feel we need to go towards as a community in pursuing our Cause in the 21st Century?

TSP: Before getting to that, perhaps we should take a look at the events and the policies dictated by Western imperial interests—particularly those of the United States—in the Near and Middle East which, by the way, haven't changed much to this day. Accordingly, our argument, presented in 1965 and after, was that by not implementing the resolutions of the Sevres Treaty, the just and logical solutions of festering problems were postponed in order to arrive at short-term, colonial arrangements that, in the long run, would pave the road to far more

"We must learn to rely on our own potential—those who rely on hand-outs from the mighty and powerful will, inevitably, lose their freedom."

for at least half a century... He was not too far off, was he? Fifty years later, in 1965, after years of low profile yet continuous Hai Tahd work spearheaded by the Delegation of the first Armenian Republic in Europe, and the ACIA in America, a consensus was achieved among leadership circles in both the Diaspora and Soviet Armenia to come out united in quest of our national rights. The momentum generated by the 50th Commemoration carried us all the way to the 60th Anniversary commemoration—achieved, once more, in unity of effort and purpose—as the armed struggle, although somewhat divisive, marked the start of political activ-

serious crises in Eastern Anatolia, the Caucasus, Mesopotamia and the Middle and Near East. Serious predicaments, as the present crises in the area demonstrate in such a violent fashion. Now, the Kurdish issue is coming to full view, while the Armenian Cause, now dormant in the "six vilayets", still awaits final resolution in Karabagh. The main reason is that Turkey, the present Turkish state, was allowed to grab and keep former Ottoman holdings, such as Western Armenia, Kurdistan, Hellenic Pontus and Armenian Cilicia by brutal ethnic cleansing methods of massacre, deportation and forced assimilation. Those lands were no more Turk-

ish than Greece, Bulgaria, Syria or Egypt, all former possessions of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, the present Turkish Republic's bloated boundaries cannot be regarded as historically justified, legitimate—or permanent, for that matter. Let us not forget, that at the time, the US Congress refused to recognize the Lausanne Treaty because Turkey had ignored President Wilson's adjudication on the Turkish-Armenian boundaries.

As we know, Hai Tahd activity here in the United States was focused mainly on the genocide recognition issue which has not met with success so far. In my opinion, it should have been focused on putting a stop to the on-going genocidal processes that Turkey implements in Western Armenia to this day, instead of commemorating an on-going genocide, sending the erroneous message to the world, that the Armenian Genocide was a tragedy of the past century, and not a crime against universal human rights being committed unchallenged at this time through forced assimilation and conversion to Islam.

This new approach in the prosecution of Hai Tahd can be based on arguments presented below:

a. It is a universally accepted dictum, that denial is the last stage of genocide; as such, it is the continuation of the genocidal process. Indeed, the Genocide started by the Ottomans in the 19th century and brought to its "Final Solution" stage by the chauvinistic adventurers of the Ittihadist government in 1915, has never truly ceased and—through a process of denials (denial of historical facts, denial of the right to use and teach the mother tongue, denial of the right to practice one's professed religion, denial of ownership of inherited religious and cultural edifices and monuments) —continues to be implemented to this day against Armenian, Kurdish, Assyrian and other minorities, in the very heart of these peoples'

Turkish-controlled homelands. The denial policy, as you can see, has many facets that need selective attention.

b. Armenians, by commemorating the 1915 - 1921 Genocide, by setting an on-going annual ritual in remembrance of a 6-year Yeghern, create the impression—both for their own people and the world community—that the Genocide has ceased, and all that remains to be done is to prove to the whole world, that a six year long genocide was indeed committed, ignoring the fact, that cloaked behind a consistent curtain of denial, the genocide—through forced assimilation—was still going on against the forcibly converted surviving Armenians and their descendents still on their native soil, coerced to hide their true identity behind Islamic Kurdish or Turkish names.

c. Decades ago—particularly during the Nagorno Karabagh conflict, in order to keep Turkey on the defensive, and out of that conflict—the Armenians should have brought up the issue of the human and civil rights of their persecuted fellow countrymen in Eastern Anatolia, throwing a searchlight on Turkey's total disregard for the numerous articles of the Lausanne Treaty—as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—to which the Turkish State was and is signatory.

H. Some argue that, now that we have an independent Armenia, we should focus less on the Genocide and more on strengthening Armenia's economy and statehood. What are your thoughts on this argument?

TSP: Those who bring forth this argument base it on a strictly state-, as opposed to nation-oriented strategic approach. The Armenian nation, at this date some nine million strong, 1/3 of them living within the landlocked and beligerently blockaded boundaries

of the 3rd Republic, the remaining majority of 6 million scattered throughout a constantly shifting and unsettled Diaspora, simply cannot accept its present status imposed on it by the Genocide and its aftermath. A status based on multiple crimes of stunning proportions perpetrated against our nation by powers both within and outside the law—by untenable treaties signed under duress with and between rogue powers, often unrecognized, or outlawed at the time, by that same international community that today swears by the 'sanctity' of borders shaped by that very lawlessness...

Under such circumstances, the fate of an entire nation takes precedence, in our case, not at all at the expense of the security and welfare of the state, but precisely having that security and welfare in mind. The present landlocked Armenian Republic with its steadily diminishing population in its truncated boundaries, surrounded by predatory neighbors, can hardly be considered a viable haven for the future of the Armenian nation, whose just Cause is very much alive at this juncture of history, when global changes are taking place and the destinies of many nations are to be decided. In such circumstances, it would be nothing short of tragic to give up the fight for our legitimate national rights that have to be secured in order to guarantee the freedom, security and normal progress of Armenia, as a nation state.

H. Over recent months, there seems to be a growing rift between the governments of Turkey and Israel, as well as a strain in relations between Ankara and Washington. What do you make of these developments?

TSP: As I just stated, the world, as we know it, is changing at a great pace towards a destiny as yet unknown. Mighty powers are being brought to their knees while lesser or emerging national entities are maneuvering for their place in

the sun. In all these changes there are geographic and demographic invariables to which geopolitics remain anchored.

The rift between erstwhile close allies, Israel and Turkey is the result of the latter's recently mapped "Neo-Ottoman" posture, where Israel must play the role of perceived 'enemy' to give the new 'Caliphate's geopolitical image some Islamic credibility in the

TSP: There was a short lived movement initiated by a small group of idealists in the ranks of the ARF, after the establishment of the first Independent Republic, to drop the "A" from the initials of the name and to call it Federation of Revolutionaries ("Heghapokhakaneri Dashnaktsutiun") uniting the efforts of all revolutionaries of neighboring nations and ethnic groups to bring about needed

and plan accordingly. We must learn to rely on our own potential—those who rely on handouts from the mighty and powerful will, inevitably, lose their freedom.

Mine was the first generation born in the post-Yeghern Diaspora. Although educated in westernized or western institutions, we still had some immunity against a total absorption by Western cultures and values. Western "liberal" values, particularly in the United States, tend to confuse nationalism with racism, or chauvinism, at best. They tend to promote an "internationalism" that, in essence, refutes the necessity of culturally distinct nations thereby rendering the very concept of internationalism meaningless. My generation, being brought up by survivors of the Yeghern, took a stronger stand on principles that we considered historically essential for our nation's survival in a world society of many cultures existing in harmony. These issues were relevant then and will remain so if we are to prevail in our present struggle to build a viable future for our presently scattered nation.

Ours was a firm conviction, that the Armenian identity, along with its distinct language and culture, not only had to be preserved, it had to have its place in the sun, not relegated to the dusty corners of libraries and museums, condemned to eventual oblivion. Preservation, "Hayababanoum" alone, without development, without rubbing shoulders with the rest of the world, would leave us behind, frozen in time as relics.

We believed, that after all those millennia, there was more than enough energy in our unique culture, as expressed in our language, literature, music, art and architecture, to give us a place of honor in the 20th century and beyond. Today, standing beyond the threshold of the 21st century, I do believe that we have managed to pass that self-assurance, that faith in our destiny, to the coming generations.

// The loftiest ideals of mankind are universal in nature, and recognize no racial, religious or cultural boundaries."

eyes of the Arab Middle East. Israel is receiving the blows meant for the Western powers—particularly the United States (for its present Kurdish policies), too important a Turkish ally to be openly pummeled by the latter. If all things proceed normally, this new Turkish gambit for hegemony will be checked in time by Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iran. In all probability, Turkish-Israeli relations will return to their former level, since they remain anchored to geopolitical invariables which, so far, remain unaltered.

Based on the above analysis, I see no permanent impact (aside from shallow diplomatic maneuverings to give credence to a grossly overreaching Turkish gambit) on the basic tenets of the regional politics involving the Armenian Cause.

H. You've spoken in the past about the importance for us as Armenians to be socially conscious. How do you strike a balance between, on the one hand, struggling for your national rights and dedicating yourself to your people, and on the other, working for the betterment of all of humanity and showing solidarity with other causes?

changes in the socioeconomic conditions in the region. Even then, some nationalists had come to understand, that there could be no real—and lasting—progress for one nation when neighboring nations were denied their basic human rights. This truth transcends time and remains valid also today. In that context, in order to work for the betterment of all humanity, obviously, one must show active solidarity with other causes struggling for recognition and justice. The loftiest ideals of mankind are universal in nature, and recognize no racial, religious or cultural boundaries.

H. Is there anything you would like to add or discuss regarding the Armenian Cause that we did not address?

TSP: I'd like to say, that the 1965 recovery of a nation that was left for dead in the sands of the Syrian Desert was predestined beyond the cynical prediction of Taleat. What followed the 50th and what will come tomorrow were, are and will be the fruits of our own efforts exerted under our own responsibility. We went through the crucible and learned a few things. The future will be ours only if and when we learn our lessons well

Cost of Living

by Kareen Sassounian

My summer in Armenia was an eye opening experience to say the least. While Americans worry about the release of the latest Ipad or the new fashion trends of the season, Armenians worry about affording day-to-day necessities such as gas and water. As time progresses, it is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain a living, which has made staying in the homeland a difficult decision.

Gyumri is Armenia's second largest city after Yerevan. Don't let this fact fool you, however. People in Gyumri are constantly struggling and are far behind compared to Yerevan's city streets. Their worries include, but are not limited to, getting food on the table, affording electricity, and staying employed. This harsh reality is visible on the streets of Gyumri where buildings are rundown, businesses are underdeveloped, and supplies and food in stores are minimal.

Although difficult to believe, Gyumri was once a bustling city. The earthquake in 1988 and the collapse of the Soviet Union broke down this developing and flourishing city and made Gyumri unrecognizable to its citizens.

During our Youth Corps trip, I sat down with Digin Lilig (our house mother) to get a better sense of life in Gyumri and to get an idea of just how much life has changed since the earthquake. After making sure we had a fresh cup of Armenian coffee on the table with chocolates and morsels on the side, Digin Lilig painted a picture of Gyumri before the tragic event. She began talking about life during the Soviet Union and how the socialist regime provided for the well being of all. No doubt about it, they were definitely under heavy suppression; individuals could not open businesses, the government placed strict guidelines on all rights and freedoms. People, she explained, could not advance in society because communism required that everyone be equal. It came to a point where neighbors would be afraid

to build higher fences on their lawns or redecorate their homes because all houses, for the most part, needed to be identical. No one tried to step past boundaries to advance and gain material wealth.

