

THE ARMENIAN INTELLIGENTSIA TODAY: DISCOURSES OF SELF-IDENTIFICATION AND SELF-PERCEPTION

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INTRODUCTION

Most studies of the intelligentsia have one common peculiarity: they are carried out by people who themselves are intellectuals or members of the intelligentsia. Consequently, studies of the boundaries and meanings of “the intelligentsia” usually end up applying to their authors as well. These studies have the latent goal of self-cognition, of understanding how their authors’ own identities have been shaped and whether they can and want to be part of the group called intellectuals or intelligentsia. I will not deny that a need for self-cognition and self-definition in social and cultural terms prompted me to undertake research on the Armenian intelligentsia and write this article. But more generally, the goal of my research is to find out how cultural roles and representation patterns developed and adopted by the Armenian intelligentsia have defined the group’s place in society and politics.

The terms “intelligentsia” and “intellectuals”—in Armenian, *mtavorakanutiun*—are frequently used in the Armenian political, cultural, and domestic life but are conceptualized and interpreted differently in different contexts. In this article, I describe the central discursive patterns of self-identification and self-representation among contemporary Armenian intelligentsia. My research also reveals both continuities and disruptions with Russian and Armenian intelligentsia of Imperial and Soviet times, which leads to potentially interesting conclusions about the group and its role in ongoing projects of nation- and state-building.

I will not present here a comprehensive history of the terms “intelligentsia” and “intellectuals,” their genesis, evolution, definitions, and interpretations. Instead, I rely on existing literature that has extensively addressed these issues (e.g., Geiger 1955; Gella 1971; Morson 1993; Lotman 1999; Uspenskii 1999; Gasparov 1999; Man-

nheim 2000; Glebkin 2002; Kamchatnov 2004; Filatova 2005). However, I feel that it is important to provide some functional definitions of intelligentsia to describe the group of people I examined during my research. The simplest one is the Soviet definition of the intelligentsia: it is a social stratum of people who earn their living through intellectual labor. But this quasi-Marxist understanding of the intelligentsia based on its position in the workforce should be supplemented by more culturalist definitions such as Gella's, who sees the group as "a culturally homogenous stratum of educated people united by charismatic feelings and a certain set of values" (Gella 1971:1), and Mannheim's, who highlights that different social types of intelligentsia reflect different understandings of the notions of culture, intellectuality, and education, but are necessarily bound to these notions (Mannheim 2000:109–112). These definitions helped me identify my object of study: educated and "civilized" people (or those who claim to be such), employed or self-employed in spheres of intellectual labor, and voluntarily and actively involved in nationwide discourses related to national, cultural, social, and political values. Do these people identify and represent themselves as the intelligentsia, and if they do or do not, then why and how? These are the questions central to my research.

I also need to provide some explanations of the Armenian-language terminology related to the intelligentsia and intellectuals, which is important for understanding the subtler nuances of their self-identification and self-representation. In the European and Russian traditions, intelligentsia and intellectuals are usually terminologically differentiated. In Armenian, both terms are translated in the same way—"*mtavorakanutiun*," which literally means a group of people of the intellect ("*mtavor*"—adv. "intellectual"). This might cause some misinterpretation and confusion. In some contexts it may mean "intelligentsia" in the Russian sense of the word; elsewhere it may be more suggestive of "intellectuals" in the European understanding (for comparative analysis of these two understandings see Eyerman 1992:35–36; also Storm 2002; Charles 2005; Marina 2007). To avoid misinterpretation, people often adopt the Russian words "intelligentsia" (интеллигенция) and "intellectual" (интеллектуал). Some of my informants insisted that all three terms should coexist in the Armenian contemporary vocabulary because of the subtle differences in their meanings. Quoting my research subjects, I will preserve the exact term they used—*mtavorakan*, intelligentsia, *intelligent* (интеллигент, member of the intelligentsia), or intellectual.

I used a combination of methods in investigating this topic. I began with personal interviews of 12 people of different ages (from 22 to 89), genders, and intellectual professions (students, teachers, journalists, researchers), supplemented by dozens of shorter conversations with other members of the Armenian intelligentsia. I also initiated several group discussions on my blog¹ and used contributions to discussions of topics related to the intelligentsia on the blogs of software engineer David Antonyan,²

¹ <http://yuliaantonian.livejournal.com/16629.html>, <http://yuliaantonian.livejournal.com/2010/07/15/>

² <http://zubian.livejournal.com>

lawyer David Sandukhchyan,³ journalist Armen Hovhannisyan,⁴ and historian Suren Manukyan.⁵ More than 25 bloggers participated in these discussions. According to recent studies of the Armenian blogosphere, the overwhelming majority of bloggers are educated professionals who are active in professional and public life (Antonyan 2010:136–137), and there is no reason to believe that my informants as a group were any different. I also analyzed similar discussions in other Internet forums, like the “Dar” (Century) forum (2007).⁶ The rest of my research consisted of analysis of interviews with representatives of the intelligentsia—such as philosopher Eduard Atayan, film director and oppositionist Tigran Khzmalyan, musician Vahan Artsruni, architect Artur Meschyan, essayist and blogger Aleksandr Kananyan, teacher and politician Ashot Bleyan, and artist Mkrtich Tonoyan—published in the Armenian press, as well as articles, essays, and event reports in widely read mass media outlets (e.g., *Armenia Today*, *ArmTimes*, *Golos Armenii*, *Novoe vremia*, *Lragir.am*, *Haykakan Zhamanak*, *Hraparak.am*). These texts help me to conceptualize and instrumentalize the notions of *mtavorakanutiun*, intelligentsia, and intellectuals. Chronologically, the data encompass the last two decades, but most belong to the period 2005–2012. I begin with a brief sketch of the history of Armenian discourses about the intelligentsia; then I summarize contemporary understandings of the terms intelligentsia, intellectual, and *mtavorakan*. The main part of the paper is devoted to a discussion of several discursive themes around which contemporary Armenian intelligentsia builds its collective identity.

THE ARMENIAN INTELLIGENTSIA: A DISCURSIVE HISTORY⁷

The Armenian intelligentsia cannot be considered outside of longstanding historical connections between the Russian and Armenian general cultural frameworks. The Armenian intelligentsia per se is a phenomenon rooted in the Russian and European cultural environments of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By this time, the overwhelming majority of the Armenian educated stratum did not live on Armenian soil, then divided between the Russian and Ottoman empires, but were scattered through Armenian communities in different cities of these two empires (Tiflis, Baku, Nor Nakhichevan, Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Istanbul) and other countries (Venice, Vienna, Calcutta, Madras). In spite of its diasporic nature, the Armenian intelligentsia was not a mere reproduction of its Russian or European counterparts. Rather, it developed into a very specific national social and cultural stratum. In this respect, it is rather similar to the Polish national intelligentsia. The

³ http://david_sand.livejournal.com

⁴ <http://azatarar.livejournal.com>

⁵ <http://orientalian.livejournal.com>

⁶ <http://www.akumb.am/showthread.php/6333>

⁷ Since there has been no specific research on the history of the Armenian intelligentsia, this section draws on more general works on the Armenian history and culture: Ananun 1916; Raffi 1958; Yerkeyan 1982.

