# The Past as Nation:
# Three Dimensions of Armenian Identity

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This article argues that the key to understanding nationhood is its relationship with the past – 'its' history. It accepts that nations are essentially modern constructs, based on subjective and objective characteristics, but this is not how members of a nation usually define their collective. What is crucial in the answer to the question 'when is the nation?' is not a given date (which is never fixed and regularly shifts based on need), but how and why the 'when' is defined. Hence, what needs to be analysed are the dynamics of formulating identity and the interpretation of history for contemporary purposes. Using the case of the Armenians, the article demonstrates that the question 'when is the nation?' is answered in terms of three broad time frames: fourth century AD, 2000 BC or earlier and 1915. Each approach looks at the past to define the nation, and, based on its world view, provides an appropriate answer. These differences are not just historiographical debates among specialists, but widely held views affecting current Armenian national identity.

## Introduction

The question 'when is the nation?' contains two sets of assumptions: first, it is assumed that there is a more or less 'exact' date or period, at least symbolically, at which point a collective becomes a nation. Second, it is implied that there is a specific set of characteristics delineating 'nationhood' – some sort of a measuring rod – against which a particular collective can be judged. This article does not necessarily reject these assumptions outright insofar as it maintains that nations are essentially modern constructs, based on certain subjective and objective characteristics. But the point of departure of this article is the *process* of identity creation or reformulation. As such, the focus is on how people answer the question 'when is *our* nation?'.

The key to understanding the content of modern nationalism is its relationship to the past, to the history of the 'nation' – of 'our nation'. The

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(re)interpretation of the past is an ongoing intellectual and political activity. There is not a magic moment when a collective becomes a nation, rather a constant process of relating to the past in defining 'who we are' – sometimes in ethnic and perennial terms, other times in civic and modern terms. Hence, the *how* and the *why* in the answer to the question 'when' is of crucial importance in understanding the 'nation', as well as in understanding nationalism, the political mobilisation on behalf of the nation. In short, what needs to be analysed is, on the one hand, the interpretation of history for contemporary needs and, on the other, the impact of this interpretation on national identity.

This article highlights the dynamics of this process in the case of the Armenians. It demonstrates that the question 'when is the nation?' has three broad dimensions to it, each associated with a specific time frame: 2000 BC (or earlier), fourth century AD or post-1915 diasporan existence. Each of these approaches looks at the past of the same nation and, based on its world view, provides an appropriate answer backed by historical evidence. These differences are not just obscure historiographical debates among specialists, but widely held views affecting current national identity.

One answer to the question 'when' that I will not discuss is the most academically accepted explanation provided by mainstream western historiography: that the ancient and religious-based Armenian ethnic identity was transformed into modern nationality in the second half of the nineteenth century through the efforts of intellectuals, writers, revolutionaries, etc. This analysis of the Armenians – and of various other people – is widely accepted by western professional historians and academics who study nationalism and national identity creation.[1] Perhaps, this paradigm too should be considered as another interpretation competing with the three narratives. However, there is something qualitatively different about its approach insofar as it does not fit into the self-definition of members of the nation. This article concentrates on how most *Armenians* answer the question 'when is the nation?' rather than academics. Often, how scholars of nations and nationalism answer the question is quite different from how members of a nation answer it.

## Definitional and Theoretical Issues

I agree with Hugh Seton-Watson that 'no "scientific definition" of a nation can be devised'.[2] Nations, and their analysis, are too diverse to merit any kind of exact definition. Certain writers emphasise the subjective component of the nation, others provide a more objective definition.[3] Moreover, the very question 'when is the nation?' is at the heart of the modernist/non-modernist divide in the discipline of nationalism studies. As

Hastings puts it, 'The key issue at the heart of our schism lies in the date of commencement'.[4] The question 'when' is inexorably tied to definitional issues: are nations modern or not? Answering this question entails defining the nation.

There is no need to elaborate on these debates here.[5] However, it is important to at least give a loose definition of the word nation – without the pretence of being 'scientific' – if the term is to have any kind of analytical merit. The definition is not based on the three dimensions of Armenianness I will be discussing; it is rather in contrast to the narratives of such self-definition. I define nations as *modern social constructs but with pre-modern roots.*[6] A nation is a combination of objective factors rooted in the past *and* in contemporary culture, and a subjective sense of belonging emanating from the notion of citizenship – or a similar political sense of belonging – particular to modernity. The modern subjective component cannot explain the shape and 'content' of the nation, its myths, symbols and various cultural markers, but it does highlight the dimension of belonging to a specific political community (with its own specific cultural markers) which is central to national identity.[7] The objective component cannot adequately explain why people adhere to the abstract notion of an 'imagined community' which is much wider than kinship groups and local cultural markers. A nation is therefore 'objectively' recognisable and 'subjectively' defined *as a nation* by its members as well as by others.

A nation is not a once and for all 'given' entity. National identity is constantly in flux, dynamic and evolving. Ronald Suny calls it an 'open-ended process, never fully complete'.[8] Homi Bhabha mentions the 'instability of [the] cultural signification' of the nation.[9] Tiryakian and Nevitte point to the nation as 'a historically evolving reality'.[10] Rogers Brubaker refers to the nation as 'a category of practice'.[11] And finally, Anthony Smith writes that 'Creating nations is a recurrent activity, which has to be renewed periodically. It is one that involves ceaseless re-interpretations, rediscoveries and reconstructions; each generation must re-fashion national institutions'.[12] What is most interesting about this dynamic is the fact that the very 'content' of the nation can change but without undermining the group's sense of nationhood. From one generation to the next, and sometimes simultaneously in different components of the same generation, the basis of belonging, within the same nation, changes. And yet, people continue to feel – subjectively – that they belong to the same national collective.

In this dynamic process of national identity (re)creation or maintenance, three sets of factors come into play. The first is the myths and symbols of the nation, including invented traditions. The second is people's imagination of themselves as part of the same national community. The

third set of factors constitutes structural realities which impact ideological processes.