Even with all of these detriments, Digin Lilig explained that in some ways, life during those times was easier. Communism provided for everyone. Under the Soviet Union, the people of Gyumri were all employed and faced no fears of losing their incomes. Everyone received their paychecks in a timely matter and parents were comfortable knowing that their children would never go hungry. It was here where she emphasized the importance of the middle class during those times. No one would be living in a big mansion with riches while one was struggling in the streets.

The fall of the Soviet Union and the devastating earthquake took a toll on the people of Gyumri. Digin Lilig explained how the fall of the Soviet Union left her family financially unstable. She cringed remembering the large sum of money her father-in-law had saved in the bank, which was all lost after the Soviet Union's collapse. That money was hope for a brighter future and peace of mind. During our discussion, she went to the other room and brought back bank records of exactly how much money they had. To this day, she has kept those records, either to remember those times or with hopes of one day receiving that sum. After the conversion to dram (Armenian currency), Digin Lilig's family was convinced that money would not be of use or value. Instead, her family decided to invest in cattle in order to ensure their livelihood. While others were left in shambles, Digin Lilig expresses how much gratitude she had for her father-in-law's smart investment. Instead of worrying about money conversions, they owned cattle and felt more secure.

When the earthquake hit, Gyumri

turned upside down. Gas and electricity would only be allowed during certain hours, food was scarce and less than appetizing, stores shut down, and the help never seemed to reach those who needed it most. They felt completely alone and began to rely on one another. As she began describing those difficult times, Digin Lilig's eyes filled with tears. She explained how the years after the earthquake seemed to last an eternity. Her youth, as she put it, passed before her eyes, and her now unrecognizable reflection in the mirror is hard to handle. With difficulty, she tried explaining the extent to which she and her family endured. As a young mother and father, Digin Lilig and her husband were not prepared to trade their content lives in exchange for worries and suffering.

As the conversation progressed, Digin Lilig asked me to forget today's Gyumri and imagine a place with working factories, furnished buildings that lined the streets, a bounty of foods and supplies in every store, and people walking around with a sense of comfort and stability. When I asked if the government provides aid, as it does here in America, she laughed. She seemed to treat my question as a joke. She made it clear that there is no government assistance and that neighbors depend on each other for help. When her neighbors are low on food, she prepares extra that day to share and vice versa. Children have a hard time going to school because they don't own a simple pair of shoes. Instead of getting an education or kicking around a soccer ball, children are left to worry about their parents' problems. The harshness of their situation leaves young kids worrying about unemployment and the loss of their parent's income.

When I asked Digin Lilig about employment in Gyumri, an even harsher reality set in. The government expects payments before they hire an individual. Meaning, before money is earned,

“ Life in Armenia, Gyumri specifically, has become very costly for its citizens. Individuals simply do not make enough money to sustain a comfortable living.

the government expects a lump sum, basically a bribe. Even after being employed, receiving a stable paycheck is something unheard of in Gyumri. There isn't enough money to go around, as Digin Lilig put it.

A major problem with the government in Gyumri, and Armenia in general, is corruption. Everything seems to run on connections and bribery. One example she brought up was Oasis, a restaurant owned by the Mayor's brother. The plot of land that the establishment stands on was public property and was in fact a park for the citizens of Gyumri. However, the Mayor seized the land and allowed the business to be built. An even worse example of such corruption is the case with Digin Lilig's daughter. Thinking she had been accepted to a university, Digin Lilig's family went to the orientation at school. Their excitement and celebration soon turned into dismay and frustration as they realized that they were falsely informed of their daughter's acceptance. They had to pay an exorbitant “fee” in order to expect any sort of fair service. I was the first to find out about this terrible event as Digin Lilig began crying on my shoulder one morning. An always cheerful woman, was left crushed and hopeless. After several parents complained and with some extra payments, her daughter was able to register for classes. Digin Lilig explained the difficulties in advancing in such a place with corruption and bribery, a place without a clear sense of what is and isn't fair.

She also explained how starting a business in Gyumri is vital. These businesses aren't what you would imagine but instead are home-operated endeavors. Selling fresh lavash or other homemade goods is a great way to make extra money. Things such as gas, electricity, flour, meat, water, and fruit, have tripled in price recently. Digin Lilig explained that water, a previously free good, is now an added expense. Making a simple meal at home re-

quires calculations from the gas used to the grain of salt. During the winter, she explained, her family gathers around the stove in the kitchen to stay warm because heating the house for one month would cost her almost that entire month's income. Imagine the freezing temperature and her house being surrounded by snow, and picture a family of five huddling around a tiny stove for months.

Healthcare was another topic we discussed. Even though technically healthcare in Armenia is free, getting special work done or operations are quite expensive. Not only do patients pay for their service, but also have to give an addition “fee” to the doctors and nurses. The lack of income and supplies make doctors less than thrilled to work, which provides for poor quality healthcare. Doctors do range in prices but as prices decrease, so does the quality of the doctor. With incomes being low, doctors will do anything to make an extra dollar, even if it means giving their patients the wrong medicine. More and more doctors are lowering the quality of their work and most simply are not qualified to even be running an office. Operations are costly so if one can afford it great, if not then good luck. The concept of taking out a loan or borrowing money is foreign to them. They either have the money to afford their necessities or they go without them.

Life in Armenia, Gyumri specifically, has become very costly for its citizens. Individuals simply do not make enough money to sustain a comfortable living. With prices increasing and employment decreasing, more and more people find themselves in difficult situations. Unfortunately, financial instability and poverty aren't their only worries. With a lack of leadership, corruption being rampant, and an incomplete sense of fairness and equality, their problems stack up and their cost of living in Armenia increases.

After hearing about such hardships

and the amount of distress these people face, my mood quickly changed. Digin Lilig realized this and brought up one important fact. Although they endure hardships, she said, Armenia is their homeland. Having independence and calling the land their own makes it special and something worth any hardship. To this day, she explained, most people living in Gyumri still greet everyone with a smile. Although some brides go to Russia to get married off and some men go to France to find jobs and get government aid, many stay in Gyumri... why? Specifically for her, it would be too difficult to move at this stage in her life. With three grown children, moving to another country and starting out fresh would not be the easiest of tasks. This is her home, their home. She explained that having a homeland gives them a sense of ownership and security, and unites the diaspora under one common cause. Everyone knows they have a homeland to go to, a place of their own. They are struggling yes, but struggling not only for themselves but also for the future of Armenia.

The people themselves are ready for a change, a change in the corrupted government whose sole purpose is to fill the pockets of politicians while their own citizens live in rampant poverty, a change in the economic climate of Armenia, and a change in their daily lives in terms of stability and comfort. Rabid post-independence capitalism brought hardships to Armenia but now, Digin Lilig explains, citizens have a sense of ownership of their belongings and have an incentive to advance in their homeland.

After hearing about one depressing topic after another, I was shocked to hear of such positivity and of how much love she has for her homeland. These uplifting attitudes despite their hardships made visiting Armenia, and especially Gyumri, an inspiring experience. Being happy with so little is not a concept known in America but was refreshing to see in Armenia. The love they have for their country is uplifting. As Digin Lilig said, we all work towards one cause; Armenia unites us all.

Witnessing all of this, and after hearing so many stories, I return with an even greater sense of responsibility. I also return with gratitude for how much Armenia has taught me and am glad that our dreams and hopes for a better and prosperous Armenia do not stop in the diaspora but continue all throughout our homeland.

Circumstance, Choice & Change:

The Story of Gyumri and the AYF Youth Corps Program

By Alina Sookasian

We often don't realize that as humans, we don't always inherit the best of worlds. Born without choice, we are thrown into consciousness; into a reality we had no part in shaping. As we travel through life, our surroundings, the people in our lives and the societies in which we live all etch their imprint into our very being, shaping our lives and the people we are to become.



Some are born into security and prosperity with the freedom to choose. Others are slaves to circumstance the moment they enter this world. Billions around the world go their entire lives trapped in poverty, with little choice, freedom, or opportunity – always yearning for a moment of reprieve from their world.

Such is the case everywhere.

Gyumri: A City of Circumstance

I found myself faced with this difficult truth over the summer, working among people coping with a life they would rather not be living.

The people of the historic Armenian city of Gyumri stand victim to this circumstance.

Gyumri, once known as Leninakan under Soviet Rule and Alexandropol under the Tsars, is Eastern Armenia's second largest city. It was a center of industry in the 19th century and culture and art in the 20th.

But an unexpected earthquake in 1988 destroyed the city and shattered its people. In one fateful day, Gyumri was leveled to the ground, its inhabitants robbed of their homes, schools, museums, monuments and infrastructure. Families were torn apart; sons were left without fathers, and daughters were taken from their mothers. More than 25,000 helpless people died as a result of December 7 and with them died the happiness and hope of the generations that would unwillingly inherit the after-shock of this catastrophe.

We traveled to this city as volunteers from the Armenian Youth Federation to

work through its Youth Corps program at a summer camp for the children of Gyumri. Our group of 11 lived here for 4 weeks, spending our days teaching and playing with nearly 200 kids escaping from their summer of boredom.

We lived with a local family in a district known as "Toorkee Mayla", down the block from a small community of "domiks". These aging aluminum shacks, built to be temporary housing after the earthquake, became "homes" for the past twenty years. A poignant reminder of the sad reality faced by far too many families.

Camp Gyumri Through the Lens

Camp Gyumri, however, was a different story; it was a welcomed sanctuary from the gloomy day-to-day of life in Armenia's second largest city. To paint you a picture, it's necessary to go back to the beginning—Session 1, Day 1.

We started the first day of camp on Tuesday, July 20 at 10:30 A.M. We were all very nervous that day, especially as we welcomed the 75 children to the public



school we were using as our day-camp. "It wasn't even 10:30 when we got to the school and they were all already lined up, and so full of energy and excitement," recalls participant Kareen Sassounian. We were all excited and worried at the same time.

"It was very intimidating counting one kid after another as they filled into the classroom we were in," she continues. "It seemed very daunting at the time. How were we going to do this for four weeks, with just three counselors for every thirty five kids?"

"Deer in the headlights" is the most apropos expression to describe our general reaction to the kids that day. Thankfully, the rest of day went by rather rapidly after the initial introductions and presentation of camp rules. After about an hour, we divided the children into color groups of red, blue, and orange and then into beginner, intermediate and advanced English classes based on their comprehension of the language.

Once everything was sorted out, we played what felt like a never-ending game of butt volleyball—an AYF Camp favorite that involves two teams playing volleyball while sitting on the floor. We ended that day by lining up in our color groups and singing Mshak Banvor, the anthem of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. Interestingly enough, many of kids who were alumni from Camp Gyumri 09, not only remembered the song, but sang it with pride.