Poles insist on the Polish origins of the term *intelligentsia*, which the Russians later borrowed, somewhat transforming its meaning (Gella 1971:4). Originally, the specific value system of the Polish *intelligentsia* included cultural patterns and a way of life similar of those of the nobility, coupled with aspirations for national independence and a devotion to the ideas of national progress and enlightenment (Gella 1971:6). The established concept of the Armenian *intelligentsia*, as we will see, is very similar despite the historical and cultural differences between Armenian and Polish societies.

The social origins of the Armenian *intelligentsia* were mixed. Initially, a significant part of it emerged from the clergy, then the most highly educated sector of society. Later, two other strata, the bourgeoisie and the nobility, became sources as well. Unlike the Polish, by the nineteenth century the Armenians had already lost their nobility due to war, foreign invasion, and crucial transformations of the society following the disappearance of the Armenian state in the Late Middle Ages. After becoming a part of the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century, the Eastern Armenians reorganized their social hierarchy and even managed to partially reconstruct their lost nobility. Remnants of the old Armenian aristocracy, minor landowners (*meliks* and *beks*), and some rich merchants were awarded or allowed to purchase noble ranks by the Russian empire in exchange for their loyalty and support. In attempt to be closer to the Russian elite, the new Armenian nobility reproduced the cultural patterns of the mid-level Russian aristocracy. In turn, the nascent bourgeoisie also adopted aristocratic lifestyles to raise their cultural and social status and enhance their influence among both Armenian and Russian elites (Ananun 1916:139, 171–178). These two strata of Armenian society preferred to educate their offspring in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Germany, or France (Raffi [1879] 1958:428–449). All this made the new Armenian aristocracy and bourgeoisie and their offspring almost culturally and socially identical.

Due to the education received both in Europe and Russia, the two intellectual traditions of the Russian *intelligentsia* and Western intellectualism were represented simultaneously among educated Armenians, with both terms translated as *mtavorakanutiun*. In the late nineteenth century, the *mtavorakan* was a primary initiator and, simultaneously, a focus of Armenian national, social, cultural, and political discourses. The *mtavorakans* assigned for themselves the lifelong mission of enlightening the Armenian people, promoting the struggle for independence and Armenian unification, advancement of the “national cause,” and reorganization of national institutes. However, they criticized themselves for not adhering strictly and fervently enough to their own idealized moral image. In the discourses of the time, there seemed to be two main perceptions of the *intelligentsia*. The first saw the *intelligentsia* as an educated stratum meant “to educate, enlighten, and administer the nation” (Ananun 1916:315), and the second defined it as “those who sacrifice themselves, endure all kinds of persecutions, fight against prohibitions, work and act without even being encouraged and praised, because they believe that the future is theirs” (Raffi [1879] 1958:457). Enlightenment and sacrifice were two main characteristics of the *intelligentsia*, according to these views.

During the Soviet period, perceptions and definitions of the intelligentsia in Armenia were threefold. The first corresponded to the official definition established by the Soviet government, which identified the intelligentsia as workers in intellectual and creative spheres such as education, science, art, or medicine, essentially expanding the boundaries of the group to include all of those with higher education. Second, the intelligentsia was expected to be educated, well-read, informed on arts and literature, and to demonstrate high standards of everyday culture such as refined manners, taste in clothing, and good speaking skills. This approach reduced the intelligentsia to a rather narrow group of people resembling, in fact, the lost aristocracy. And, finally, the third group of perceptions drew on the traditional Russian understanding of the intelligentsia as, first and foremost, a protest group that included educated dissidents and nationalists who fought for human rights and, more importantly, for national interests like memorialization of the Genocide or the official recognition of the Armenian language (Manukyan 2006).

These basic approaches to *mtavorakanutiun*/intelligentsia, prevalent before the collapse of the Soviet world, have served as a starting point to changes in the identities, perceptions, and attitudes towards the intelligentsia on which I focus in this article. Further analysis of contemporary discourses reveals significant continuity of (self-)identification and (self-)presentation of the Armenian intelligentsia with its pre-Soviet and Soviet predecessors but also some differences.

INTELLIGENTSIA, INTELLECTUALS, AND *MTAVORAKANUTIUN*: CURRENT UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE TERMS IN EVERYDAY PUBLIC DISCOURSES

Unlike in Russia where many academic and non-academic texts have been devoted to discussions of the origins, roles, functions, and fate of the Russian intelligentsia, the Armenian discourse on intelligentsia issues is recent, scarce, and takes place mostly outside of academia—in popular essays and media interviews. It was reanimated in the early 1990s in connection with the independence movements, the Karabakh war, and the fall of the Soviet Union, as the need to reformulate the goals, objectives, and strategies of the Armenian intelligentsia appeared. It might also be a consequence of an influx around the same time of Russian-language publications on the topic by contemporary and pre-revolutionary authors.⁸

A 1991 interview given by the late professor of the Yerevan State University, member of the Academy of Science, and a well-known linguist and philosopher Eduard Atayan to a leading Armenian newspaper might serve as a model text for reflections on this topic (Atayan 2010:261–269). Atayan was one of the few Armenians to join the Russian dissident movement and be imprisoned for that by the Soviet gov-

⁸ For example, a collection of articles about the intelligentsia first published in 1909–1910 (Vekhi 1991) was reprinted in 1991 in Moscow. The book was available in Yerevan and, presumably, was influential in the Armenian intelligentsia's circles. Besides, popular Russian magazines *Ogonek*, *Novyi mir*, and others that discussed topics relevant to the intelligentsia were by then also widely read by Armenians.

ernment. Therefore, questions about the definition and role of the intelligentsia had personal significance for him even though he tried to approach them analytically. First, he differentiated the terms “intelligentsia,” “intellectual,” and “*mtavorakan*.” According to him, the *mtavorakan* is better translated as “intellectual,” whereas the intelligentsia is a moral phenomenon. He defined the intelligentsia as an “aristocracy of spirit” (“аристократия духа”) that might even indulge in some snobbery. They are fighters for justice, internally free and uninhibited. If the intellectual mainly demonstrates his erudition, the *intelligent* is educated in the full sense of the word: he not only masters proper spelling or good reading skills, but is also able to recognize the true meaning of the text. One cannot be an *intelligent* in name only, he must think and act as one and be penetrated with “intelligentsialism” (интеллигентность).⁹ To put it differently, Atayan raised here the very important issue of the authenticity of the intelligentsia. He made an analogy between those who pretend to be called the Armenian intelligentsia (*mtavorakanutiun*) and the so-called *nomenklatura*, the term used to describe the Soviet political, military, and administrative elite. Atayan’s clear message is that only those who have not been in service of the Soviet regime can be called intelligentsia. He nominated the famous Soviet dissident and human rights activist, physicist Andrei Sakharov¹⁰ and the German philosopher, musician, physician, and missionary Albert Schweitzer as examples of genuine intelligentsia, stressing their public activism and support for human rights (Atayan 2010:261–269). In this respect, he comes close to those (including Russian scholars Nikolai Berdyaev [1991], Boris Uspenskii [1999], Mikhail Gasparov [1999]; see the comparative analysis of definitions in Glebkin [2002]) who define intelligentsia as an ideological and moral group rather than a social one.