Anthony Smith emphasises the role of myths and symbols as the basis upon which national identity is created, particularly 'myths of ethnic origin and election, and symbols of territory and community'.[13] Building on the work of John Armstrong on myth–symbol complexes,[14] Smith argues that national identity is constructed through a series of unique belief systems which give each nation its distinctive characteristics. These constitute the symbols and myths every member of the nation accepts as 'givens'. Some of the more widely accepted ideas include: a God-given homeland (mountains, rivers, etc.), a common ancestry, a sacred language, 'national' heroes and villains every school child is taught, past glories and catastrophes (wars, exile, etc.). Around these symbols collective identity is built and national belonging is constructed through the work of intellectuals and the state. This project of nation-formation succeeds, according to Smith, if it is based on a pre-existing core *ethnie*; myths and symbols unconnected to the ethnie will not have the deep emotive resonance necessary to provide people a meaningful sense of belonging. And without this deepness, mass national identity will be weak.[15]

Smith's 'ethno-symbolic' approach provides a valuable insight into the 'content' of nationalism: what people actually believe in, and mobilise around. It highlights much of the imagery behind nationalist movements. It makes it clear that despite the rhetoric of uniqueness expounded by nationalists – and there is uniqueness in the detail of each case – there are many similarities in the types of symbols used and the dynamics of propagating those symbols.

In many ways, Eric Hobsbawm's approach is the polar opposite to Smith's. However, both scholars pay much attention to similar factors: symbols and traditions. Whereas the latter argues that myths and symbols have to have deep historical roots to be meaningful (emphasising continuity), the former highlights the modernity, and to some degree the artificiality, of such traditions, even though they might *seem* to be based on ancient customs (emphasising breaks with the past). According to Hobsbawm:

> It is clear that plenty of political institutions, ideological movements and groups – not least in nationalism – were so unprecedented that even historic continuity had to be invented, for example by creating and ancient past beyond effective historical continuity, either by semi-fiction … or by forgery …

On the next page he adds, 'it may be suggested that where [traditions] are invented, it is often not because old ways are no longer available or viable,

but because they are deliberately not used or adapted'.[16] Unlike Smith, Hobsbawm insists that nations are thoroughly modern constructs, the products of a radical historical break in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries.[17]

If such symbols, myths and traditions – regardless of their origin – are the foundations of the 'imagination' of the nation, how they become so is analysed by Benedict Anderson. In his *Imagined Communities* Anderson explains how a collective comes to see itself as one nation.[18] Through the printing of books and newspapers – i.e., print capitalism – and the increasing use of a standardised vernacular in them, men and women begin to imagine themselves as part of a wider community, a nation, bound together by common characteristics. As such, invented or long-accepted traditions and the symbols came to provide the content of imagined communities.

Myths, symbols, traditions, and their operationalisation in the form of the imagined community of the nation, can only have a profound impact on collective identity if they interact with socio-structural dynamics – the third factor in the formation of national identity. For example, all scholars of nationalism discuss the profound changes brought about by modernity, and how these affected collective identity (be it political or cultural). Benedict Anderson, for instance, connects print capitalism with national identity, and Ernest Gellner explains nationalism through structural changes necessitated by modernity and the requirements of modernisation.[19] One may disagree with the various aspects in the relationship between structural factors and ideological developments, but it is crucial to link the two in order to explain collective identity.

These three dimensions are part of the ongoing dynamic process of national identity formation and reformulation. Myths, symbols, traditions are constantly created and recreated as 'imagined communities', and they are interlinked with socio-structural and ideological changes taking place within a given society.[20] Based on these theoretical points, I will now turn to the Armenian case study.

## Three Narratives of Armenianness

Many elements and events go into the formulation of Armenian national identity. In this article I focus on three historical dimensions which underpin the contemporary sense of Armenian nationhood. These are not the only ones. Other narratives are beginning to take, or have already taken, hold as well: Armenia's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, as well as victory in the Gharabagh war in 1994, are crucial factors in the current reformulation of national identity, and they could be the topic of another

article. The three dimensions I discuss below focus on history rather than on events in the last decade. These narratives either project the nation into ancient times or they take a specific date from the past and construct identity around it. Each dimension has a different – but intertwined – set of myths, symbols and imaginations which define Armenianness. The narratives at times overlap and at times contradict one another. But despite these differences an overall sense of unity is maintained; the subjective sense of belonging to the nation overrides the symbolic, and even cultural, variations inherent in the widely dispersed collective known as the Armenian nation.

## The First Christian Nation: The Standard Paradigm

According to legend, in the early fourth century, God punished King Trdat of Armenia because of his sins which included the violent persecution of Christians. Trdat was transformed into a wild boar. He was, eventually, healed by his former assistant Gregory who had been incarcerated in the dungeon of Khor Virap years earlier on the order of the King for being a Christian. Gregory miraculously survived the deadly pit and was freed when Trdat's sister had a divine vision to release Gregory in order to cure the King. The King converted to Christianity in 301. Subsequently, Trdat 'The Great' and St Gregory 'The Illuminator', the founder of the Armenian church, Christianised Armenia together. Hence, Armenia was and remains the first Christian nation.

This myth of Armenia's conversion to Christianity is one of the pillars of Armenian identity. Until the age of secular nationalism in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the 1915 Genocide, it was indeed the cornerstone of what it meant to be Armenian: a member of St Gregory's church.

In fact, King Trdat (who was educated in Rome) converted to Christianity sometime in 314–15,[21] after Emperor Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313 legalising Christianity in the Roman Empire.[22] This was a political act to counter Persian pressures to forcefully proselytise Armenians to Zoroastrianism, the official religion of the Persian Empire. Through Christianity, Armenians resisted such assimilating tendencies which were threatening their religious–cultural identity and the political control of their territory. Armenians had already developed – at least at the elite level – a distinct collective identity, and Christianity was the means to assert and maintain this separate identity in relation to a more powerful neighbour.