Every day after the first was a bit better, with the daily agenda running

smoother and more efficiently. Our personal relationships with the campers also solidified and in less than a few days we had already become full time mentors and older siblings for our campers, who had already come to see Camp Gyumri as their home away from home.

A Day in the Life

Picture this: A typical day at camp began with the 11 of us counselors scrambling out of bed, pouring tea down our throats, grabbing "bonchiks" from the nearest baker, and darting across town to beat the kids to camp only to see the bittersweet picture of them already there, playing in the yard.

"No matter how early we woke up or arrived there, they were always a step ahead of us," says Daniel Ohanian, a volunteer joining our team from Toronto Canada. "It was like an ongoing battle of failed attempts trying to beat them to the school."

Once at camp, we would quickly scramble to set up our classrooms then rush outside to line up the campers to sing the Armenian national anthem. What followed after that could only be described as brief moments of mayhem and havoc, as the kids, all at once, tried to squeeze through a small doorway to get to their respective classrooms to devour their breakfast.

After breakfast, the campers would split up into their English classes for an hour. The beginner level classes focused on teaching the ABC's and how to read

and write basic words; the intermediate classes built vocabulary and sentence structure; while the advanced section introduced conversational skills and proper grammar.

"Most of the kids seemed to really enjoy learning English and were constantly leaping out of their seats to answer a question or for a chance to write on the chalk board," recalls volunteer Kristina Karayan.

At the hour's end, the kids would impatiently run back into their color group classrooms, eager to find out about the day's next activity. The general list of color group activities included: drawing, painting, and making necklaces, bracelets, key-chains, and other handcrafts with beads and lanyards.

Complimenting our schedule were weekly educational about personal hygiene, nutrition, the dangers of smoking, and the environment. Professionals from environmental organizations such as the Armenian Tree Project and Sunchild visited Camp Gyumri throughout the program to teach the campers about a wide range issues, from Gyumri's trash and pollution problems, to the deforestation of the country and the fundamental importance of trees to their personal lives.

Singing was also a big part of the curriculum. For an hour each day, campers studied and practiced Armenian national and patriotic songs in preparation for the end-of-session song competition between the color groups. Interestingly enough, the majority of the traditional songs, commonly known throughout the





Diaspora, were relatively unheard of here in Gyumri.

For camper Lusine Safarian, song practice was the best part of camp. "I really want to be a singer when I grow up but I can't afford singing lessons," she says. "Song practice was my favorite part of camp because it was my first real chance to practice singing in a setting other than just by myself."

One activity that everyone equally anticipated from the moment the day started was the two hours of sports and games at the end of each camp-day. Lunch seemed almost like a roadblock to sports for many of them, especially Hrach Maloyan, who thought of nothing but sports all day long. "Game time is my favorite part of camp because of the teamwork factor," he says. "I love being able to work toward something with my friends and the reward is so much greater when you win!"

"Sports and games were very important, especially since a majority of the kids came from families that couldn't afford to buy balls for them to play with over the summer," explains red group counselor Rita Yemenidjian. "It was also a chance for us to connect with the campers and give them an amazing and active summer."

Talent shows, games, singing, and "dance parties" were all big hits among the campers, recalls Marae Sarkuni, a blue group counselor. "We would initially prepare a list of activities ahead of time, but we realized the kids really appreciated, and loved, it when we put music on and just let them be."

Little Big Things

All these kids wanted was some freedom and attention—a chance to just sing, dance, and show off their karate or gymnastic skills. It was during these moments, when the kids were doing

what made them happy, that we grew the most attached to them.

"Little Robert loved making necklaces with beads so much that he would stay in from sports time to work on them," explains Marae. "By the time he made six of them, he was walking all around camp, showing them off and simply enjoying his works of art, his pride and joy."

"One day, when he came to show them to me, I expressed my admiration for them and told him how pretty they were," she continues. "At that second, he took one off and handed it to me and said, 'Ungerouhi Marae, just for you.'"

Robert's case was not unique. The majority of the nearly 200 campers forged close bonds with the Youth Corps volunteers. That's because children in Gyumri don't generally get the love and attention they need, according to the local ARF's Badanegan fieldworker, Ara Nakhshkaryan. Unger Ara, as we came to know him, works as a grade-school teacher in one of nearly a dozen schools spread throughout the city. For him, the very fact that people were spending time with these kids was reason enough for Youth Corps to exist.

"Teachers here don't have the time and resources to follow up with every child's specific needs," he says. "Here, children, who throughout the year don't get any attention from anyone, feel significant and each relationship with a counselor has a very strong impact on their lives."

"The smallest things can have the largest impact in places like Gyumri, where children don't have access to basic things like a pencil and paper or even a toothbrush. Here, the things we take for granted are cherished beyond imagination," says participant Nora Kayserian, who had arrived in Gyumri a month earlier to volunteer for the Gyumri Social Services Center through BirthRight Armenia.

The Choices we Make

An amazing thing happened this summer in this city of misfortune, where few from the Armenian Diaspora ever venture. Here, a group of young Armenians, living 7000 miles away from their homeland, made a difference in the lives of 180 children. I don't think any of us will ever forget even a single minute of those four weeks at Camp Gyumri. The children will forever remember that the counselors spent extra time looking for the perfect colored crayon for them, while the counselors will forever relive the torrent of emotions caused by every single tear shed by a camper when each session came to its bitter-sweet end.

We found a home in Gyumri, and it changed our lives forever. Because at the end of this entire experience, we all realized that the kids of Camp Gyumri were not the only one's benefiting from the Youth Corps program. Living and working in Gyumri reinforced our Armenian identity and connected us to a very powerful legacy of service to the homeland.

For Allen Yekikian, who served as this year's group leader, "Youth Corps instilled in all of us the same dreams that inspired a generation of revolutionaries to struggle for a national awakening and liberation over a century ago."

"We did real ARF work here, like the founders of the organization, who from the 19th century Diaspora set out and traveled to villages in the homeland and worked side by side with other Armenians to develop communities, build schools, and spread national awareness," he claims.

"When joining the AYF and later ARF, I took an oath to work for the social, political, economic and educational betterment of my people and community and that's exactly what Youth Corps enabled me to do this summer," he adds.

Anyone who has ever served as a Youth Corps volunteer has probably felt something akin to what drove us all to join the program this summer.

This program is humbling. It is inspiring. And it will define you.



LEST THEY PERISH *THE CRY FROM JAVAKHK*

Daniel Ohanian

The following is an interview recently conducted with a Javakhktsi Armenian. Although the conditions here have been reported in different ways at different times, we found that there is a paucity of firsthand accounts given by those living in the region itself. We hope that through this interview, we will be able to amplify the voices of our fellow Armenians in a way not possible for them in their present situation.

Let's begin with a simple but important question. What is Javakhk and where is it located?

The name Javakhk can be understood in two ways. Samtskhe-Javakheti is a province within the Republic of Georgia in the South Caucasus – an administrative division. But Javakhk is also understood as a smaller region in the southeastern corner of the country – a historical entity.

The name Javakhk is a phonetic derivative of Zabakha, a name used since the 9th century BC. The region was ruled by Armenians, Iranians, Iberians and others over the centuries, always maintaining its Armenian identity. During the time that the Kingdom of Armenia existed – that is, from 200 BC to 400 AD – Javakhk was part of the province of Gugark.

Moving on to the modern era, we find Javakhk being a battleground between the Persians and Ottomans for several decades until Ottoman hegemony over the area was established in 17th century. From that point onward, the population was subjected to massacre and forced conversion to Islam, but foreign immigration was so low that an Ottoman census shows the majority of the population remaining Armenian.

Soon afterward, it was annexed by Tsarist Russia and the Armenians of not only Javakhk, but Tbilisi as well, flourished economically and culturally.

What is the Armenian population in the region?

Over half the population is ethnically Armenian, and the remaining 40% or so are largely Georgian, Turkish and Azerbaijani. The primary cities (Akhalkalak and Akhaldzkha) and many villages are almost exclusively Armenian; in Akhalkalak, for example, we make up 95% of the population. Outside of Samtskhe-Javakheti, an additional 200,000 live in the capital, Tbilisi.

How would you summarise the major challenges faced by Armenians in Javakhk?

The biggest problem we have is with our youth, but there are political, social, religious and economic issues, too. The government puts great pressure on us to forget our language, our cultural treasures and to leave our homeland. Using Armenian is illegal here, for example.

We're facing a growing age gap. A



// The government puts great pressure on us to forget our language, our cultural treasures and to leave our homeland. Using Armenian is illegal..."

large portion of Javakhtsi youth leave for Yerevan to study and end up staying there after securing their diplomas. Those that don't leave for Armenia pursue postsecondary education in Tbilisi and settle there, or immigrate to Russia to find work.

Here is another facet to the age problem: it's normal for men and women here to get married between the ages of 18 and 21. So by the time they reach a point where they've attained the necessary amount of maturity and experience to be able to have a positive and meaningful impact on the region and its problems, they're already preoccupied with securing a family. So the pool of young, capable Javakhtsis remains meagre. We need to find ways of keeping them here and ameliorating the situation.

You mentioned that the use of Armenian is illegal. So you can't speak your mother tongue when you're out on the street or in public?

No, we can speak it in the street, but legal documents have to be in Georgian – they can't be in Armenian. We can't import Armenian language newspapers into Javakhk; we are made to organise our own

press, which requires funding. Because we're an ethnic majority, we're allowed to teach Armenian in our schools, but the number of hours of Armenian-language class has been decreased from 8 hrs per week roughly 6 years ago to only 4 hours this coming term, while the length of Georgian classes has increased. There was a law passed recently mandating that all schools be renamed to follow a generic numbering system; so a school that was called Haik Nahabed Secondary School may now be known as Georgian Secondary School Number 13. In this way, they lose their connection with their fundamental Armenian identity. The use of imported Armenian-language texts is barred; instead, the government has decided we're to use books translated from Georgian by them. But the translations are so inaccurate that they sometimes don't make sense. So how are our sons and daughters supposed to learn? Those that teach Armenian are underpaid, too, thereby discouraging people from pursuing that career path. They're playing a zero-sum game here; they're not only making it harder for our Armenian teachers to work, they're also making it so that there is increased demand for Georgian teachers to take their place.

What types of religious problems are there here?

What we see in Javakhk is a clear attempt at erasing the Armenian character of our churches, which have been here for centuries. They destroy or remove cross stones (khachkars) and the Armenian writing engraved on church walls, then seek to Georgify them by bringing the building under the ownership of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Clerics will come and announce to the village that this is now a Georgian church, etc. Our Church currently operates outside the proper legal framework in Georgia. It does not have any de jure legitimacy here because the government does not accredit it the proper legal recognition it deserves. These are our major problems.

Are steps being taken to afford our churches proper de jure standing, or is that something that has already been tried and failed?