Atayan’s reflections also provide a good segue into the analysis of two currently dominant approaches towards intelligentsia and *mtavorakanutiun*: occupation-based and values-based.

THE OCCUPATION-BASED APPROACH

The official Soviet definition of the intelligentsia as workers in the intellectual sphere significantly extended the boundaries of the group, displeasing many of those who defined themselves as the intelligentsia and who stressed the exclusivity of the group.

Not every intellectual work might be considered that of intelligentsia. An accountant is not an *intelligent* (интеллигент), but a physician, academician, artist, painter, and writer are surely intelligentsia. An intellectual is a person who reads and knows a great deal and thinks independently. For instance, the doctor can be an *intelligent*, but not an intellectual.¹¹

⁹ The English translation of the term is borrowed from Morson (1993:20).

¹⁰ Due to his pro-Armenian position on Nagorny Karabakh, Sakharov is a very popular and revered person in Armenia.

¹¹ Hereafter all indented text, if not specially attributed, presents excerpts from interviews or public discussions gathered in the course of the research. Because many respondents did not want

In everyday usage, the occupation-based approach prevails, but perceptions of what sorts of occupation are typical of the intelligentsia are rather flexible and depend on circumstances. The following examples demonstrate such different uses. A group of university professors arrived at a military base to deliver lectures to the soldiers (I was among the professors). The commander, who was speaking on the telephone when the lecturers finished, said to his interlocutor: "Sorry, I will call you back as soon as I see off the *mtavorakanner*."¹² Another case occurred during a recent opposition rally, when representatives of the intelligentsia (*mtavorakanutiun*) were asked to sign a petition urging the authorities to immediately release an imprisoned opposition leader. Out of the people crowded around the petition holders, only those who were recognized as artists, writers, or musicians were allowed to sign. Some were rejected because they supposedly were not *mtavorakanner*. One of them said, "I am a thirty-year veteran teacher. How could it be that I am not a *mtavorakan*!"¹³ Mass media periodically reports on the so-called "Committees of *mtavorakans*" or various petitions signed by *mtavorakans*; and everyone understands that *mtavorakans* in such cases are usually public persons engaged in arts, literature, music, theatre, cinema, and show business—in many cases the common perception of the term is limited to the arts sphere in particular.

In the meantime, the occupation-based approach also has important political and ideological connotations inherited from the Soviet times, when the artists, writers, actors, and other art professionals were supposed to serve as ideological supporters of the ideas of socialism and the ruling Communist Party, as indeed some did. For their services, they were considered a "privileged estate" of the Armenian (and, more generally, Soviet) society. Today, the situation is very different because the privileges offered by the state to the arts professionals are incommensurable with those of the Soviet times and seem to be largely fictitious—however, attitudes change very slowly. It is still very common to hear negative comments about the intelligentsia, referring to it as a group of creative professionals loyal to the authorities. One of the most pejorative references is a slightly changed pronunciation of the word *mtavorakanutiun* with the soft "r" replaced with the hard "rr" to produce "*mtavoRRakanutiun*," which completely transforms the whole meaning of the word, making it metaphorically closer to "brown nosing" ("vorr" meaning "ass").

THE VALUES-BASED APPROACH: EVERYDAY BEHAVIOR, MORAL AND ETHICAL CODES

The everyday uses of the words *mtavorakanutiun* and intelligentsia do not only have professional connotations but sometimes also include moral, behavioral, and

their names to be published, I prefer to leave all the informants anonymous. Besides, many of the utterances of different informants were almost identical.

¹² Plural of *mtavorakan*.

¹³ See "Intelligentsia Defends Nikol Pashinyan." YouTube Web Site. Retrieved May 8, 2012 (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p46pvdXJ05M>).

mental dimensions. The definitions that people were giving in interviews and discussions often also stressed “non-professional” aspects of the phenomenon.

Mtavorakan is the person who is not dominated solely by physical demands and desires, who is led not only by stomach and covetous eye but by the mind and whose spiritual and intellectual demands are more important than physical and sexual ones.

When we say *mtavorakan* we mean that someone follows moral and ethical principles of creative and intellectual work.

There remains a difference between an *intelligent* and a merely well-bred, educated person. The main characteristics of the intelligentsia are believed to lie in “hereditary” cultural and social features, which cannot be acquired but are rather “inherited” as a result of a specific family environment. There is even the notion of a “third-generation intelligentsia,” which means that a person may be called an *intelligent* only if at least his or her grandparents also belonged to the intelligentsia. This construction of the intelligentsia is very similar to that of the nobility and makes sense in situations where the intelligentsia is treated as an elite class replacing the nobility in a direct (as in Armenia) or indirect (as in Russia, see, e.g., Rendle 2008) way. However, the validity of this construction of intelligentsia is sometimes disputed:¹⁴ events in Armenian history have often disrupted the generational continuity of educated elites. Instead, everyone in Armenia who seems to be educated, well bred, and good looking is considered member of the intelligentsia. Indeed, in the simplest, vernacular use of the term, belonging to the intelligentsia usually means being polite, courteous, even exhibiting some aristocratic sensibilities in everyday life (such as in home interior, meals, and clothes). Aristocratic manners might be matched with a sense of superiority and even arrogance sometimes associated with the intelligentsia. A former medical student remembered: “I didn’t like the *intelligent* (интеллигентный) professors, they were a bit arrogant.” “Perhaps, they weren’t *intelligents* at all?” “No, they were, but arrogance made them unpleasant.”¹⁵

Other conceptions, while recognizing the value of intellect and knowledge, also underscore moral qualities:

A *mtavorakan* should be brave, he cannot be a coward, should be professional, have a worldview and analytical skills, should struggle against mediocrities.

Moreover, intellect and concomitant features like smartness, introspectiveness, and analytical skills may be important characteristics of an intellectual, but they do not automatically make someone an *intelligent* unless the person also has a predisposition for political, public, or nationalist activism. After Armenia regained its independence, nationalism has become less important, and today struggles for

¹⁴ E.g., Mikael Baghdasaryan “Esse ob armianskikh intellektualakh i ne tol’ko.” Retrieved on January 31, 2011 (<http://www.hra.am/am/point-of-view/2007/11/14/17371>).

¹⁵ Author’s interview.

social, political, or cultural change have become the main tasks of the contemporary intelligentsia. In this respect, the Armenian intelligentsia today perpetuates attitudes that were common to the Russian intelligentsia of the nineteenth century.

We, Armenians, consider *mtavorakan* those who, being faithful to their profession, simultaneously carried out intellectual activities and followed the mission of popularizing the culture. *Mtavorakans* (intellectuals) were distinguished by their intellectual and moral qualities, they struggled against medieval customs and habits, and for the freedom of the Armenian nation.

A *mtavorakan* should be worried about the fate of his country.

He who is silent, he is not a *mtavorakan*.

Those who do not participate in explaining and improving reality, who remain stuck in snobbism and self-complacency, who profess religious fanaticism, and depend on authorities are not *mtavorakan*.