Both the myth version and the more research-based version of Armenians' conversion to Christianity is indicative of the interpretation of a past event in a way that emphasises the desire of a people to remain distinct. One of the most powerful means to reinforce such uniqueness has

been the notion of 'chosen people'.[23] The textual basis of being a 'chosen people' was already set in the fifth century by the Armenian historian Agathangelos who wrote about the Armenians' conversion to Christianity (he was the author of the 'wild boar' myth above). According to him, Armenia was 'where God's grace has been manifested'.[24] Even the name of the Armenian mother church, *Ejmiatzin*, affirms this; it translates into 'where the only begotten descended'.[25]

The idea of being the first Christian nation, and a chosen people, was propagated throughout the centuries by Armenian historians (many of them priests) and the church itself. Once the Armenian alphabet was invented in early fifth century (by the monk Mesrop Mashtots), it added another layer of uniqueness to identity. It was seen as a God-inspired alphabet to translate the sacred texts of the new religion. A cultural 'golden century' began with the production of religious and secular texts, including manuscripts on history. Many of these texts combined the religious and the 'national'. For example, the fifth- to sixth-century historian, Eghishe, stressed both the importance of fighting for Christianity or Truth, and the need to protect ancestral customs; he combined personal salvation with 'national' survival.[26]

The more significant 'father of Armenian historiography', Movses Khorenatsi (fifth to eighth century[27]), wrote the first systematic history of the Armenians, from the beginnings to the fifth century (his purported time). He thus gave the Armenians a long and continuous sense of history which was integrated in world civilisation and in the Biblical narrative. And he did this consciously. He was the first to write of the myth of the genesis of the Armenians – the history of the righteous Haik, the forefather of the Armenians, struggling against the evil Bel. Taking the account of the first Christian author, Eusebius of Caesaria, he inserted Haik into the Biblical genealogy, making Haik (and subsequent Armenian kings) descendants from Noah, through his son, Japheth.[28] Khorenatsi's *History* was tremendously important in subsequent nationalist discourse. As Robert Thomson points out, it created the basis of '"received tradition" [which] was of major significance in the emergence of Armenian nationalism in the nineteenth century and is still a vital force in today's debates on national identity'.[29]

Centuries later, in the 1780s, Father Mikayel Chamchian (a member of the Armenian Mkhitarian Catholic brotherhood) published his three volume *History of the Armenians*. This massive study, the most significant since Khorenatsi, became the definitive Armenian history text in the formative period of mass national identity, setting the stage for national(ist) historiography. Chamchian continued with the tradition of combining national identity with religious identity. It was he who calculated the 301 date

for Armenia's conversion to Christianity. He also calculated the exact date of the battle between Haik and Bel: 2492 BC! Like Khorenatsi, Chamchian situated Armenians in Christian civilisation, going even as far as suggesting that God spoke Armenian. The argument went as follows (as explained by Leo[30]): according to the Bible, the Garden of Eden was in Armenia, therefore Adam must have spoken Armenian, and since Adam spoke to God, Jehovah too, it must be assumed, spoke Armenian! This reaffirmed that the Armenians were indeed a chosen people, the inhabitants of the sacred land of Eden, and speakers of the sacred language which was also the original language of humanity (all others being derivatives of it). Chamchian was thus, as Leo puts it, 'robbing the myths of the Jewish nation' and bestowing the honour of being the 'real' chosen people on the Armenians.

Subsequent intellectuals either toned down or altogether disregarded Chamchian's religious excesses, but maintained and furthered the national and secular dimension of his research – which was, incidentally, truly remarkable for his time period. However, the notion of Christianity being intertwined with nationality was firmly ingrained in Armenian popular consciousness, something which Chamchian's work reinforced. Even anti-clerical nationalists in the late nineteenth century could not (and most would not) fundamentally undo the church–nation knot; they objected to the conservatism of the clergy but did not dismiss the importance of the national church to Armenian identity.[31]

The religious basis of Armenian identity had structural reasons as well. There are three factors here. First, as early as 554, the Armenian church had become autocephalous, severing its links with the patriarchate of Constantinople.[32] This meant that the church, independent of all external authority, could develop a totally separate institutional framework, eventually evolving into an exclusive 'national church'. As such, ethnicity, religion and church completely overlapped – at least until the eighteenth century when significant (but numerically small) Armenian Catholic, and later Protestant, communities emerged. Second, the fall of the last Armenian kingdom in 1375 meant that Armenians were deprived of a secular state-based leadership until 1918. By default, church leaders, who presided over the most established and pervasive Armenian institution, became the predominant leaders of the 'nation' as well. Finally, the leadership of the church over Armenians was affirmed by imperial structures, namely the *millet* system of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans reinforced the religious nature of the Armenian community and accepted the head of the Armenian church, the Patriarch of Constantinople/Istanbul as the head of all Armenian subjects in both sacred and profane matters. The Armenian millet had communal sovereignty but under the leadership of the church (which was, of course, subordinate to the Sultan). Only in the nineteenth century did

secular Armenian intellectuals began to question the religious leadership of the community. However, the Christian character of Armenians was never questioned. To this day, one could not be a Muslim, for example, and an Armenian as far as the Armenian church and popular belief are concerned.

In sum, Christian religious identity, being a chosen people, and being part of a unique and independent church, was intertwined with ethnic-cum-national identity among the Armenians. At the centre of this identity is the belief that Armenians were the first Christian people – often expressed as the first Christian nation. The church was – and is – a 'national church'.