That's unfortunately something our religious leaders here would be able to answer in greater detail than I.

If they're able to completely erase the Armenian character of the churches, what would the consequences be for the Armenians living here?

If this were to happen, we would become witness to the same situation we see in

Western Armenia, which has been taken from us. Javakhtsis consider themselves a people indigenous to this region. It's well known that there were waves of immigration in the 1830s and 1840s, but there was a large population living here before then.

Today's Georgian historians give us a different official account than their Armenian counterparts and these may be interpreted as two subjective readings of history. But the physical things we see around us have to bear witness to the truth, right? And what we see is that in the 5th century, Armenian churches were built. So there was Armenian life here, an Armenian faith. This is what we see. And we haven't even spoken out our fortresses and walled cities yet, which further solidify this "version" of history as the truth.

And despite the fact that the majority of the population is Armenian, you aren't able to make your way into the political arena to solve these issues?

There are a small number of Armenians in local government, but it appears that that's not sufficient. They only represent 10% of the governing body and aren't able to bring about meaningful change through the positions they occupy. The true power lays higher up, at echelons we don't have access to.

So, at the federal level.

Yes, at the federal level.

Although all these problems exist, it seems that the Georgian government hasn't made a clear effort at keeping Javakhk underdeveloped the way we see in southeastern Turkey, for example. The roads are well-paved, there is running water and there are new construction projects all around. These are things that even Armenians living in Armenia don't always have. What explanation is there for this dichotomy?

Look, we are living, after all, in the 21st century. The days of not having running water or electricity are behind us. But there are several important points to make here.

The primary land routes linking Georgia to Turkey and Armenia run through Javakhk, so keeping the roads in good repair is an important economic asset to Tbilisi. The country also received \$300 million as part of the US' Millennium Challenge programme. A third of this amount was earmarked for road repair projects between the capital and the borders with Turkey and Armenia.

So, yes, you're correct in noting that



there is a good deal of active construction work in Javakhk, but the companies that are granted these long-term projects are usually either Turkish or Azerbaijani and hire their workforces out of those countries. These labourers then sponsor their families to join them and end up settling here. All this happens while Javakhtsis have to emigrate in order to secure an income, thereby weakening our majority in the region.

What has the Diaspora's role been in Javakhk and in what new ways can the Diaspora help?

Unfortunately, we haven't seen the same level of interest in and support for Javakhk that we've been seeing for Artsakh.

Moving forward, the Diaspora can put the Javakhk issue on the agendas of many different organisations and countries around the world. There are always attempts at silencing this issue when it arises on the international stage and the Diaspora can oppose that. You can also help us overcome our national, religious and socio-economic hurdles. And most importantly, our linguistic and cultural is-

sues.

We are trying to claim our rights in Javakhk. According to the Congress of the Council of Europe [in which Georgia holds five seats], as a national minority and as an ethnic majority in Samtskhe-Javakheti, our language must be given official status. Georgian will remain the official language of the Republic, but Armenian must become a recognised second language. Especially seeing as how our schools are losing their Armenian character and it's becoming increasingly difficult to teach Armenian to our children, this is very important.

Considering Javakhk is not part of the Republic of Armenia, do you consider yourself a Diasporan?

No. If you called a Javakhtsi on the street a spyurkahye, they would probably consider it an insult. The word spyurk doesn't even fit in Javakhkahye... Javakhkaspurkahye? It's awkward, it doesn't make sense. We don't accept that label.

Here is a concrete example I can use

to demonstrate. When the Republic of Armenia's Diaspora Ministry wanted to organise an event here, we refused their invitation. Look, let them send their Committee of Physical Education and Sports or something different; we would be more than happy to accept their help. But not the Diaspora Ministry. We're not Diasporans. We're an ancient people living on historically Armenian soil, regardless of what the Georgian government says. This is a part of Armenia and we're Armenians. We're not part of the present Republic, but this is still Armenia. We're not Diasporans.

Thank you for your time so far. Do you have any thoughts you would like to share in lieu of closing remarks?

Simply that our nation must remain united, because if history has taught us anything, it's that when Armenians stand united, we have the power to solve problems in ways that are beneficial to us, not others.



Recollecting Rwanda:

A Lesson in Forgiveness and Respect

by Anahid Yahjian

I arrived in Kigali, Rwanda on August 9, 2010: election day. The entire country was in the midst of celebrating their opportunity to re-elect Paul Kagame, a national hero since leading the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) to end the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Kigali--the nation's capital--was covered in streamers that matched the Rwandan flag and every voting center erupted with music, laughter and dance. Shortly after settling into my home in the Kabeza neighborhood, I was invited into the playground of a nearby school-turned-polling-place by a middle-aged man who had just submitted his ballot.

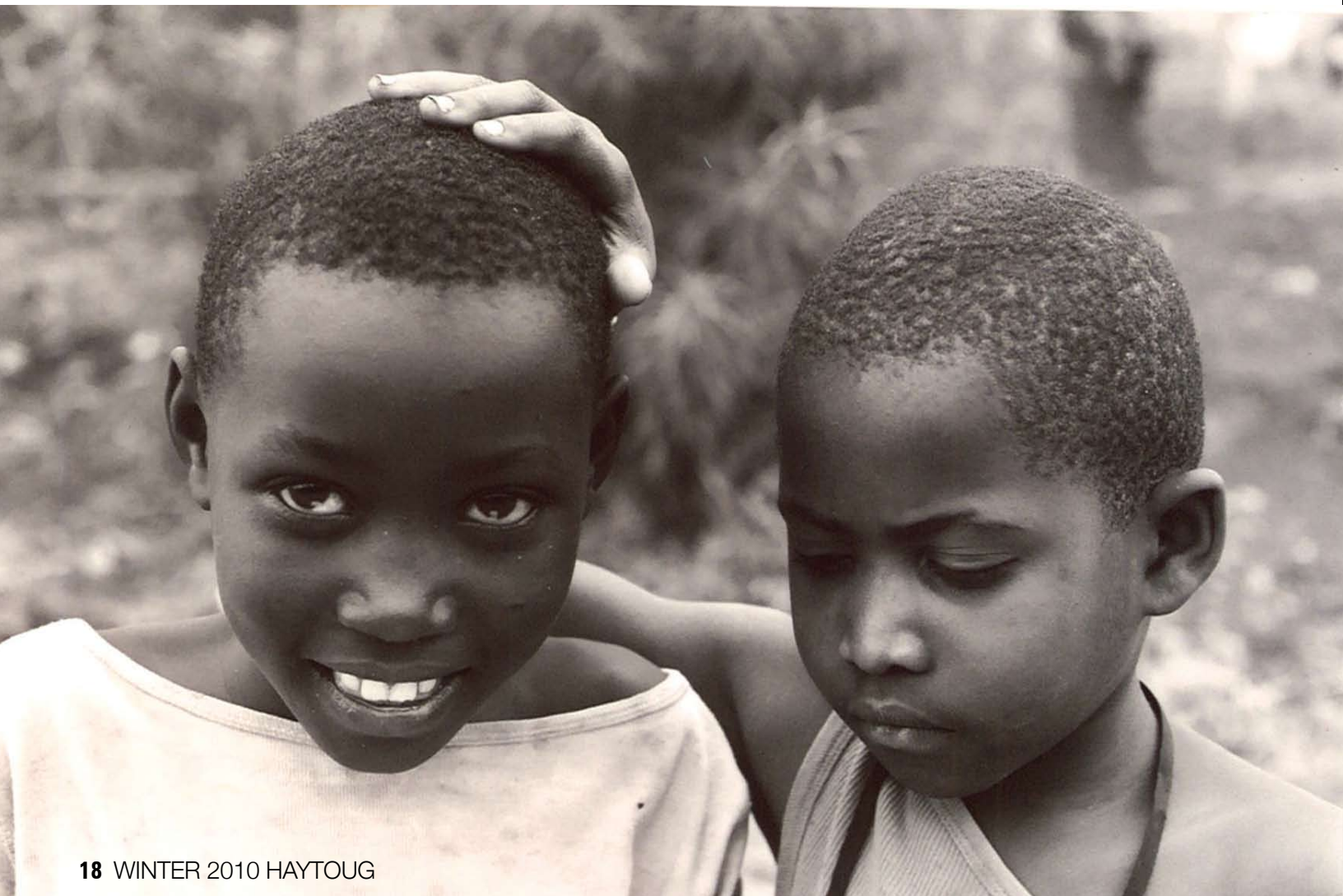
"Come, come!" he said. "Please, be with us today. This is a celebration!"

I had never seen anything like this before--not even when U.S. President

Barack Obama was being elected. Children danced gleefully as their parents waited in line to vote, each wearing t-shirts with Kagame's portrait. Upbeat Rwandan pop music piped into the air from massive speakers. Elderly Rwandan men and women sat under shady trees, energetically discussing the historical moment they were witnessing. Every single person was smiling from ear-to-ear with pride. Had I not already learned of Rwanda's history, I would have never guessed that a mere 16 years prior to that moment, Rwanda was a living hell devoured by the pitch darkness of a genocide that claimed the lives of nearly one million of its people.

I re-experienced this pattern of revelation over and over again throughout the month I spent in Kigali. Each day, I

would encounter a new aspect of Rwandan culture that would leave me in awe; I had never met such open-hearted people in my life. Perfect strangers on the bus would take another passenger's child to sit on their own lap if there was a shortage of seats, the elderly were looked upon like national treasures, children played freely outside with no fear of kidnapping, women walked side-by-side with men in the evenings with no fear of rape or petty theft, shop owners offered their own cell phones to clients if the power had gone out...and all this in addition to the kindness shown to me as a guest in their country. Each time I observed or experienced such moments, I would immediately go back to the same question: how did these people exist in such harmony, when less than twenty



years ago they were at each other's throats?

I traveled to Rwanda to teach a month-long photography course to a group of men and women in Kigali who needed vocational skills and didn't have access to arts education or equipment. Several of my students were orphaned in the genocide, and almost all were old enough to have distinct memories of what happened in 1994. I didn't learn any of this until a handful of my students took me to the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre, though, because there is a general, unspoken consensus amongst Rwandans to actively resist discussion about the genocide; in fact, I was told before my arrival that bringing up the topic of the genocide was considered highly offensive and disrespectful. Until our visit to the Memorial, I had no way of knowing what my students, let alone everyone else in Rwanda, had experienced during and after the genocide unless I read it in a book or on the Internet. I didn't encounter anything throughout my time in Kigali that referred to the genocide--everything had been suppressed as a means of quickly forgiving one another and moving on, in order to be able to focus on Rwanda's future and rapid development.

When we were at the Memorial, one of my students finally opened up about losing his entire family in the genocide. He said that it was hard for him to go inside the museum and relive what happened, but that he had no anger in him. He had forgiven the people who killed his siblings and parents and did not harbor hatred towards them. This ideation was remarkable to me. It was so difficult to reconcile this reality with my frame of reference: my experience in the Armenian diaspora, where any talk of forgiving the Ottoman perpetrators (and their descendants) of the Armenian genocide is prac-

tically non-existent.