This transition from a nationalistically oriented intelligentsia to a social protest group generates new possibilities for comparison of the Armenian and Russian intelligentsia. And for some, the Armenian intelligentsia, unlike its Russian counterpart, does not “look for the truth.” The Armenian intelligentsia is based on the form rather than on the content, because looking for social justice may jeopardize national unity and national interests.¹⁶

Popular definitions often create the impression that the intelligentsia is a group of supermen endowed with the best of human qualities, projecting the image of an “ideal” personality. However, this is a false impression: as has been mentioned, for some, intelligentsia is not an unambiguously positive category, and many do not want to be considered a part of it.

THE ARMENIAN INTELLIGENTSIA: BOUNDARIES AND DIMENSIONS OF SELF-PERCEPTION

The process of identity-building among the intelligentsia constantly shifts from that of the individual to that of group self-identification. However, members of this group also either instinctively or deliberately try to maintain boundaries between the socio-cultural and the ethnic/national dimensions of identity. Current developments in Armenian society (significant changes of the social structure, in the political and cultural landscape, and in the previously existing Soviet value system) have created uncertainties about the eventual reconfiguration of social roles that were previously considered stable and fundamental categories of society. It seems that, due to its highly discursive nature, no social group but the intelligentsia has been so strongly and pervasively concerned with what they are, with their own social, political, and cultural roles, and with their future prospects in a changing world.

¹⁶ Stepan Danielyan. “Nrantits chi pahanjvum voch khighch, voch banakanutiun.” Retrieved on January 31, 2011 (<http://www.religions.am/index.php/art.html>).

THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE INTELLIGENTSIA

The main conclusion that we can draw from the definitions and uses of the words *intelligentsia*, *intellectuals*, and their Armenian counterpart *mtavorakan* is that they are instrumental in shaping people's social and cultural identities, which is crucial in the newly formed hierarchies of contemporary Armenian society. The collective process of building a definition is also important insofar as it aims to locate "the genuine"—in this case the "genuine intelligentsia." A significant part of this discourse of authenticity concerns the division of the intelligentsia into "fake" and "true" and describes ways of discerning who is a "phony" and who is a "genuine" *intelligent* or *mtavorakan*.¹⁷

There are *mtavorakans* "by law" and "philistines" who are looking for a better life and are ready to sell their ideals for that.

People called intelligentsia/*mtavorakans* can be very different. There is a category of people I am calling "educated bastards." They are intelligentsia as well.

When we say "identity," we usually mean self-understanding and self-identification despite multiple, even contradictory, interpretations of the term (see Brubaker 2004). However, I have encountered a significant number of cases in which an interviewee modestly declined "the honor" of being intelligentsia. As one of my informants responded to my question, as to whether or not he considered himself an *intelligent*: "Am I an *intelligent*? I think, only my colleagues and friends are able to answer this question." Mikhail Lotman indicated that being an *intelligent* means being identified as such by other representatives of this social group (as in the case of the aristocracy). In his words, the intelligentsia vigilantly ensures the purity of the group, occasionally conducting "purges" (Lotman 1999:134). This is true in the Armenian situation as well. One of the most effective mechanisms of purity control is the social taboo against self-identification as an *intelligent* that directly correlates with such categories of self-control as shame, modesty, and so on—in other words, commonly accepted signs of the "civilized" person in modern European perception (Elias 2000:365–379), inherited by the Armenian intelligentsia from its Russian and European counterparts. To say "I am an *intelligent*" is the same as to claim "I am a well-dressed, well-bred, and intellectual person," and in doing so at least one of these characteristics might be undermined, as a well-bred person should not be so immodest. In the meantime, saying "I don't think I am the right person to bear the honorable and responsible name of *mtavorakan*," as one of my informants did, implies that he is in fact the true *mtavorakan*, because this form of self-abnegation seems to be a disguised form of self-identification as such.

Whether identified by themselves or by others, the intelligentsia follows two ways of building its identity. The first approaches the problem from the "primordial" position, in which one's identity is defined "by default" because of

¹⁷ This kind of discourse is also characteristic of the Russian intelligentsia (see Lotman 1999; Uspenskii 1999).

his or her belonging to a particular family: “he was born in *mtavorakan’s* family,” “he is a third-generation *intelligent*,” “N. is a hereditary *intelligent*.” The second way is a self-constructed identity achieved through targeted life activities like education, career, self-development, political or cultural participation, and so on:

I am [a part of the] intelligentsia, because I am carrying out some social functions free of charge like thinking, writing, criticizing the authorities and other [members of the] intelligentsia. I am doing intellectual work on behalf of the society.

Of course, the problem of self-identification for the Armenian intelligentsia is not a mere question of social belonging or professional/public activities, but it is also embedded in discourses of national culture, national identity, and national values, which are currently unfolding in many different ways. One issue is whether or not the intelligentsia is indigenous to Armenian culture. Some argue that the intelligentsia is not an authentic Armenian phenomenon but was imported from Russia and Western Europe and should be viewed as a direct result of imperialism and colonialism. Therefore, features of the Russian intelligentsia should not be incorporated into the identity of the Armenian *mtavorakanutiun* unless they are first transformed and “nationalized.” The essayist Stepan Danielyan argues that each nation has its own type of intelligentsia and, even when borrowed from other cultures, will be adapted and nationalized: “If Dostoevsky and Nansen had been born Armenians they would have necessarily become Sos Sargsyan or Zori Balayan.”¹⁸

Usually, concrete personalities are represented as examples of the “true” intelligentsia. Answering the question “who might serve an example of a true *intelligent*?”, the overwhelming majority of respondents first mentioned several Russian writers, poets, and academics (Anton Chekhov, Aleksandr Blok, Boris Pasternak, Andrei Sakharov, etc.) and a few Armenian poets, actors, musicians, or painters (including Yeghisheh Charents, Sos Sargsyan, Aram Khachaturyan, Hakob Hakobyan, etc.). Interestingly, almost no Westerners were mentioned except for those with Armenian origins (singer Charles Aznavour or writer William Saroyan) or known for their support for the Armenian people (e.g., Fridtjof Nansen). In the last case, Nansen’s public activism on behalf of Armenian refugees during the Genocide was considered a more important reason for listing him among the “true” intelligentsia than his previous achievements in science and diplomacy.

I am surely not an *intelligent* and I don’t need to be.

God was generous to have not created me as an Armenian *intelligent*.

¹⁸ Sos Sargsyan is a famous Armenian cinema and theater actor; Zori Balayan is a writer and public figure. See Stepan Danielyan. “Nratsits chi pahanjvum voch khighch, voch banakanutiun.” Retrieved on January 31, 2011 (<http://www.religions.am/index.php/art.html>).

Such statements are usually accompanied by a thorough critique of the intelligentsia as a phenomenon of the imperial or totalitarian past.

I do not accept the notion of intelligentsia, it has been a product of power, when the big idols used to create smaller idols to make people worship and copy them.

Intelligentsia is a Russian notion, which gave birth to Bolshevism, Kemalism, and other "isms." It's not what Armenia should aim for.