In the face of the secular nationalist movement from the 1880s onward, and the secularisation affecting Armenians in the twentieth century (especially in Soviet Armenia), one would expect the weakening hold of the 'First Christian Nation' paradigm on the collective imagination of the Armenians. To some degree this is true, and Christian myths now compete with other sources of identity: the Genocide, independence, secular nationalism, the Gharabagh war, etc. But the paradigm remains a core element in Armenian identity – albeit no longer the only element. In fact, it has recently been used to reinforce Armenian identity both in the homeland and in the diaspora.

In 2001, Armenians worldwide celebrated the 1700th anniversary of their adoption of Christianity as a state religion with pomp and ceremony. The year began with the pilgrimage of the Catholicos and forty or so bishops to Khor Virap on New Year's Eve. The head of the Armenian church, Garegin II, emerged out of the pit with a flame which symbolised the faith of Gregory 1700 years earlier, and shared it with the gathered clergy. According to Bishop Paren Avedikian, the Catholicos 'brought up the light from the place where St Gregory had atoned for the *nation*'.[33] The high point of the year-long celebrations was the consecration of a new cathedral in Yerevan, named after Gregory the Illuminator, in September 2001. In the meantime, scores of other activities took place in relation to the 1700th anniversary, from art exhibitions, the planting of 17,000 trees in Armenia, and amnesty for prisoners in the republic, to organised pilgrimages visiting Armenian churches in Turkey, to the Catholicos's visit to – and prayer in – the US Congress in May, and a fascinating exhibition in the British Library entitled 'Treasures from the Ark: 1700 Years of Armenian Christian Art'.[34] Many of the activities in Armenia are state sponsored, others (particularly in the diaspora) are organised by the church, various organisations, host institutions and individuals. As one writer has correctly observed, 'Much of this year's celebration ... is purely secular'.[35] The 1700th anniversary is not just about religion, church and Christianity, but just as much – if not more – about culture, national identity, politics and nationalism.

Of course, the use of religious symbols for political purposes is nothing new. Armenian politicians, and even church leaders, often use Christian imagery for national and political needs. One telling example comes from the former Armenian ambassador to the UK and to the Vatican, Armen Sarkissian. At the opening ceremony of the 'Rome–Armenia Exhibition' at the Vatican in May 1999, Sarkissian referred to Armenia's conversion to Christianity as an 'act of self-determination … [Armenia's] faith in the values and principles of Christ has reinforced its support for the fundamental ideas of freedom, human dignity and the self-determination of free people'.[36] This is a fascinating example of how history and religion are interpreted to fit in the modern political needs of Armenia and Gharabagh – more specifically, to add weight to the Armenian insistence on Gharabagh's right to self-determination.

To conclude, the paradigm of being the 'first Christian nation' still resonates with considerable meaning for Armenians; it remains one of the 'core myths' of being Armenian. Indeed, in 2001 it is being strengthened further by the conscious effort of the church *and* the state, as well as many community organisations and individuals. The idea reinforces the 'unique' national character of the Armenians. Perhaps most Armenians no longer believe that they are a 'chosen people', or that King Trdat turned into a wild boar and was saved by Gregory, but they are proud of being the 'first Christian nation' – even if they do not at all take part in Christian rituals or attend church. Over the past 1700 years religious *and* ethnic or national myths, symbols, institutions and structures have reinforced the imagined community of Armenians. And they continue to do so. When is the nation? On this view, at least 1700 years ago. But for some nationalists, 1700 years is not long enough.

*A Pre-Christian Nation: The Extreme Nationalists*

Some of the nationalist *samizdat* literature printed in Armenia in the 1987 to 1989 period did not have a date based on the common era calendar (e.g., 1987, etc.). Rather, the date that appears is 4480, 4481, 4482, and so forth, with the words *bun hayots* (real Armenian) preceding the actual number.[37] As late as 1997, the date on the official newspaper of the Armenian Republican Party, *Hanrapetakan* (*Republican*), appears as '(4490) 1997'. The 'real Armenian' date comes from Chamchian's dating of the mythical battle between Haik and Bel in 2492 BC.[38] According to these nationalists, 2492 BC is the actual birth date of the Armenian nation, and its calendar should be dated from then.

On this view, the Armenian nation is more than twice as old as Christianity itself, and therefore Armenian national myths, symbols and historical dates should incorporate, and highlight, pre-Christian elements. Many of the publications of these nationalists seek to do this. Most of these

individuals do not dismiss the significance of Christianity in relation to Armenian identity, but emphasise the 'nationalisation' of religion by the Armenians.[39] There is, however, a fringe element which sees the conversion to Christianity in the fourth century as going against the 'real' national character of the Armenians.[40]

There are two general ideological trends which give expression to this 'old-nation' approach, both of which are based in Armenia with little following in the diaspora. The first emphasises language as the key marker of Armenian identity, and extrapolates national identity from linguistic research. The second trend is based on racialist views and racial identification. The linguistic argument emanates from the work of Rafael Ishkhanian (writing in Soviet Armenia in the 1980s) who believed that Armenian speakers emerged as a separate group when Indo-European languages divided at around 6000 BC. Hence, according to Ishkhanian, the Armenian people go back to as early as the sixth to fourth millennia BC.[41] There is a clear ideological statement being made here:

> The gist of all of Ishkhanyan's [sic] interpretations is that Armenians were the aborigines of the Armenian plateau who have been living there continuously since the fourth millennium B.C. at the latest, and at the earliest, the sixth millennium B.C. ... In this perspective, Armenia is one of the oldest nations and states on earth, a fact which should inspire nationalist pride.[42]

Ishkhanian's publications led to acrimonious debates within Armenian intellectual circles (the established view was that Armenian ethnogenesis could be traced back to the sixth to seventh *centuries* BC), but it did provide a very rich source of material for the nationalist discourse which erupted in Armenia in 1988 over Mountainous Gharabagh (Nagorno-Karabakh). It was an especially poignant issue given the historiographical debates with Azerbaijan over Gharabagh.