I learned from an exhibit at the Memorial that many accused killers in the Rwandan genocide have since been released back into society, simply because the families of their victims have forgiven them (as dictated by Gacaca, a tribal-based justice system instituted in the wake of the genocide). As a result, both victims and perpetrators of the genocide are now once again living side by side. Although they are divided by their respective experiences, they are united in thought: that to kill one another is wrong, that the genocide was a bloody lesson in peace and understanding and that the only way for Rwanda to move on and flourish is if each and every Rwandan does their part to move on individually. Of course, this is a double-edged sword: countless survivors of the genocide are now living with severe trauma-related disorders, psychological issues and depression but are actively participating in this repression that will inevitably make their mental conditions worsen. Yet for the people of Rwanda, this seemed to be a worthy sacrifice; to hold back their personal healing for the sake of not tainting the new generation with the disunion, hate and anger that nearly shattered Rwanda just 16 years ago. The result, from what I described at the beginning of this narrative, is a country ruled by peace, love, unity, respect and unadulterated selflessness.

Anahid Yahjian is a 21-year-old student at Occidental College in Los Angeles, where she is studying comparative literature and film theory. She chronicled her experience in Rwanda on her blog, recollectingrwanda.tumblr.com. Her students' photography will be exhibited alongside her own later this year on the Occidental campus.

Facts about the Rwandan Genocide:

-The Rwandan genocide is officially noted to have started on April 6, 1994 after the assassination of then-president Juvénal Habyarimana; it lasted approximately 10 months and 800,000-1,000,000 people were killed.

-Tensions between the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi ethnic groups had been intensifying throughout the 1900s, culminating in the Hutu-dominated government of the 1990s declaring total cleansing of Rwanda's Tutsi population. The distinctions that separated the Hutus from the Tutsis were minimal and mostly class-based; they gained prominence at the behest of Belgian and German colonists in the first half of the twentieth century, who then gave privileges to the Tutsis that immediately separated them from the Hutu majority. It was only a matter of time, then, until the Hutus retaliated. By 1962, however, colonization was over and the only people left to weather Hutu anger were the Tutsis themselves.

-Thousands of Tutsis had been living as refugees in neighboring Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya and Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), among other countries, for decades at the time of the genocide and so were unharmed. Once the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), led by current President Paul Kagame, ended the genocide, many of these diasporans repatriated to Rwanda and repopulated the country--physically about the size of the U.S. state of Maryland--thus contributing to its current population of nearly 9 million.

Since the genocide, ethnic terminology has been totally eliminated in Rwanda; any mention of the Hutu and Tutsi distinction is considered highly offensive and people identify themselves--both personally and on official documents--only as Rwandan.



ARMENIAN YOUTH FEDERATION

GLENDALE ROUPEN CHAPTER



Being in the center of one of the most Armenian populated cities outside of Armenia, the Glendale “Roupen” Armenian Youth Federation (AYF) Chapter feels a special obligation to keep the Armenian youth involved culturally, socially and politically.

hFounded in 1977, the Glendale Chapter was named in honor of Roupen Der Minasian, a famed Armenian revolutionary and former Defense Minister of the First Republic of Armenia. Born in Akhalkalk in 1882, Roupen became a key figure in the ARF soon after returning from studying in Russia. He was both an organizer and fedayee, who traveled from Kars, to Van, to Sasoun, leading resistance efforts and defending the Armenian population. His famous seven-volume “Memoirs of an Armenian Revolutionary” serves as one of the most important sources of information on the figures, ideas, and events of the Armenian Revolutionary Movement.

It is in the spirit of dedication and sacrifice set forth by famous heroes such as Roupen that the Glendale AYF seeks to carry out its activities in the heart of the Armenian community of Southern California. Yet, given the diversity of cultures in Los Angeles and the many challenges which confront the youth, this obligation can often be a difficult one to fulfill. Nevertheless, despite the obstacles, what makes the Glendale AYF unique is its strong emphasis on outreach, getting the youth acclimated and interested in contributing to the community, and reaching higher grounds of success.

In 2009, the Glendale AYF Chapter finally received an important resource in its pursuit of activating the youth: the Krikor & Mariam Karamanoukian Glendale Youth Center. The ground breaking for the center was on December 12, 2007, and the opening on July 7, 2009. The chapter finally had an “agoump” that they could call their own.

“The Roupen Chapter might have been on hiatus due to lack of a center,” said Roupen Karakouzian, former chapter executive. “However, with our new Armenian center, it gives us the upper hand showing the community what activities we are able to carryout for Armenians and non-Armenians.” This community center is shared along with other organizations that serve the community, such as the Armenian Relief Society and the Armenian National Committee.

“We are such a big part of this center and we stepped up to protect it when the city asked for papers from the youth center of financial proof; we took the initiative” explains Anahid Yahjian, a member of the Glendale AYF. “We finally have a center of our own; what sort of family has no home? At times we had to have our meetings in a parking lot” says Anahid.

From the members’ perspective, this center, opens doors to a stronger community, “With our new youth center, Glendale AYF is reaching out to the Armenian-American youth. We organize a variety of social and educational events to bring the youth together” said former chapter chariperson, David Arakelyan. This past year the “Roupen” Chapter welcomed the new agoump with activities for the AYF Olympics. After fifteen years it was once again Glendale’s turn to host the annual Olympics, which was held in San Diego. The committee spent months on the preparation and the arrangement of the event. “It was extremely successful and changed our chapter,” says Executive member Kristina Karayan. “It brought us together and it was a blast. We didn’t expect it to rain,

though,” she says laughing. Building fun memories and strong bonds together, the chapter continues to grow and fulfill each goal that they have set for themselves and their beloved new home.

Another treasured asset of the Glendale Chapter is its ARF Badanegan (Junior) chapters, “Shant” and “Zavarian.” The main source of transfers to the “Roupen” AYF continue to be Badanees from these chapters. “It’s important that we spend time with them; they will soon follow our footsteps” said Nairie Mirzayan who is a Director for the Glendale ARF Badanees. There are many plans in the works relating to the Badanees to ensure that ties between them and the chapter remain strong.

This is an investment that could not go wrong. They are the future of the chapter and of AYF as a whole. In many ways, the future of the Glendale AYF rests in their hands, along with the overall youth of the community. “The chapter is planning on starting a tutoring program for high school and college students and we will hopefully have that starting next year” said Arakelyan.

Returning to the importance of the new youth center, members regularly point out how it is full of opportunities that are created by the youth for the youth. “With a new café and game room, we utilize this Armenian center as a social environment, as well,” says Karakouzian. “We encourage whomever is reading this to come and experience what I’ve experienced, which are memories for a lifetime.”

The Glendale AYF extends its invite to all youth in the community to come and visit the new youth center. As members constantly emphasize, this center should be for all Armenian youth what it is for them: a home and a place that welcomes all.

For more information about the Glendale “Roupen” AYF or how to get involved with the chapter or activities at the new youth center, send an email to: Roupen@AYFwest.org.

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Վերժինի Թույլումեան

«Վասզնի գիտցէ՛ք, գիտցէ՛ք Հայրենիք կը նշանակէ երիտասարդութիւն: Եւ վա՛յ այն ժողովուրդին, որ կը կարծէ, նոյնիսկ իր հողին վրայ, թէ հայրենիք ունի՝ երբ երիտասարդութիւն չունի, կը մեռնին բոլոր ազգերը, երբ երիտասարդութիւն չունին», կ'ըսէ Շաւարշ Նարդունի:

Մենք հայերս դարեր շարունակ ենթարկուած ենք բազմաթիւ եւ բազմատեսակ հալածանքներու եւ կոտորածներու: Ապրած ենք օտարներու տիրապետութեան տակ, սակայն այս բոլորը չեն յաջողած դադրեցնել մեզ հայ ըլլալէ:

Հայը իր զօրաւոր վճռակամութեամբ ու վառ ոգիով ոտքի կանգնած է, տկար մարմնին վրայ հանդուրժելով խոր վերքերը եւ շարունակած է կենալ: Պէտք չէր յուսահատիլ եւ պէտք էր շարունակել, որովհետեւ թշնամին անհամբեր կը սպասէր այն օրուան, որ հայ ազգը յաւիտեան ոչնչանայ եւ ձուլուի: Բայց դարեր շարունակ, հայը թող չտուաւ որ թշնամին այսպիսի ուրախութիւն վայելէ:

Մերթ ընդ մերթ աշխարհի վիճակը աւելի կը բարդանա, անոր բաղկացուցիչ հաւաքական տարրերը կը բազմանան եւ մենք կը գտնուինք քառսի մէջ: Մենք ազգ ըլլալէ առաջ ժողովուրդ ենք տոհմերէ կազմուած ու բաղկացած: Իբրեւ հայ ժողովուրդ կը հետապնդենք դատ մը, որուն համար մղուող պայքարը մեծ ճիգ եւ հաւատք կը պահանջէ: Սակայն դարը փոխուած է, օրէ օր մեր ժողովուրդին մէջ կը պակսի հայութեան կառչելով հայ մնալու վառ ոգին: Հետզհետէ ընտանիքներ կը դառնան անտարբեր ու շատեր կամաց-կամաց կ'օտարանան իրենց արմատներէն, միջավայրէն եւ ինքնութենէն: Բայց ընտանիքները պէտք է հասկնան, թէ այսօրուան իւրաքանչիւր գաւակը կը մարմնաւորէ գալիք հայ սերունդը:

Լիզպոնի տղաքը, Մհերը, Վիգէնը ու

իրենց նման հերոսները, արքայութեան մէջ հանգիստ բազմած աստուածներ չէին: Այդ տղաքը մեզի նման անհատներ էին: Այսօրուան երիտասարդները պէտք է ըլլան իրենց պէս ու զինուին անոնց երկաթեայ կամքով: Մենք ենք այս ազգին ապագան ու գալիք սերունդներուն ներշնչումն ու տիպար օրինակը:

Այսօրուան երիտասարդը պէտք ունի հետեւեալ յատկանիշներուն՝ Ա. Հաւատք- Պէտք է ունենալ զօրաւոր հաւատք եւ կամք, որպէսզի կարենանք ոչնչացնել ամէն տեսակի յոռի երեւոյթներ, որոնք մեզ կ'արժեզրկեն մեր պատմութենէն եւ ինքնութենէն:

Բ. Հայրենասիրութիւն- Ամէն հայ պէտք է սիրէ իր ինքնութիւնը եւ պատրաստ ըլլայ ինքզինք զոհելու ի սէր ազգութեան ու հայրենիքի ազգակերտումի վսեմ նպատակներուն:

Գ. Միասնականութիւն- Համախմբուիլ

ու միասին պայքարիլ կերտելու փալլուն ապագայ, համահայկական մտածողութեամբ եւ պահանջատիրութեամբ:

Դ. Ուսում- Զինուելով բարձրագոյն կրթութեամբ եւ մասնագիտութեամբ, օգտակար հանդիսանալով սփիւռքի եւ հայրենիքի պէտքերուն եւ բարօրութեան:

Մենք՝ հայերս խօսք ունինք, եւ աշխարհը պիտի լսէ մեր բողոքը, համայն մարդկութիւնը պիտի ճանչնայ մեր պատմութիւնը, իսկ մենք պիտի լուծենք մեր վրէժը: Այս ինքնուրոյն նկարագիրով, յանձնարարութեամբ ու պատրաստակամութեամբ երիտասարդութիւնն է, որ միակ ապաւէնն է մեր ապագայի հայրենիքի կերտման, ինչպէս Սարգիս Զէյթեանի կ'ըսէր «Ազգի մը պահեստի գլխաւոր ուժը, հիմնական դրամագլուխը, յատկապէս իր ապագայի կերտման հաշուին, երիտասարդութիւնն է, այդ երիտասարդութեան կազմակերպումն ու դաստիարակութիւնը»:

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Have You Climbed

Ararat, Lately?