Such a perception has become one of the main political imperatives of the present—not because the past and present are juxtaposed, but because the realities of the past are extended to the present situation.

All KGB informers were *intelligents*; Georgian Zviadi [Gamsakhurdia] was an *intelligent*. Our current intelligentsia is a satellite of our authorities.

People who refuse to identify themselves with the intelligentsia justify their position by expressing implicit or explicit concerns about the "genuineness" of the intelligentsia today. The common explanation sounds like this: "I am not intelligentsia because I am not like those who call themselves intelligentsia; or if they are intelligentsia, then I am not."

So, disavowal of belonging to the intelligentsia is a veiled indictment of the current Armenian intelligentsia as being "false," and due to this fact some people prefer to deliberately renounce membership in this social group. From their perspective, belonging in a social group is something that can be deliberately chosen, accepted, or rejected.

I prefer to be called a "service man."

If I want self-realization, then I would rather choose one of other existing strata of the society.

A lack of stability and certainty in self-identification, a "soft" conception of identity that implies fluidity and multiplicity (following Brubaker's terminology [2004:37]) often put this "floating" type of the Armenian intelligentsia at the epicenter of different movements, ideologies, social and cultural processes that require not only reshaping of the self, but also revising, transforming, eliminating, or inventing "tradition." Of course, this is not an exclusively Armenian phenomenon—it is intrinsic to nation-building processes everywhere according to Eyerman's definition of intellectuals "as a part of a historical process, in which human actors reinvent cultural traditions" (1992:34). Below, I discuss the cultural context of six more discursive aspects of the traditions of Armenian intelligentsia in order to demonstrate the continuities as well as ruptures with its past.

INTELLIGENTSIA VERSUS HUCKSTERS

In everyday conversations, Internet forums, and interviews, one frequently encounters remarks in which the intelligentsia is opposed to "hucksters" (often called

by the Russian-language moniker “лавочники”), a derogatory name for the current ruling elite, alluding to their sometimes real and sometimes imagined low social origins. The term also implies that most of them have made their fortunes through shady trade and speculation.

Our army does not have intellectuals or professionals, it has nothing but bureaucrats and hucksters.

Previous politicians [of the First Armenian Republic of 1918–1920] were intellectuals and true *mtavorakans*. Currently one can encounter no intellectuals among the leaders of the government.

We need a strong will, but the elite of hucksters does not have it. We should get rid of the hucksters in power as soon as possible.

Why “hucksters”? As previously mentioned, most of the Armenian intelligentsia of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries emerged from the merchant estate. Armenians have long been known as skillful traders, a fact incorporated into stereotypical descriptions of the Armenian ethnic character (Melik-Shahnazaryan 1999). At the same time, as leitmotifs of Armenian “realistic” fiction of the nineteenth century implied, the educated offspring of Armenian merchants always wanted to get rid of their past by adopting completely different modes of life and thinking—those of the nobility and the intelligentsia. But this juxtaposition of the “true” intelligentsia with “hucksters” was solidified during the Soviet period, when trade and some industries became associated with the black market. Armenia was one of the centers of clandestine entrepreneurship and illegal trade. While the Soviet intelligentsia lived on state salaries, the *tsekhovikner* (from Russian “цеховик,” those running underground private factories) enriched themselves through black market manufacturing and trade. After the market economy was introduced in Armenia in the 1990s, all types of businesses were legalized and the word *tsekhovik* was immediately replaced by the words “entrepreneur” and “businessman.” However, those who managed to make a lot of money during the first decade of independence (the so-called oligarchs) later came to power and now make up the majority in the Armenian parliament. Perhaps because of their business experience, they often use market-related metaphors (“sell,” “buy,” “bargain,” etc.) when discussing political or social issues, a tendency which the intelligentsia views as inappropriate for the topics of national interests, national culture, and patriotism.

We let today’s thieves and hucksters in power gamble our national honor and memory of the Genocide.

Moreover, those of the intelligentsia who achieve access to the upper echelons of political power are recategorized as hucksters by default, because they have joined the clique, without considering the personal and social characteristics (manners, education level, etc.) that are otherwise crucial for identification of the intelligentsia. The opposition of hucksters and intelligentsia is much more than just a metaphor: it

is a commentary on the incumbent rulers. It is also an attempt to set up boundaries between two forms of power, “genuine” and “bought.”

THE LANGUAGES OF THE ARMENIAN INTELLIGENTSIA

Since the nineteenth century, Russian was almost equal to Armenian as a language of both official and domestic communication among the Armenian intelligentsia. Moreover, in the final decades of the Soviet Union, Russian-language education became highly prestigious in Armenia. Speaking Russian was one of the informal signs of the intelligentsia. According to statistics, 45 percent of Armenians living in Armenia mastered Russian, and 25 percent of students went to Russian-language secondary schools (Panossian 1988:344). The latter were mostly the children of the elite. According to my own observations, between 40 and 90 percent of content of home libraries of the Armenian urban intelligentsia consisted of Russian-language titles even though Armenia had one of the highest rates of native-language publications of the Soviet republics (over a thousand titles a year). At the university level, biomedical science, mathematics, and physics were all taught in both languages, so the students could choose between Russian and Armenian departments. Most of the last Soviet generation of Armenian intelligentsia graduated from Russian-language schools and were thus less familiar with literary Armenian language and culture. Instead, they were well-versed in Russian literature and were acquainted with world culture through the lens of the Russian language.

In the post-Soviet period, school instruction in the Russian language was discontinued, except for a small number of classes intended for ethnic Russians and recent repatriates. The Russian-speaking intelligentsia is dwindling now, and those who identify closely with the Russian language and Russian/Soviet mentality and cultural patterns nostalgically speak of a dramatic decline in the educational and cultural level of the current generation—frequently heralding the death of the intelligentsia altogether. However, in the last several years, Russian and English have been reprioritized and considered obligatory for everyone in Armenia. A recent legislative initiative of the Ministry of Education allowing for the establishment of foreign-language schools in Armenia was viewed as a revival the Russian language in the cultural and educational system of Armenia. A mayor of Yerevan (who was in office between December 2010 and November 2011) provoked discontent among citizens when he forced employees of the municipality to learn Russian and English. These initiatives are interpreted as having political implications for relations with Russia, but also might be considered as implicit attempts to rehabilitate the elite position of Russian.