Currently, this view of Armenians being indigenous to the land, and being there for thousands of years, is taken for granted by nationalists – and often used to justify current politics. The theme came up often when I was doing research in Armenia in 1996 and 1997, and was expressed most poignantly by a then-member of parliament, and a veteran of the nationalist movement from the 1960s (a dissident), Khachik Safarian. As we were discussing current politics, the genealogy of the Armenian nation came up as 'essential background' to explain the basis of the 'Armenian Cause' today. He explained:

> ... Humanity has originated in one spot, in the near east, and then, independently of one another, [the various tribes] have multiplied. Those who were capable of adapting to their milieu, to the local

conditions, stayed; and those who could not, the riff-raff, wandered throughout the earth, and adapted to different conditions and environments, developing different languages, customs, etc. ... Those who stayed in the original location developed into sedentary life ... and, therefore, they considerably advanced because they started thinking about creating things ... We [the Armenians] stayed here. We did not go anywhere, nor did we come from anyplace. [It has been] determined in scientific studies, with thousands of facts, that the fatherland of Indo-Europeans is found in the Armenian mountain ranges or nearby territories. And the closest language today to the original Indo-European language is Armenian.[43]

If the belief that Armenians existed thousands of years ago based on linguistic arguments can be considered nationalist indulgence, the second ideological trend in the 'old-nation' approach, the racialist argument, has a much more primordial (and sinister) side to it. In another interview, with a high-ranking Communist Party official (September 1996), I was told, *after* I had turned off the tape recorder, that my research was rather shallow. When I asked why, the answer was: because you are not 'examining the link between the shape of the skull and language'. Sensing my shocked look, the interviewee added, 'I know, I know, Hitler discredited this type of research in the West, but ...' and proceeded to give a racist explanation that linked the shape of the skull with genes, language, the Armenian alphabet and identity.

This is one extreme example of a racialist (and racist) explanation of identity, but it should not be dismissed as a fluke since similar ideas are held by some people in Armenia. However, such genetic/biological racial views are rarely expressed publicly. Nevertheless, there is a train of thought, and a few organisations, which espouse a form of Armenian nationalism which takes the race – the perennially existing race – as its basis of differentiation, but without a biological and hierarchical categorisation. This is known as the *tseghakron* ideology. Literally translated, tseghakron means 'race-religion', with strong connotations of worshipping the race – which is conflated with the idea of the nation. The notion comes from the Armenian revolutionary leader, Garegin Nzhdeh, who was active in the first half of the twentieth century (he died in a Soviet prison camp in 1955, after being captured by Stalin's troops in Bulgaria in 1945). Nzhdeh was a Nazi sympathiser and a staunch opponent of the Soviet Union.

According to Nzhdeh, tseghakron ideology has three main components: (1) acknowledging the race as a supreme force and being; (2) the knowledge of being born from that force and being; and (3) loyalty to that force and being until death. The race, for him, has an eternal spiritual quality. As he

puts it, esoterically, 'The race does not get old, it does not know tergiversation [or equivocation], and it does not get defeated. It is the witness of time, the eternal Armenian, the co-worker of God. The race is creator; the people, created …'.[44]

Nzhdeh's racial ideas – although not him as a revolutionary hero – were largely forgotten by most Armenians by the 1980s. However, his image, writings and his tseghakron philosophy gained much popularity in the 1988–91 nationalist movement in Soviet Armenia. They were widely used as a prism of intense nationalism. Many samizdat publications from the period printed excerpts and aphorisms from his works, his photos, and articles on him. Organisations which reproduced his ideas included the Armenian National Movement (ANM)[45] (which later became the ruling party of Armenia), and the Armenian Self-Determination Union (which had a chapter and a publication called *Nzhdeh* in the city of Girovakan). A fringe political organisation called the Armenian Race-Worshipping Party was founded in this period as well, and it published a paper called *Tseghakron* 1988 onward.[46]

This race-based branch of Armenian nationalism never managed to get a large following in terms of political mobilisation explicitly based racial ideas. Their views were too esoteric and their rhetoric too extreme. Organisations which kept the race as a central defining component of their ideology remained on the margins of politics. One can argue that tseghakron ideas, myths and symbols in the 1988 to 1991 period were a 'natural' reaction to the discredited but officially espoused internationalism of the Communist Party. Once independence was achieved, it appeared that the racial ideology fizzled away to a large degree. The ruling ANM soon distanced itself from such extremism and dismissed racial notions from its nationalism, as did other mainstream parties. Nevertheless, racialist ideas remain important, and racial interpretations of Armenian identity are heard often in private (and almost always in the Armenian language). More concretely, tseghakron ideas are prevalent in significant sectors of society in two respects.

First, organisationally, groups of 'Nzhdehians' are still active, and continue to publish pamphlets, books and magazines.[47] Until 1998, they were the ideological component of a small and insignificant political organisation called the Armenian Republican Party. They published its newspaper, *Hanrapetakan* (*Republican*), which occasionally contained pieces on Nzhdeh and tseghakron ideas. However, the Party was eventually patronised by Armenia's Defence Minister, Vazgen Sargsian, who then became Prime Minister (June 1999). The Republican Party thus catapulted to national prominence. After Sargsian's assassination in October 1999, the Party's leader, Andranik Markarian was appointed Prime Minister in May

2000. By 1998, the Nzhdehian group had left the Republican Party due to ideological differences, but their ideas do permeate the organisation.[48]