By Edna Baghoumian



It is mid-August again and the heat may be unbearable here in Yerevan, but it is perfect conditions for climbing Mt. Ararat (elevation 5,137 m/16,854 ft)—the best time of year for such an undertaking. In the past month or so, I have heard of a few groups of climbers who have successfully climbed Ararat and proudly announced their achievement. A bit of controversy has been hitting the online news services, as a result, mostly about the reaction from Turkey. There has been a lot of noise regarding whose flag was up there and what it really represented.

I am no mountain climber myself, but coming from the same background as many Diaspora Armenians, I can well understand the desire and appeal for taking on such a challenge. I wanted to know about the real motivation that drives so many to attempt the climb. Mt. Ararat is certainly nowhere near as high as the Himalayas or as daunting a climb. Even so, one needs to keep the main goal in mind and a burning desire together with sheer strength of will to keep going until one reaches the summit.

I have had very interesting conversations with local friends about this sudden interest in climbing Mt. Ararat. One question, though, keeps coming up: “Why are they so obsessed with climbing Ararat, when there is so much more that they can do, right here, in our homeland?” Is the quest to climb Mt. Ararat, then, simply a travel adventure, or does it represent something more to Armenian mountain climbers?

“ *I believe every young Armenian should do this. Even if they can't climb the mountain I would suggest they all go to Western Armenia.*



Motivation

Here, in Armenia, it is not uncommon to meet repatriates who have a unique sense of mission and purpose. They often start with a set of very ambitious goals and stay in the country for however long it may take to accomplish them. They have a genuine desire to change Armenia for the better. But how about the Diaspora Armenians who cannot make that leap of faith and directly move here? Don't they have the same attachment to Armenia and nostalgic ties with the motherland through songs, literature and, of course, the iconic image of Mt. Ararat which hangs in most Armenian homes?

For the climbers I met and with whom I have become close friends, the answer seems to be yes. They are the quintessential Diaspora Armenians from Los Angeles, California. They trained for almost a year in order to climb a mountain together. Their intention was not to climb just any mountain, but to scale the heights of their dream: Ararat. They said that they had "read Ararat, dreamed Ararat and sung songs about Ararat." It was, for them, a natural progression to want to climb the very mountain that had held such a special place in their hearts and reach the summit of which they would have the chance to see, with their own eyes, the valleys of Western Armenia. They wanted to soak up all that

could have, and should have, been part of today's Armenia.

It is not difficult to lead a team of eight males and three females to Mt. Ararat when you are Baghdik Der Grigorian, Vachik Zakarian and Roubik Mardirosian - veteran mountain climbers. What made this team so unique to me was that they all share the same background. All are Armenians born in Iran, but currently living in Los Angeles. All but the youngest member, Mineh, were members of the "Ararat" Sports Club, an incredibly nurturing environment for young Armenians living in Tehran. Their climbing expedition is aptly named "Ararat 2 Ararat."

The team's camaraderie has its roots in their childhood during which time they learned how to follow orders, share a tent, be team players as well as team leaders. Above all, they learned the meaning of what it is to be an Armenian. They grew up together, sang the inspiring national songs that invariably express the longing and desire to see an independent motherland whilst they held onto the dream of, one day, climbing to the very top of Mt. Ararat. On 5th August, this year, that dream became a reality for the eleven member team. Moreover, the eight male members continued on with their climb and reached the summit of Mt. Sipan on the 8th of August.

Ararat 2 Ararat

Team Members

Baghdik Der Grigorian - This was his second climb to the Ararat summit, a more meaningful journey since his 35 year old daughter was climbing with him.

"We were better prepared this year, because we had more information in hand which made the whole journey a lot easier; so much so that we even climbed Mt. Sipan!

"The road is long, going through Georgia, crossing Dogubayazit and then Khars, but very interesting. We had mixed feelings all the way, thinking this land was our homeland. It was incredibly crowded in the second camp which was a rocky and a rough camp. Almost 200 people were camping there. At 4,200 meters, we had to go up to the summit from there and get back. We came across Russians, French, Germans and Iranians. There are lots of mountains that are more challenging to climb, but Mt. Ararat has a special meaning for different individuals.

"We are planning to create a website for sharing all this valuable information. We had detailed GPS plans. The first two days were not difficult, at all, but the third day was quite challenging. We started at 1.00 am and in five and a half hours, you reach the summit. We were there for 45 minutes then it took another three hours getting down.

"I believe every young Armenian should do this. Even if they can't climb the mountain I would suggest they all go to Western Armenia. It is an incredibly interesting place. I'm not an emotional person, I'm more logical. But the first time that I went there, I could not hold back my tears. I have climbed many mountains, but always felt that, for me, Ararat was the ultimate climb because it's been a dream of mine for many, many years. As for the moment when you reach the summit, I don't have the words to explain the feeling that overwhelms one. And I had the same feeling when climbing Mt. Sipan.

"Our success was due to teamwork and having the girls with us made the whole experience particularly special. And the fact that all of us reached the summit together was incredible. It is common practice, when mountain climbing, to raise

one's country's flag at the summit just to show a sense of pride and to mark one's achievement.

"This climb of ours has created a tremendous amount of interest. Since we got back, at least four people have approached me to sign up for a climb next year. My eldest daughter is planning to be part of next year's team. This patriotic desire is healthy and we should not ruin this for propaganda purposes. I have little time for reactionary talk which I believe is counter-productive and does not serve any useful purpose. I am, understandably, saddened to see the state of ruin in which Ani, Akhthamar and other similar treasures have fallen. I hope to see them in a better condition, in future."

Harmik Baghdasarian – Having just turned 50, he had this to say about the climbing expedition:

"It was not just a physical challenge for me. We have lived and been nurtured with the idea of Ararat as a symbol of all that is Armenia so this was something I simply had to do. Every step for me was a memory. One of the memorable images for me was to see the mountain's shadow getting larger and larger as we reached closer to the top and turned to look at the Ararat valley. It is just an amazing and indescribable sight. You forget all feelings of pain and fatigue. As you get closer to the summit, you are overcome with this indescribable energy and strength—an adrenaline rush—to reach the very top.

"We met German and Austrian climbers and they expressed surprise when they learned of our emotional attachment to this mountain. It felt like home to us all and we were fortunate enough to be there and welcome all these guests to our homeland. After we descended Ararat, we crossed Lake Van on the following day and went to Akhtamar Island to visit the Akhtamar Monastery. There, we encountered a group of teenagers aged between 14 and 16 who were holding the tricolor Armenian flag. They were winners of the Hai Aspet's (Armenian Knight) television contest. They filed into the church to light candles and to sing, but they were turned out immediately by the guards. Naturally, they were very up-

set because they had gone there to pray. However, they danced the Ishkhan (folk dance) outside the church - nothing was more important to these youths than to pay their respects to their ancestors. I applauded their courage. I felt that they brought some life into the church."

Roubina Hovnanian-Manouchehri – A 50-year mother of two teenage sons, Roubina had never climbed a mountain, before.

"I actually got up every Saturday at 6:30 am and went training for this climb. We exercised vigorously and it was worth it! The funny thing is that I was more nervous and stressed over this challenge than I was on my wedding day. My emotions took hold of me from that first hour in the bus at the start of the trip. Every step was a tear for me, I was overtaken by emotions which I could not control.

"All the way going up, I never attempted to look at the summit because the goal being far, you do not want to be discouraged by looking at the distance to be covered. I kept my head low and followed our team leader, Vachik. I never thought that doing something special like this was something no one else could do. Anyone can do this but even with just ten steps to the summit, I still could not believe that I'd make it. I was so nervous that I could not say I realized that I'd done it until I took the last step up! They tell me that on the way back, I literally rolled down the mountain. I don't doubt it because I have all the bruises to remind me of it. People were just amazing with their words of encouragement. On the way, we met this man who said, "you have come all the way from America to climb Mt. Ararat. I wish I had a lamb to sacrifice in your honor.

I asked Roubina if all the tears were tears of exhaustion.

"No, I did not feel fatigue or exhaustion going up. But, as soon as I came down to my tent after the climb, I could not control myself and I cried for half an hour, straight, from sheer exhaustion."

Vachik Zakarian – An experienced mountaineer who celebrated his 70th birthday on Mt. Sipan on August 8th had this to say.

"I have been an active member of the Ararat Club's mountaineering division since I was 18 years old and have climbed many mountains in Iran and in the United States. This was my third climb to Mt. Ararat and my first climb to Mt. Sipan. My friends had a big birthday surprise for me waiting on the summit of Mt. Sipan. My good friend, Greg had been carrying a piece of dry cake (perok) and all other good stuff, all the way



from L.A. to the top of Sipan to celebrate my 70th birthday. There were candles and a banner which had 'Happy Birthday' printed on it. I was truly touched. I will never forget this birthday.

"As it happened, I had a bottle of an Armenian Cognac which added that extra something to this amazing and unforgettable celebration. My journey ended with the climb of Mt. Aragats which I completed on the return trek back to Armenia. I think it's high time for me to stop these difficult adventures and stick to more simple and easier climbs. All in all, it's been a fantastic journey!"

Roubik Mardirosian – This was his second climb to Mt. Ararat and his first to Mt. Sipan.

"We had trained well in L.A. and that training paid off. Seven of us had a dream to climb Mt. Sipan as well, and that dream, too was realized! Though it was a much more difficult a climb, this entire journey was an amazing experience which I'll never forget."

Greg Sookasian – A first-time climber, Greg had this to say about his experience.

"We read and breath Ararat from childhood, but I never imagined that one day I would actually climb Ararat. There was some doubt about my ability to make the climb because of my serious back problems. I bought my first climbing boots, but since I could not complete my first climb in L.A., I had to return them to the shop. But I did not give up! I bought another set of boots and practiced and stuck with it until I succeeded to complete a climb in L.A.! By the time we reached the second camp in Armenia, however, I had serious doubts about being able to continue as my bad back was giving me grief. But, I looked up and the mountain seemed to be calling me so I crawled and limped my way along until I reached the top. I had a mission to track and record every step of our team's moves on a video camera. I'm proud to say that

I managed to record everyone's arrival on the summit. My next wish is to have my daughter, Alina, accompany me on my next attempt."