Given that during the Soviet period a significant number of the nationalist intelligentsia were Russian-speaking, we can conclude that language was not an obstacle for the nationalistic aspirations of the Armenian intelligentsia. Many of the Russian-speaking Armenian intelligentsia repatriated from Russia or other Soviet republics to their motherland, which many of them had never even seen before. Some of them sought a complete “Armenianization,” including adopting the Armenian language as, at least, a second mother tongue. However, the majority of returnees

either could not or did not want to adopt Armenian, considering Russian a sufficient tool for expressing their nationalistic feelings and aspirations. One of the most outspoken among them was Robert Sahakyants, a famous cartoonist and public figure. He often spoke in public and always in Russian. When he was criticized for this by the Armenian-speaking nationalists, he parried that he did it deliberately, for no one in the country should be prevented from speaking the language they feel comfortable with. This “foreign-language nationalism” is not unique to Armenia. For example, the first manifestations of Finnish nationalism were conducted in Swedish (Hobsbawm 1990:104). One of the first Armenian nationalist political parties, the “Dashnaktsutiun,” was established at the end of the nineteenth century by representatives of the Russian-speaking Armenian intelligentsia living in Tiflis (current Tbilisi, Georgia).¹⁹

The development of Armenian nationalism in Russian was supported by Soviet-era policies that mandated the translation of national literatures and films into Russian. Thus, one could find whole libraries of Armenian books translated into Russian in the homes of the Armenian intelligentsia. This trend continues today, and most of the influential Armenian blogs and Internet media outlets are Russian-language ones, though there has been a gradual increase in the use of Armenian. Even with this increase in Armenian resources, the use of foreign languages by Armenian intelligentsia is likely to continue into the future. English—and to a much lesser extent French—also claim to be languages in which Armenian nationalism is developed and conveyed, because of the Armenian diaspora living in English- or French-speaking countries or those who were recently educated in the West.

Another aspect of the Armenian intelligentsia’s discourse has been the Armenian language itself. The Eastern and Western Armenian literary languages²⁰ developed during the nineteenth century alongside Armenian nationalist movements headed by members of the intelligentsia. But even in the early and mid-twentieth century, its preservation, development, and utilization were associated with national cultural development and progress. The issue of the Armenian language was among main topics of the Armenian dissident movement in the 1960s and 1970s. As Panossian writes: “Out of all the identity markers, language was the one emphasised the most by nationalist intellectuals” (1988:344). The nationalist fight for the Armenian language also resulted in the creation of an “ideal” Armenian dialect, which the intelligentsia and, eventually, all the people should speak. There are literary and vernacular forms of Eastern Armenian with significant differences in pronunciation and intonation and some variations in vocabulary and grammar. The intelligentsia in Armenia mostly speaks a vernacular, domesticated version of literary Eastern Armenian, except in the region of Shirak, where a local dialect of Western Armenian is used as an everyday language. However, the image of the “ideal,” genuine

¹⁹ I am grateful to Levon Abrahamian for bringing my attention to this historical fact.

²⁰ Contemporary Armenian has two literary versions, East Armenian and West Armenian. West Armenian was a vernacular language in Western (Turkish) Armenia and remains as such in the Armenian Diaspora. Before these two literary versions of Armenian were developed, ancient Armenian (Grabar) was the language of literature, education, and religion.

intelligentsia is of those who speak an impeccable, “pure” literary Eastern Armenian, which in real life is spoken by very few people. But when speaking in public, the intelligentsia usually deliberately code-switches to this “bookish” version of literary Armenian that they would never use in everyday life. The ability to speak this somewhat artificial language is still considered an asset and has been counted among reasons to favor some contemporary politicians. “Unlike the others, he at least speaks very good literary Armenian,” said supporters of one of the presidential candidates, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, during the electoral campaign of 2008, implying that, unlike other candidates, he was an *intelligent*.

RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR NATIONALISM OF THE ARMENIAN INTELLIGENTSIA

The questions of religion and religiosity have always been central to self-identification of the Russian intelligentsia of pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet times. Pre-revolutionary intelligentsia was depicted as oscillating between two extremes: explicit, fanatic religiosity and militant secularism and atheism (Bulgakov 1991). A Soviet dissident and essayist described the militant secularism of the Soviet *intelligent* as “reversed” religiosity (Kormer 2009). The concerns of the Armenian *mtavorakan* with religious matters must be understood in the context of nationalism and national self-determination rather than that of metaphysical contemplations about God and Faith. Belonging to the Armenian Apostolic Church, one of the first national Christian Churches, has been an integral part of the Armenian ethnic and national identity for so long that even Soviet antireligious campaigns could not shake its foundations. Starting in late 1950s, when the processes of political and cultural “nationalization”²¹ in the national republics of the Soviet Union were reanimated, the Church regained its position as a national institution with both implicit and explicit support of the Armenian Communist Party officials. For example, Hakob Zarobyan, the republican Communist leader in the 1960s, “succeeded in beginning to nationalise the republic. The leaders and the intellectuals turned to the diaspora and to the church to find ‘the national’” (Panossian 1988:283). Indeed, Armenian intellectuals, even secular ones, turned to the Church not in search of the spiritual, but in search of the national—sometimes explicitly rejecting the clerical or religious component.²²

A recent example of this discourse is the intelligentsia’s reaction to the possible construction of a replica of the Poghos-Petros Church, destroyed in the early Soviet years, on the spot where the Summer Hall of Moscow Cinema is currently located.

²¹ Nationalization processes, as understood here, included acceptance of national languages as official ones alongside Russian; development of national versions of Soviet culture (art, literature, architecture, etc.); localization of research topics in the humanities and social sciences such as history, ethnography, archaeology, and other aspects. The intelligentsia was meant to play an important role in these processes, and it was a chance for it to increase its social status in the Soviet hierarchy.

²² For an analysis of the religious bases of Armenian national identity see Panossian (2002:126–130).

Representatives of the intelligentsia, more specifically a group of architects, declared the latter a masterpiece of Soviet constructivism and blamed the Church for attempting to annihilate Soviet cultural heritage in the same way that the Soviets had done to the Church. Another instance of this secularized approach to the Church and religion was expressed during public debates about a new secondary school course focused on the history of the Armenian Church. It was perceived as an attempt to inculcate elements of Christian, religious education into secondary education and therefore faced a strong backlash from some representatives of the intelligentsia (Jaloyan 2010). Here, the intelligentsia's public messages to the society were about the secular character of the Armenian intelligentsia within national models of thought and identification.

Another sort of anticlerical discourse is represented by a critical review of the historical and national role of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The idea that the Church historically has hindered the development of the Armenian statehood appears in writings, conversations, and public speeches of the secular Armenian intelligentsia who position themselves in opposition to the Church (writer Vahan Ter-Ghazaryan, architect Manvel Sargsyan, and others). An article about a recent public speech by Ter-Ghazaryan on this topic was titled "Uncorrupt Intelligentsia is Not Going to Be Silent."²³ At the same time, a totally secular and atheistic worldview is alien to most discourses of the intelligentsia in contemporary Armenia. Very few members of the intelligentsia could publicly confess to being atheists without jeopardizing their image. Even neutral or academic approaches to religion are seldom voiced in public. Christianity remains a symbol of the Armenian national, and in many cases even ethnic, identity, and Christian values are recognized as main components of the intelligentsia's worldview.