Second, a 'watered-down' version of Nzhdehian ideas – usually interpreted as total commitment to the race-nation – remains fairly widespread throughout Armenia, particularly among people connected to the military. In fact, according to some, Nzhdehian views (as selected by the military establishment) form the ideological basis of the Armenian army. At least one army base has its newspaper named *Nzhdehian Serund* (*Nzhdehian Generation*). More generally, the term 'Garegin Nzhdeh' has come to symbolise national salvation and an uncompromising stance on national issues. For example, Nzhdeh's name is invoked by some of the fiercest opponents to the current President of Armenia, Robert Kocharian. They implicate the President in the murder of the nationalist Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsian, and denounce the President's regime for supposedly entertaining ideas to 'give away' Meghri (the southern region of Armenia for which Nzhdeh fought in 1920) to Azerbaijan for the sake of a peace agreement on Gharabagh (or even for personal gain).[49] Even the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, which expelled Nzhdeh from the party in the late 1930s for his racist and pro-Nazi views, and then began to 'rehabilitate' him in the 1960s for his 'healthy' nationalism, now uses his example – in a 'sanitised' manner – as one to be emulated:

> Nejdeh [sic] demonstrated his creed in regard to the nobility of man and the excellence of the Armenian character with his own example throughout his entire life. His life was dedicated to his fatherland and his people, whom he served with loyalty and zeal … His was a vigorous character, imaginative, daring, courageous, and fearless. He had boundless contempt for the weaklings, the cowards, and the unscrupulous adventurers … He had an invincible faith in the racial virtues of his people …[50]

This 'Nzhdehiansim' is more than nationalist commitment. It introduces a racial element into Armenian nationalism which goes beyond the primordial notions of nationhood. Such ideas, whether attributed to Nzhdeh or going beyond him, permeate large sectors of the population of Armenia and often come to the surface at times of national crises.

The last point can be demonstrated best by citing certain discussions I had with people who opposed the former President, Levon Ter Petrosian, at the height of the presidential election crisis in September 1996. Just before the elections on 22 September, one individual put it thus:

> They [people in Ter Petrosian's government] are selling the country to foreigners, to Turks, to Iranians (who are really Azeris [i.e., from

Iranian Azerbaijan]). They are letting these impurities pollute our country. How can it be that non-Armenians get citizenship to this republic? There are 1500 Iranian kids born here and with Armenian citizenship – and Azeri Iranian! This is a disgrace. But what do you expect from foreign leaders? The leaders of a country have to be from that nation, from that blood and genes. They cannot be otherwise ...

Another person, at a political rally in Yerevan on 25 September 1996, referred to Ter Petrosian as 'that son of an Arab, the groom of a Jew'.[51] A similar idea, that the president was unfit to rule Armenia because he was married to a 'foreigner', was insinuated from the podium at an opposition rally a few days earlier. These examples are indicative of the racialist, and sometimes racist, subtext ingrained in the nationalist discourse of many Armenians. Nzhdehian ideals are the most articulated and visible dimension of this view.

To conclude, according to racial (extreme) nationalists, the question 'when is the nation?' has a two-pronged answer: it has perennially existed – at least for a few millennia – and the nation is a primordial, racial and natural reality. These ideas were best expressed by one of the more prominent ideologues of Nzhdehians tseghakrons, Mushegh Lalayan. In almost Herderian terms he explained:

> Humanity is divided into nations; each nation is unique and has its own specific characteristics such as language, cultural traits, family values, territory, etc. These must be kept and perpetuated in an unadulterated form without the influence of other values and races – i.e. the national blood must stay pure. Hence, mixed marriages and cultural hybridity are not acceptable. The onslaught of the West must be rejected. For example, western concepts such as human rights, feminism, etc. are foreign to Armenian values and must be opposed. Armenians, furthermore, must occupy their own historic lands – to where true Armenians from the diaspora must return. Tseghakrons have nothing against other nations, as long as the other nations leave Armenians in peace and do not transgress on Armenian historic lands as Turks have done. Hence, these territories must be returned to the Armenians without the current Turkish and Kurdish occupants, and the lands must be populated by Armenians.[52]

The 'imagined community' envisioned here is very much a community of blood, a primordial race, which must remain 'true' to its roots. Race and nation are one, and they have always existed.

As mentioned, the more extreme version of this racial nationalism never took root in Armenia as a mass political movement, despite the popularity

of its hero and symbols during the height of the nationalist movement between 1988 and 1991. The main reason why the racial 'core' of tseghakron ideology remained on the fringes of Armenian identity, while a more diluted or filtered version did merge with mainstream nationalism, was the fact that it was not connected to structural realities which could make it more meaningful or relevant to the general population. Both linguistic arguments and tseghakron principles of race were, on their own, too esoteric, too ideological and too far removed from the current struggle over Gharabagh and from daily problems, to be of much use. Nationalists with such extreme views were not concerned about mundane issues but about abstract notions of cultural authenticity and biological purity. Their concerns, put simply, were (and are) too far removed from on-the-ground realities and structures in Armenia. However, such ideas were internalised by many, particularly during intense moments of (military and later political) struggle. Racial notions were (and are) reinterpreted as loyalty to the nation as race and nation are conflated into one another. There might not be a mass-based tseghakron political party in Armenia currently, but Nzhdehian views occupy an important place in the world view of the nationalists.

## A Nation in Exile: Post-Genocide Diaspora

The third dimension of current Armenian identity is inexorably tied to the 1915 Genocide when the Young Turk regime in the Ottoman Empire killed one million to one-and-a-half million Armenians, and pushed practically all Armenians out of the historic Armenian provinces. Approximately half of the world population of Armenians were killed between 1915 and 1916.[53] It is impossible to understand twentieth-century Armenian identity, particularly in the diaspora, without situating the Genocide at its very centre. This elimination from their ancient lands is seen as the ultimate 'catastrophe'[54] by Armenians. The Genocide itself, and its subsequent denial by Turkish authorities, became the defining moment – the 'founding symbol' – of contemporary Armenian identity. Post-1915 Armenians, especially in the diaspora, saw themselves as 'the first Christian nation' and 'the first victims of genocide in the twentieth century'. Unlike the previous two dimensions discussed, the genocide issue is not directly related to ethnogenesis. But it is related to the question 'when' insofar as it adds a new point of reference to the definition of Armenianness.