Melineh Saginian – A 50-year old proud mother's account was moving.

"This was one of the most important and difficult decisions made in my entire life. I decided to do this for my father, Sevag Saginian."

Melineh's father was a prominent member of the Iranian parliament in Iran, prior to the Islamic Revolution.

"My father had fought for the Armenian cause throughout his life. However, due to difficult circumstances and his illness, he was not able to see our independent Armenia. Even though I had never, ever, climbed a mountain in my life, I felt that I could climb Mt. Masis and reach the Ararat summit and look towards Armenia from the highest point and let my Dad see our country through my eyes. I'm sure that he now has! We had a great team and excellent team leaders who led us safely to the top. I owe my success in this to our team leaders. And I have to say that if I, a fifty year old female, can achieve this feat after only seven months' training, then anyone with a strong will and purpose can do the same, also."

Armen Norhadian – A 63-year old frequent visitor to Armenia who dreamed to see Ararat from behind.

"I did this journey as homage to my parents and my ancestors and for the one and half million Armenians who lost their lives so tragically nearly a century ago. This is my sixth visit to Armenia and when staying in Yerevan, I always try to book a room that faces Mt. Ararat. As I had always longed to see Yerevan from the other side, as soon as I found out that a few of my friends were getting ready for this expedition, I joined in and prepared for this physically and men-

tally challenging feat. The most memorable moment for me was seeing Alexan Bayandurian, a disabled one-legged Artsakh War veteran climb Mt. Ararat and to reach the summit. I admire him, greatly and he was an inspiration to us all. Our achievements were humble in comparison."

Mineh Dergrigorian Zadourian – A 35-year old young mother of two.

"My main motivation was to climb with my Dad but as soon as I found out that my aunt, too, was going, I just had to do it! The ability of males vs females in mountain climbing made no difference to me. The only thing that was evident was that we had to work a little harder physically. Reaching the summit with my Dad was something I will cherish for the rest of my life. I would like it if every young Armenian has this experience. It is for each generation to pay its debt to the past generations in their efforts to continue to demonstrate their patriotism. This experience has left a profound impression on me. I now hope that, one day, my two daughters will follow their parents', grandfather's, great aunt's example and take this same journey."

Unfortunately, I only had the opportunity to talk to nine of the eleven members of the Mt. Ararat climbing expedition. Each one had a unique perspective and a purpose for this challenge. To my surprise they all became very emotional when talking about their journey. Where do all these emotions come from? These emotions run very deep and the team's sense of pride in reaching its goal—after spending so many years sitting around campfires as young scouts, reading and dreaming of this event—is all too clear to see.

To me, these "brothers and sisters" who had realized their dream, had in a sense "reached the moon!" This particular team of climbers seemed to be saying to the world, "We came, we remembered and we will never forget." They called it their "bardk" –homage to their motherland, Armenia.

Flashing Gyumri Before My Eyes: A Look Into My Birthplace

By Karen Jallatyan

When in 1899 the construction of a railroad tunnel in Jajur (the birthplace of the renowned painter Minas Avetisyan) was completed and the first steam locomotive entered Gyumri, the inhabitants of the city gathered at the rail station to see the otherworldly sight. It is said that two youths, Poloz Mukuch and his friend Madoyents Napo, were there as well. After watching the approaching train for a while, Mukuch asked:

"Napo, how does this train move?"

"Bghov", by vapor.

The eight-year-old Mukuch did not believe his friend. As Napo tried hard to convince him, he expressed his doubt:

"Tso, if this train moved by vapor, then Dsitoghtsonts bathhouse would have reached London!"

The hero of this anecdote (conversational Armenian for 'joke,' borrowed from Russian, borrowed from Greek, borrowed from...) is Poloz Mukuch, the most famous of many renowned witty persons of Gyumri. These tales have become emblematic of the city's spirit and are a veritable source of joy and pride for the inhabitants.

Poloz Mukuch (Mkrtich Ghazari Melqonian) was born in Gyumri on January 7, 1891. Because of his height, Mukuch

(already a colloquial form of Mkrtich) was given the name 'Poloz' (colloquial for elongated, asymmetrical, out of proportion). Despite his father being one of the most accomplished blacksmiths and artisans in Gyumri, Poloz Mukuch didn't learn a trade. He only received an elementary education and, to earn his living, became a *podratchi*. He would station his cart at different points inside the city and, as he sold fruits, would pepper his humble trade with endless sweet jokes. His impromptu tales—many of which are based on real-life events—quickly made him famous around Gyumri.

Among the witty contemporaries of Poloz Mukuch were Tsitro Aleq, Tutkhal Harut, Madoyents Sirun Napo, Tiraturents Margar, Nal'j Karo, Gramophone Onéss, Dzaghleunts Nerses, *damrchi usta Kola*, Sokh' Heyvaré, and *dholchi millstone Asho*. (If you are really curious, ask a Gyumretsi to decipher for you these phantasmagoric nicknames. I will not do so here due to space constraints).

Poloz Mukuch died in February 1931. The inhabitants of Gyumri loved Poloz so much that a huge crowd accompanied the funeral (As a reminder: the funerals in Armenia consist of having the coffin openly carried out from the home of the dead



and, in special cases, the procession walks all the way to the cemetery). Twenty years later seeing that Poloz Mukuch did not have a gravestone, Avetik Ishakyan asks varpet Simik to make one on his behalf. On the one side of the gravestone is carved 'To Poloz Mukuch (Mkrtich Ghazarosi Melqonyan); on the other side, 'A memento from the poet Avetik Isahakyan'.

When I was growing up in Gyumri, Poloz Mukuch was an omnipresent and glorified figure. But because scarcely any facts were mentioned about his life, secretly I started to seriously doubt that such a person ever really existed. Most people didn't bother to talk about his biography. In fact, the jokes with which Poloz had made his mark on the world were much more powerful than any historical facts. Hence, there isn't a Gyumretsi who not only has heard about, but feels a warm, personal attachment to a figure called Poloz Mukuch. The legend of this man is so dear to a Gyumretsi that innumerable jokes are attributed to him, oftentimes posthumously. Only after living in America for a while do I see the way a city—my home city—has given birth to and nourished a wonderful legend.

Yet, in the 1990s, this pride and humor, although of great psychological use, was surreal and incomprehensible to me. Half of the city was devastated by an earthquake; cycles of harsh winters had left no trees standing in and around the city; the war and a possible conflict with Turkey had made the residents anxious; and people fell into object poverty overnight. Still, they managed to look at the world as if half-seriously; not believing what they see and making fun of it.

To recall, the opening *aneqtd* mentions a railway being constructed through Gyumri, and a certain Dzitoghtonts bathhouse. Unlike the rest of Eastern Armenia, Gyumri was annexed to the Russian Empire in 1804 at the beginning of the 1804-1813 Russo-Persian war. Already in this period, Gyumri was a major center. In 1829 its population grew significantly due to the influx of about 3000 families from Western Armenia. In 1837 Czar Nicholas I visited Gyumri and renamed it Alexandropol, in honor of his wife, Princess Alexandra Fyodorovna (Charlotte of Prussia). (Almost a century later, in 1924, the city would be renamed again, this time to Leninakan, honoring Lenin...more on this, on re-naming).

Due to its strategic location, Gyumri became a major military station for Russian troops. In many respects, the city's architecture was determined by this. Thus, two intermingled themes dominated the city: commerce and military presence. Interestingly enough, there are still Russian troops stationed at Gyumri, with a peace-keeping, deterring mission, given the proximity of the current Turkish border (this is the official version of the story). What also seems unique about Gyumri is the fact that during the 19th century the vast majority of its inhabitants have been Armenians.

In the Armenia of today, despite the devastating earthquakes that have periodically occurred in the region, Gyumri has the largest number of standing 19th century buildings. The city was becoming an important commercial and military outpost for the Russian Empire. Ironically, the Russo-Turkish wars of the 19th century were profitable for the commercial class of Gyumri. There were dozens of taverns and large guesthouses. Usually, at the top of the arched gate or somewhere on the front of the building is a slab on which is inscribed the date of the construction, the varpet who built it and the name of its owner.

Early on, the inhabitants of Gyumri lived in houses completely or partially dug into the earth: in Armenian, *getnapor* and *kisagetnapor* houses. The latter is also known as *glkhatun* or 'Gharnavuj tun' in the vernacular of Gyumri. These kinds of constructions were used for multiple purposes (living space, storage, workshop, etc.) and were popular throughout the Caucasus and the Armenian Highland. They were built largely with tuff stone and had their own gardens and conveniences. At the same time, another type of building was being perfected: a house-complex with covered internal gardens.

The architecture of these houses already testifies to the growing sophistication of the Gyumri artisans. Their multi-functionality, efficient inner and outer solutions and decorative richness made them exemplary buildings. One of the largest complex houses in Gyumri was the Dzitoghtsonts old house. The Dzitoghtsyan was one of the richest families of the city. It is not accidental that Poloz Mukuch compares their *baghniq* ('bathhouse') to the new railroad in the opening '*aneqtd*' of our writing. The Dzitoghtsonts complex was built in 1829. Architecturally, this building was one of the

masterpieces of early Gyumri cityscape. Like other buildings of its kind, it had many rooms and intricate and highly functional network of halls and entrances.

These prefiguring architectural developments lead to the building of urban house complexes in the second half of the 19th century. There were one and two storied houses and some of them were explicitly called shahutaber (literally 'income generating') houses because they rented out frontal spaces and interior rooms for shops and guests, respectively. These houses have intricate designs on their frontal walls. They incorporated details from previous forms of buildings, such as basements, inside gardens, windows on the ceiling and narrow hallways. Once again, the Dzitoghtsyan had one of the largest shahutaber houses in Gyumri. This new two-storied house was built in 1872, according to the inscription on the front of the entrance gate. The first floor was used for commercial purposes while on the second floor, lived the owners of the house. Interestingly, this house had a rare metallic 'hanging' balcony on the front-center of the building. Today, this late Dzitoghtsyan's building houses the Gyumri museum of popular culture and the museum of Sergei Merkurov – the renowned Soviet sculpture of Greek origins and a native of Gyumri. Anyone visiting Gyumri must visit this museum.

Even though Gyumri has had more prosperous days, it has never been as

vibrant and creative as in the second half of the 19th century. In a sense, Poloz Mukuch's death marked the beginning of a kind of cultural decline for Gyumri. This decline, to be sure, was concomitant with political and economic hardships. There was the devastating impact that the genocidal events of 1915 had on Armenia, in general. With the annihilation and scattering of the Armenian life in Western Armenia, Gyumri lost a great source of economic and cultural growth. The city's infrastructure and population was put under great pressure by the inflow of refugees. The city lived through harsh winters and devastating epidemics.