VICTIMS AND MISSIONARIES

A powerful image, often recurring in discourses about intelligentsia, is its role as a victim (sometimes by choice) perishing for the sake of the entire Armenian nation. This victimization is usually conceptualized in the context of the Armenian Genocide of 1915, when hundreds of Western Armenian intellectuals were murdered or subjected to severe repression and exile. Although intensive massacres lasted for several more years, April 24, 1915, has been accepted as the symbolic memorial date of the Genocide, not only because the massacres were launched on this particular day, but also because the Armenian intellectual and artistic elite of Istanbul were almost entirely annihilated on that date. Thus, the assassination of the Armenian intellectual elite became a cumulative symbol for subsequent massacres of population of Western Armenia. "The Armenian nation was beheaded," "exsanguinated"—these metaphors directly refer to the extermination of the intellectual elite during the Genocide.²⁴

²³ By which is meant being silent about the "historical truth." Retrieved May 5, 2012 (http://armtoday.info/default.asp?Lang=_Ru&NewsID=64140&SectionID=0&RegionID=0&Date=04/16/2012&PagePosition=1)

²⁴ Joseph Stalin's repression of the Armenian intelligentsia during the 1930s–1950s has not

The topic of the victimization of the intelligentsia has not been exhausted by such reminiscences of the past. It has been revived by recent developments in the political, economic, cultural, and demographic situation in Armenia. The first decade of the Third Republic (as the current republic of Armenia is called) was marked by a collapse of the economy and deteriorating living conditions, eventually leading to mass emigration, which only recently has started to subside. Highly educated professionals made up a large share of emigrants. Their departure is considered the direct consequence of the “criminal regime of merchants and oligarchs”; the emigrating intelligentsia is, thus, positioned as victims of the regime. This wave of emigration is described in public discourses as a “White Genocide” and a “brain drain” resulting in the “exsanguination” of Armenia, ruining its intellectual potential, and bereaving it of its creative capacities.

Another instance of the victimization and heroization of the intelligentsia is bound to the Karabakh movement and the Karabakh war of 1991–1994.²⁵ The movement was headed by a group of nationalist intelligentsia (academics, writers, teachers, etc.) whose life and freedom were threatened in the first months of the movement: Soviet authorities arrested and imprisoned them for six months in 1988. The very fact of their imprisonment was perceived as a sacrifice:

The members of the “Karabakh Committee” were imprisoned not only in the name of, but also instead of, each of us, even those who blamed them earlier or keep blaming now. Their arrest confirmed the idea on their belonging to the victimized—voluntarily victimized—intelligentsia. (Atayan 2010:267)

Though the percentage of the intelligentsia voluntarily participating in the Karabakh war was not very high compared with other social groups, they were considered the main bearers of ideological, national, and cultural values facilitating victory. One of the participants, the painter Tonoyan, said in an interview:

The results of a war are usually conditioned by two main circumstances: participation of the intelligentsia and the extent to which this war is technocratic. One of the specifics of the Karabakh war was the fact that the leaders of our military units were the intelligentsia—artists, writers, painters. And thanks to those of them fighting on the front lines, the enthusiasm of our soldiers had been increased.²⁶

contributed much to the victimization discourse. There are multiple explanations for this phenomenon that deserve their own research.

²⁵ The public movement, started in 1988, aimed to restore the Armenian protectorate over the autonomous republic of Nagorny Karabakh, which was made a part of the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan in 1923 by the Soviet authorities despite its mostly Armenian population. As the Soviet Union was falling apart, Armenia and Azerbaijan entered a four-year war over the region, which resulted in Nagorny Karabakh’s independence.

²⁶ Interview with Mkrtych Tonoyan “Artsakhyan sharzhman himqum kangnats e haj mtavorakanutiuny.” Retrieved January 31, 2011 (<http://www.armor.am/?p=30327>).

In war, the intelligentsia, like the clergy, often bring in spirituality and additional ideological zeal to the killing process, thus turning it into a struggle for supreme cultural and national values that are, for the conflict's participants, worth dying for.

It is possible that the role of martyr is connected to intelligentsia's role as missionary. One of the commonly observed features of the Russian intelligentsia is its supposedly eternal guilt before the "folk," expressed in missionary aspirations to "save" and "enlighten" the masses. Following the example of its Russian counterpart, the early Armenian intelligentsia also practiced moving to the countryside to enlighten people in the hopes that educated folk would live better economic, juridical, and social lives. This phenomenon recurred throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, though embedded in different ideological, cultural, and political situations and interpretative frameworks. At the end of the nineteenth century, this movement was construed as bringing literacy and practical knowledge to Armenian villagers in both Russian and Ottoman empires; in the 1930s, the intelligentsia participated in a similar literacy campaign conceived and conducted primarily by the Soviet government. The intelligentsia's missionary aspirations reemerged during the Karabakh war, when many of its members resettled to depopulated or abandoned villages and towns of the region. Its leaders, who first sought to "repopulate and develop the homeland," appealed to representatives of the Armenian intelligentsia—teachers, physicians, and other educated and qualified professionals—to move to Karabakh to accelerate its economic, cultural, and demographic development. The political scientist and essayist Aleksandr Kananyan is a good example of this phenomenon. He moved to a small town in northern Karabakh (from Tbilisi, Georgia) not because of its alpine beauty or strategic position, but because he wanted to set the precedent of leaving a secure life in order to contribute to the rebirth and prosperity of depopulated and underdeveloped parts of Armenia. Even though he was unable to find a job suited to his high level of education, he did a lot of volunteer work, including teaching and advocacy (Kananyan 2010). His case is special but not unique. Dozens of representatives of the intelligentsia (or people identifying themselves as such) have moved to Karabakh since the end of the war in 1994, stirred by the prospect of "being useful," of contributing to the reanimation of the economy and culture of the territories that suffered during the war.²⁷ The idea of moving to Karabakh (as a symbolic place for Armenian national identity today) to help the people who live there has become one of the possible missions of the Armenian intelligentsia.

THE "DEATH" OF THE ARMENIAN INTELLIGENTSIA

An essay about the intelligentsia, titled "The Dying Class of the Dying Empire," exemplifies well another theme—that of death (often violent death) of the Armenian intelligentsia—which frequently emerges in discourses about the intelligentsia (Hayrapetyan 2006).

²⁷ I met many such individuals during my fieldwork in rural Karabakh.

The Armenian intelligentsia does not exist any longer; it has been annihilated.

I think the Armenian intelligentsia had been assassinated in the Turkish prisons of Ayash and Chankri and gone with the first republic of Armenia and has not come back yet.

Statements like this are not unique, nor are they new. For example, the issue of whether the Soviet intelligentsia was alive or figuratively dead was debated in the 1960s (Kormer 2009:211–252). This metaphor also directly refers to the issues of genuineness of the current Armenian intelligentsia. Sometimes, speaking about a specific person, my interlocutors would say: “He was the last *intelligent*,” “She belongs to the cohort of the last *mtavorakans*,” “*Mtavorakans* like him (her) do not exist any longer.” Such statements imply that the person mentioned possessed all the characteristics of a “true” intelligent seldom found in people today. People saying so often consider themselves to be the debris of a once powerful community that has lost its strongest representatives and is currently in decline.

In nationalist discourses, statements about the death of the intelligentsia are often replaced with those claiming that the Armenian intelligentsia never existed.

The Armenian intelligentsia has never existed. What we call the intelligentsia, in reality is a mixed Armenian-Russian cultural category. One should have invented another term for the Armenian intellectuals that has nothing in common with thoughts and concerns of the Russian intelligentsia. The word *mtavorakan* seems to have been just a weak translation from the Russian.