The Genocide was the great 'equaliser' of identity.[55] *Everyone* became a victim or was affected by it. Being Armenian, namely in the diaspora, meant being a survivor of genocide, and therefore a member of a community of sufferers. This mentality of victimhood, which was an important part of Armenian identity for centuries (and which revolutionary parties had tried

very hard to overcome from the late nineteenth century onward) once again was ingrained as the central element of Armenian collective consciousness – at least until the 1970s when a new wave of Armenian radicalism arose in the diaspora, and 1988 when the Gharabagh movement exploded in Soviet Armenia. The ideas and experiences of exile and hardship, by definition always associated with diaspora, were magnified and reinforced after 1915. It was no longer a diaspora of merchants, labourers, fortune seekers, intellectuals and political exiles. Rather, it was of refugees, starving survivors and a deeply scarred people. Moreover, the diaspora and the homeland no longer co-existed as two parts of the same nation. The homeland (except Russian Armenia) was completely decimated – physically lost – and diasporans did not have the option of return. Subsequently, diaspora nationalism focused on retrieving the home*land*. Post-genocide Armenian identity therefore came to be associated with a 'lost homeland' and the need to regain it – or to at least have free access to it. Getting the Genocide recognised by Turkey and the rest of the world became the highest political priority for the diaspora. Its 'identity politics', notably in western countries, is manifested through lobbying for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide.[56]

Armenians commemorate the Genocide every 24 April.[57] In Armenia, the population visits the Genocide memorial (Tzitzernakaberd in Yerevan), while in the diaspora commemorative events are held in community centres, churches and at local Genocide monuments. Four themes, which I mentioned above, are intertwined in such commemorations. These encapsulate post-Genocide Armenian identity. The first theme is the obvious point that 'we are a victim nation' and all of our dead in the Genocide are martyrs. Second, tied to this, is the notion that 'we are still suffering' because the injustice has not been recognised by the perpetrators and most of the world. Third is the idea that 'we have lost our homeland' which is awaiting the return of its 'true inhabitants'. Finally, more radical elements go beyond remembering the past and demand justice, revenge and retribution, often using the word *pahanjatirutiun* (to demand and protect what is your own).

The post-Genocide dimension of Armenian identity sees the question 'when is the nation?' differently. While it maintains that Armenians have existed for a long time, on this view the central point of identity is 1915 – the turning point in the nation's modern history. From this perspective, 'when' is not as essential as 'where': the nation is not where is should be. It was for a long time on its own land, but it no longer is; and this injustice must be redressed. Thus, the myth of return remains central according to this argument. But this is one component of identity, usually associated with the older generation and traditional nationalists.

In reality, of course, the chances of diaspora Armenians ever returning to their ancestral lands in present-day eastern Turkey are next to nil. This is not only because of Turkish policies and the ideology of Turkification, but also because after three to four generations diaspora Armenians have developed – particularly in the west – a hybrid and at times cosmopolitan identity, heavily influenced by host societies. This is particularly true in the case of the younger generations. At this point, for almost all diasporan Armenians, actual return to the lost homeland is not even an issue. It becomes, as William Safran puts it, an 'eschatological concept' much like the Second Coming – i.e., an abstract myth.[58] The emerging diasporan identity is much more of a 'symbolic' notion of Armenianness[59] based on a subjective sense of belonging rather than traditional objective markers such as language and membership of the Armenian Apostolic Church. I have written elsewhere that this 'hybrid Armenian entity is based on a *double* imagination: a diaspora that … is imagining an "imagined community" found somewhere between the hostland and the homeland' – however that homeland is defined.[60] This is the second component of post-Genocide diasporan identity: the nation is here and now, in us, in our assertion that 'we are Armenian' *in defiance of 1915*. The notion of return is not centrally, if at all, present, but 1915 is: it is the refusal to die out as a nation, to assimilate into host societies (often referred to as the 'white massacre').

The structural basis of post-Genocide diasporan identity construction or maintenance is composed of two elements. First are the institutions and policies of the host society: for example if host states allow Armenian communal autonomy, and its political representation (e.g., in Lebanon and Iran); or if they are conductive to the maintenance of community institutions – such as schools and churches – as part of civil society, and the politics of lobbying (e.g., France and USA). Second are the actual institutional basis of the Armenian communities and nation- or identity-building activities of these institutions. The latter are analysed by Khachig Tölölyan as 'governments-*of*-exile'. The 'governments' of Armenian communities (usually the self-appointed leadership in each of the communities) have

> done considerable work of political organization and cultural production, of the sort that preserves, invigorates, and invents the concepts, narratives, and symbols that empower exiles to live on as a collective, or at least to represent their situation as such to themselves and others.[61]

As such, community structures, much like a mini-state, were the foundations through which Armenian national identity was maintained, or even augmented, particularly between the 1920s and 1950s. Through political mobilisation, community-run schools (teaching Armenian

language and history), the clearly articulated nationalist ideology of intellectuals, and commemorations of key national holidays or memorial days, diaspora Armenians maintained and developed national identity.

The Genocide, for example, is publicly commemorated every year in all diasporan centres where there is some sort of organised community life. Initially this was a predominantly religious memorial but, after 1965, its observance was politicised. In a typical Armenian community (except in Istanbul), 24 April remembrance ceremonies include church services, an evening of speeches calling for the recognition of the Genocide by the world community and Turkey and, often, demands for the return of the lost lands. There would also be cultural performances highlighting the mass killings, and in some cities public rallies or demonstrations. After the eruption of the Gharabagh movement in 1988, the Armenian demand for Gharabagh is woven into the discourse, highlighting the threat of 'another genocide' if Armenians do not defend themselves against both Azerbaijan and Turkey.[62]

In sum, the third dimension of Armenian identity is the predominantly diasporan component of being post-Genocide survivors. The *main* concern in this case is not the dating of the nation in antiquity (although many of these myths are accepted), but one specific date, 1915, as being foundational to identity. On this view, Armenian history is divided between 'before 1915' and 'after 1915'. The beginning point of contemporary and meaningful identity is thus 1915. Ironically, on this view, the destruction of Armenians in their homeland is the point of reference for the survival of the nation.