Before the collapse of the Armenian Democratic Republic (the first Armenian republic), Gyumri was occupied by Turkish forces twice and in 1920 the infamous Treaty of Alexandropol was signed there. Soon, along with the current day Armenian Republic, Gyumri became a part of the Soviet Union. Then came a few more years of starvation that were accompanied by forceful efforts to collectivize the economy. This was followed by years of Stalinist repression, and then WW II.

From 1950s on Gyumri experienced major industrial growth. It became the second largest city of the Soviet Republic of Armenia, after Yerevan. Its factories produced textile, high quality electronic devices, industrial parts and construction materials.

However, the 1988 Spitak Earthquake and the subsequent economic collapse after the birth of the present Republic of Armenia obliterated the economy of the city.

Unfortunately, even without citing any statistical information it is easily confirmed that to this day Gyumri hasn't recovered from these blows. There is still wide-spread unemployment; the economic infrastructure is outmoded and sometimes blatantly absent. A new generation of young Armenians who have spent their formative years in an independent Armenia, have not experienced prosperity. The young people of Gyumri lack educational and technological resources. For example, many of them are poorly acquainted with the internet and do not take advantage of the new modes of world-connectedness. Add to this the rampant corruption of the city administration and the future doesn't look very promising. Instead, for the youth it is completely normal to aspire to move to Yerevan and, even worse, to Russia, Europe, Australia, and especially to the US.

But, I can't help but be hopeful. Clearly, the multifarious and sophisticated cultural heritage of the city has the potential to reinvigorate itself. Consider all that early-industrial achievement in architecture, artisanship, the arts, and commerce. We should think of how to tap into these potentialities that will allow Gyumri to re-imagine itself. Perhaps this should be left as material for another article.

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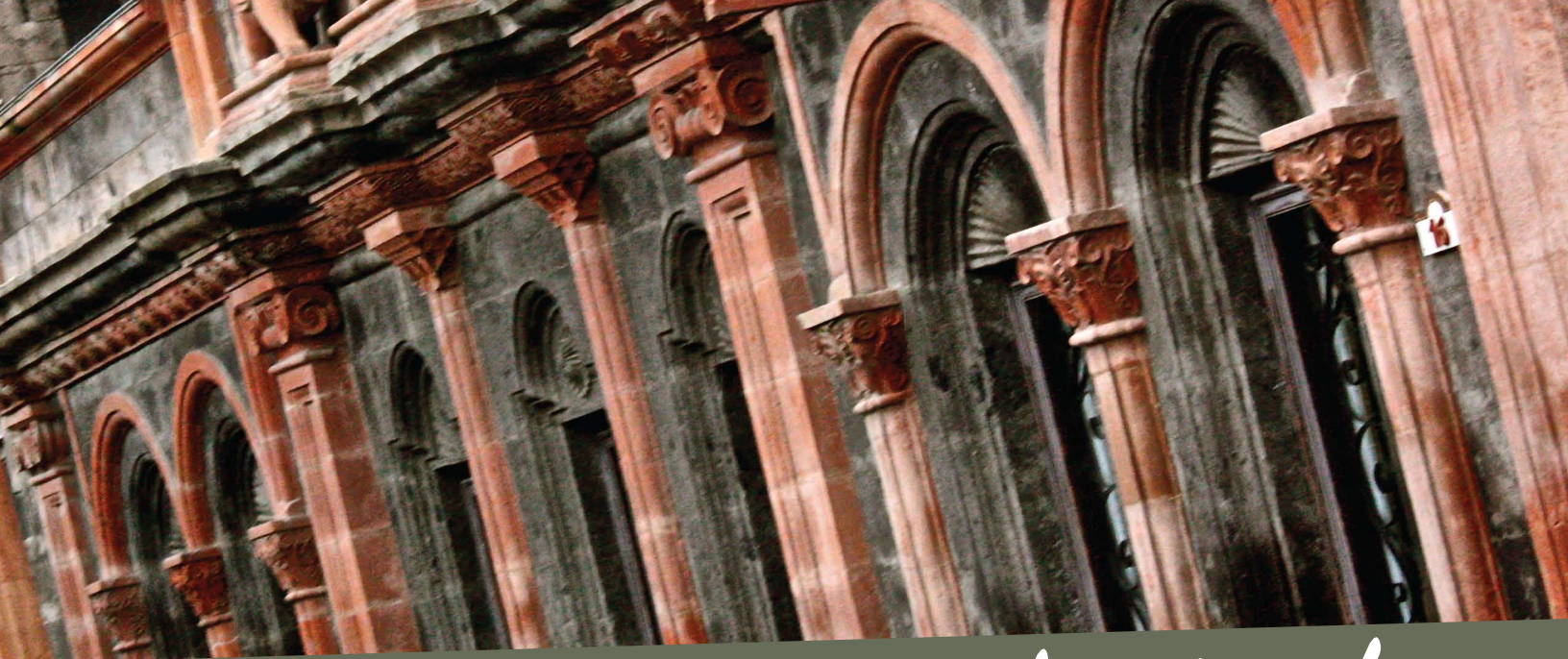
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Հնամենի Գիւմրի

Կումայրի, Ալեքսանդրապոլ, Լենինական, Գիւմրի. չորս անուններով է ամբողջանում քաղաքի պատմութիւնը, որը սկիզբ է առել դարերի խորքից ու կարծես պատրաստ է հոսել դէպ յաներձնութիւն...

Դեռ 5-րդ դարում Մ. Խորենացի պատմիչը յիշատակել է Երիախի կոչուող բանակավայրի մասին, որին յետագայում Կումայրի են անուանել: 18-րդ դարի վերջին Կումայրին վերանուանում են Գիւմրի: Ըստ որոշ աղբիւրների՝ օտարերկրացիները չեն կարողացել արտասանել Կումայրի բառը եւ աղաւաղելով այն՝ կոչել են Գիւմրի: 1804-ին Գիւմրին ուսանների տիրապետութեան տակ է անցնում, ինչն էլ ապագայ քաղաքի յետագայ զարգացման գործում դրական ազդեցութիւն է ունենում: Բայց բնակավայրի բուռն ծաղկումը սկսում է 1828-ից, երբ Արեւմտեան Հայաստանի Կարս, Էրզրում, Կարին, ու Անի քաղաքներից գաղթած մեծ թուով ընտանիքներ այստեղ են հաստատուում: Ձեւաւորում են առանձնապատուկ աւանդութիւններով եւ օրէնքներով արհեստաւորական համայնքներ:

1837-ին Գիւմրի է այցելում ուս ջար Նիկողայ Ա.-ը. այնքան է Կումայրին հաւանում, որ որոշում է ի պատիւ կնոջ՝ Ալեքսանդրա թագուհու, քաղաքն անուանել Ալեքսանդրապոլ: Աշխարհագրական յարմար դիրքի շնորհիւ Ալեքսանդրապոլը վերածւում է բերդ-ամրոցի. ստեղծւում են ռազմական ամրութիւններ, զինուորական աւաններ: 1840-ից Ալեքսանդրապոլը պաշտօնապէս հանաչւում է որպէս

քաղաքային բնակավայր, իսկ երկաթուղու կառուցումից յետոյ արդէն Արեւելեան Հայաստանում դառնում է երկաթուղային կարելոր հանգույց, առեւտրական, արհեստաւորական, ռազմաստրատեգիական ու մշակութային կենտրոն:

Քաղաքում մեծ թափով սկսում է զարգանալ արհեստագործութիւնը, որն այստեղ սկիզբ է առել դեռ հնագույն ժամանակներից. ապացոյցն էլ 1930-ին հազարամեակների վաղեմութեան ձուլարանի յայտնաբերումն է: Ալեքսանդրապոլի հարստարապետութիւնը առանձնապատուկութիւնների շնորհիւ իր վարպետների անունները հռչակել է ամբողջ Կովկասում: Նրանք հեղինակել են այնպիսի կառուցներ, ինչպիսիք են Սբ. Աստուածածնայ եկեղեցին, Սեւ եւ Կարմիր բերդերը, Սբ. Ամենափրկիչ եկեղեցին, Օրիպոդաց գիմնազիան /այս շէնքում էր Բակային համբար 2010-ը:

Անուանի բանաստեղծ Աւետիք Իսահակեանի խօսքերով՝ Գիւմրու հարստարապետութեան մէջ կան անթիւ տարրեր, ընդօրինակումներ մեր Անիի մնացորդներից: Ըստ Նրա՝ Գիւմրու վարպետները Անիի վարպետների աշակերտներն են եղել ու մանկուց աշքի առաջ ունենալով փառլուն հարստարապետութեան օրինակ՝ տեսած են այս քաղաքում են վերարտադրել: Լաւագոյն ապացոյցն էլ Անիի Կաթողիկէ Մայր եկեղեցու տիպարով գրեթէ քսան տարում (1858-1876) կառուցուած Գիւմրու Սբ. Ամենափրկիչ եկեղեցին է:

Հին Գիւմրին համբաւաւոր արհեստաւորներից բացի՝ յայտնի է եղել նշանաւոր աշուղներով:

19-րդ դարի երկրորդ կէսին Զիւանու գլխաւորութեամբ ձեւաւորւում է ազգային աշուղական դպրոցը, որին բնորոշ էր հասարակական-սոցիալական թեմաների սրութիւնը, գրական-երաժշտական լեզուի մաքրութիւնը, ուրոյն մտածելակերպը: Սկսած 1870-ական թուականներից քաղաքի հռչակաւոր արհարանները դարձել են աշուղական երգ ու նուագի իւրապատուկ կենտրոններ: Գիւմրեցի մեծանուն աշուղներին յաճախ հրաւիրել են Երեւան, Թիֆլիս, Պաքու, Աստրախան եւ այլուր:

Հայաստանի խորհրդայնացման արդիւնքում՝ 1924-ից Ալեքսանդրապոլը վերանուանւում է Լենինական: Նաեւ Սովետական Հայաստանի օրոք Լենինականն իր զարգացուածութեամբ ու հզօրութեամբ Երեւանից յետոյ երկրորդն էր: Սակայն շուտով ամէն ինչ գլխիվայր է շրջում 1988-ի անեղ երկրաշարժը: Երբեմնի հզօր քաղաքի մէջքն ալլեւ կոտորում է: Հողին է հաւասարւում կանգուն ամէն բան: Ալլեւս պատմութեան գիրկն է անցնում Լենինականի վաղեմի փառքը: Քաղաքը Գիւմրի է վերանուանւում 1991-ից Խորհրդային կարգերի փլուզումից յետոյ:

Եւ հիմա էլ ժամանակի հռչակաւոր քաղաքի մասին յիշեցնում են լոկ կիսաւեր շինութիւններն ու հարուստ պատմութիւնը: Կումայրին, Ալեքսանդրապոլը, Լենինականն ալլեւս ուրուականներ են...

Մարկարիթա Հովանէսեան

ԿԵՐԶ ԿԱՆԱՆՑ



ԲՈՆՈՒԹԵԱՆ

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