The main sentiment of this statement is that the Armenian intelligentsia was deliberately inculcated into the Armenian society “from above” and, thus, cannot be considered “genuine.” Therefore, after the Empire collapsed, the Armenians no longer had a need for its constituents. In some cases, these statements may mean that Armenians no longer need the Russian-speaking intelligentsia, which was a product of colonization and imperialism. Paradoxically, for representatives of the Russian-speaking intelligentsia, the metaphor of the death of the intelligentsia is also often identical to a gradual disappearance of a Russian-language cultural environment that encompassed not only spoken language but also Russian-language books, films, and other cultural texts.

THE INTELLIGENTSIA'S VALUE: HAS IT REALLY CHANGED?

“Change of values” and “collapse of the value system” are top themes of current public debates among intellectuals and intelligentsia in mass and virtual media. Participants in these debates are concerned with the ascendancy of a consumption mentality in society, the preponderance of the “material,” and the disappearance of “true” culture: “Our society is literate but not cultivated, not civilized.”²⁸ Paradoxically, one of the suggested ways of improving this situation is to import foreign cultural

²⁸ Aghasi Tadevosyan. “Mer hasarakutiuny tarachanach e, bajts haziv te qaghaqakirt.” Retrieved February 14, 2012 (<http://haynews.am/hy/1327865210>).

capital instead of preserving Russian-centered cultural aspirations. It is more accurate to speak about change of patterns in the formation of value systems, because the old patterns are no longer effective politically or culturally. Having particular patterns is an indispensable condition if one believes that value systems can be deliberately inculcated, built, reconstructed, or invented by a “genuine” elite and then proliferated among the lower layers of society. This way of thinking was intrinsic to the Soviet era when cultural, ideological, and behavioral values were imposed on the society from above through the “Soviet intelligentsia.” It also explains today’s complaints about the devaluation of the intelligentsia in terms of the influence they previously exerted on the people.

The status of art and artists has been devalued today. Today’s poets, cinema directors, singers, and painters are not prophets anymore [compared to Soviet times].

The Soviet government made every effort to return Armenian intelligentsia to the country.

The belief that the Soviet government took care of the intelligentsia might seem counterintuitive, but it is not entirely untrue. Indeed, the majority of the Armenian creative intelligentsia (artists, writers, musicians) who had proved loyal to the Soviet regime were given freedom and the necessary facilities to work: studios; free sanatoriums; opportunities to exhibit, perform, and publish their works. The early 1930s were marked by the repatriation of a significant number of intelligentsia to Soviet Armenia from different corners of the former Russian Empire and the diaspora with the aim of “building the homeland.” The repatriation of the emigrant Hovhannes Kajaznuni, the ex-prime minister of the bourgeois Republic of Armenia of 1918–1920 and a professional architect, is one example. Initially he was given the opportunity to work as an architect but later was imprisoned and killed, alongside many other repatriates, during Stalin’s purges. Despite all this, the current intelligentsia cannot help but claim that

one of our main goals, the rehabilitation and repatriation of our national elite, ... was once done in Armenia, when [early-Soviet Communist leaders of Armenia] Myasnikyan, Ter-Gabrielyan, Khandjyan, and Harutyunov brought back [famous Armenian representatives of arts and sciences] Tamanyan, Saryan, Isahakyan, Khachaturyan, brothers Orbeli, and brothers Alikhanyans to the country, the elite that rebuilt the country and saved it after the Genocide. (Khzmalyan 2010)

Such statements imply that the declining public and political role of the intelligentsia (at least as perceived by the group itself) is the result of a “change of values” in society in general.

Sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt wrote: “Intellectuals were most often conceived as guardians or ‘would be’ guardians of the society’s ‘conscience’—but only when that conscience was thought to be opposed to the established order” (Eisenstadt 1972:1). This does not seem applicable to Soviet Armenia. For example, very few

members of the Armenian intelligentsia were involved in clandestine antigovernment activities or the dissident movement during the Soviet period (Manukyan 2006:86). Their reluctance to oppose the regime was evidently strengthened by the national character of the Armenian government (Panossian 2002:283). Moreover, as a periphery, Yerevan, the Armenian capital where most of the republic's intelligentsia were concentrated, enjoyed a bit more freedom and a bit less ideological pressure than centers like Moscow and Leningrad: artists, writers, musicians and other professionals were afforded greater liberties there. Loyalty to the regime, nationalism, and marginality were three main characteristics of the Armenian Soviet intelligentsia. Intelligentsia's discourses consistently describe the Soviet period as a golden age and myths about the good and wise government that supported the agents of cultural values are not easily debunked now. One can find very few studies revising the history of Armenia during the Soviet era, and the Soviet period remains terra incognita for Armenian scholars and society in general.

Older generations of intelligentsia seem at ease with the idea that they are mistreated by current authorities and are unwilling to accept that times have changed and previous hierarchies, attitudes, functional roles, and interactions are no longer in demand. Remarkably, some representatives of movements supporting the political opposition that emerged around the presidential elections of 2008 have explicitly repudiated the intelligentsia: "We refuse to be the elite or the intelligentsia and from now on we view ourselves as a resistance movement" (Khzmalyan 2010:39). At the same time, the names of opposition youth groups "Sksela" (It's started) and "Hima" (Now) almost literally reproduce the watchword of the Soviet intelligentsia of the 1960s—"It's started" (Началось) (Kormer 2009:32).

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have attempted to describe the historical and contemporary cultural and social meanings, perceptions, and boundaries of the notion of intelligentsia—and of its Armenian counterpart *mtavorakanutiun*—in Armenian culture. It is clear that all these understandings and (self-)definitions cannot exist outside a certain discursive space or spaces, in which patterns and stereotypes associated with the notion of intelligentsia are constantly developed, fine-tuned, or transformed. Actually, there has never been any stability in the self-understandings and self-definitions of this group, and such conceptual flexibility has always been one of its specific characteristics. It also seems that the intelligentsia requires this endless dialogue with itself in order to maintain this discursive space and, therefore, it is unlikely to develop a unified (self-)perception for this very reason.

Analysis of discourses relating to the Armenian intelligentsia shows that the current search for identity and (self-)definition is embedded in four civilizational paradigms: imperial, nationalistic, modern/socialist, and postmodern/capitalist. Each paradigm imposes a specific worldview, a system of values, and cultural perceptions that are consequential in attempts to define the place, functions, and role of the intelligentsia in a changing world. Despite the obvious differences among

these paradigms, they are not represented separately, by particular groups or individuals. The same participants of discourses about the intelligentsia may advance this or that paradigm depending on circumstances. Therefore, one can conclude that the intelligentsia exists as a set of variations on an imagined cultural and social construct that needs constant tuning and elaboration. The continuous implicit or explicit discourse on identification, forms of representation and cultural manifestation, and social roles of the intelligentsia is an important part of the ongoing process of reconciliation and negotiation of the boundaries between old and new identities, social structures, hierarchies, roles, behavioral codes, and systems of values in the modernized and globalized Armenian society. In my understanding, the creation and maintenance of such discursive fields makes the intelligentsia the main conduit for the ideas about the construction of national culture, memory, history, and ideology that eventually leads to changes in the cultural, social, and political frameworks in which nation- and state-building processes are embedded.

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