The three narratives presented above are not mutually exclusive discourses. They can reinforce or contradict one another, but they all provide powerful bases for national identity – for the same nation. In two of the three cases the emphasis is on ancient history; the nation is *in* the past, and *is* the past. In the third case, a specific moment in the more recent past, 1915, is most important. All three narratives are used, to varying degrees, to understand modern issues and problems. For example, the struggle over the Gharabagh enclave is seen by various people as: (a) a conflict between Christian Armenians and Muslim 'Turks'; (b) a battle over who was there first, and therefore has a right to the land, Armenians or Azerbaijanis; (c) a perennial struggle against a destructive race; and (d) a continuation of genocidal policies from 1915 to expel Armenians from their historic lands. These 'explanations' stem from different aspects of the narratives analysed in this paper and one encounters them often while discussing the conflict with Armenians. Of course, other reasons are provided as well (the right to self-determination, past discrimination, Russian manipulation, etc.) but they all, at one point or another, come back to history and historical rights and considerations in popular discourse.

**Conclusion**

Theories of nationalism maintain that nations are modern constructs, imagined communities with myths and symbols of ancientness, and often connections to past ethnic entities. I agree with this formulation, and use it as a point of departure to analyse Armenian national(ist) narratives. However, these narratives themselves consciously reject the modernity of the nation, of Armenians, and emphasise the perennial and primordial dimensions of identity, either tying it to race or Christianity, or defining it in relation to a catastrophe in the near past. Theoretical insights enable one to analyse the discourse and the project of nationalists, and to maintain that the Armenian *nation* – or for that matter any other nation – has not existed for thousands of years. This is not at all to deny that a sense of Armenianness, a collective identity known as Armenians, and the Armenian language, have not existed for a long time – even for millennia. The point is how knowledge of this past, the history of the modern nation, is interpreted, used and abused by nationalists for political and cultural purposes. For example, in 1992 and 1993, when Armenian forces were victorious on the battleground, one often heard the phrase: 'we have not had so much military success since the time of Tigran the Great!' King Tigran lived in the first century BC.

On a more substantive plane, the explicit utilisation of history for nationalist purposes is now being demanded by certain important elements within the historiographical establishment in post-Soviet Armenia. Their aim is to make the writing of history a 'strategic tool' for the national cause. One of these 'young turk' intellectuals, Armen Aivazian, puts it bluntly, 'Armenian history is the inviolable strategic resource pool of Armenia ... Therefore, the scientific study of Armenian history ... is not only a pure academic endeavour, but also a necessary and productive means to benefit the newly formed Armenian state'.[63] According to Aivazian, almost all of the western historical analyses of Armenian national identity are 'hypocritical-Armeneology', intent on destroying Armenian identity with their 'pro-Turkish' approaches and collaboration with 'Azerbaijani hypocrisy'.[64] Significantly, most of the historiographical establishment in Armenia rallied around Aivazian in denouncing western approaches to Armenian studies. His mendacious and accusatory book was reviewed almost always favourably in Armenia. For example, one reviewer in a respectable journal went as far as saying 'the American authors mentioned in Aivazian's book [Ronald Suny (Chicago), Robert Thomson (Oxford), Nina Garsoian (formerly of Columbia University), James Russell (Harvard), Levon Avdoyan (Library of Congress), and others – all established and well respected experts in their fields] not only are pro-Turkish in their thinking, but directly take its false formulations, explicitly defend them and act as the lawyers [of this approach]'.[65] Moreover,

the Department of Armenian History of Yerevan State University issued a 'Declaration' on this 'controversy' on 19 December 2001 condemning historical research which it believes undermines Armenian nationhood – i.e., research that does not agree with the nationalist mould being cast in Armenia. The Declaration also calls on diasporan organisations and individuals not to fund academics whose work is 'anti-Armenian'. This approach employs, ironically, the same type of 'logic' that the Soviet establishment used – that history was to be a tool for communist goals (as defined by the Party). Now, instead of communist goals, historians ought to pursue nationalist goals; the explicit instrumentalisation of the discipline remains the same.[66]

Nationalists, be they historians or not, take ancient commonalties for granted and accept them as 'national' without taking into account fundamental transformations of collective identity in the nineteenth century. Does the fact that the Armenian language has roots going as far back as 4000–6000 BC mean that there was an Armenian nation then? Or that this entitles modern Armenians historic rights to a territory? Does the experience of genocide make survivors and their descendants 'authentic' Armenians? And why being the first 'Christian nation' is so significant in this day and age?

People generally do not define themselves only in terms of current issues, realities, and realpolitik, but also through historical and cultural considerations. Identity (and politics) are not just pragmatic ahistorical factors. Therefore, in order to understand contemporary national identity, it is crucial to understand how a people construe their past – or their identity in the past. Assumptions and beliefs, no matter how far-fetched, must be taken into account in answering the question 'when is the nation?'. Often, the 'real' answer does not matter. What matters is how the nation itself answers that question and why does it answer it in one way or another. This article analysed three narratives among the Armenians which deal with the perennial question of 'when is the nation?'.

NOTES

1. I discuss this process extensively in Razmik Panossian, 'The Evolution of Multilocal National Identity and the Contemporary Politics of Nationalism: Armenia and Its Diaspora' (London School of Economics Ph.D. Dissertation 2000) Chapters 4 and 5.

2. Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States: An Enquiry Into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism* (Boulder: Westview 1977) p.5.

3. The subjective approach is usually traced to Ernest Renan's famous phrase from 1882: 'A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle … A nation's existence is … a daily plebiscite …'

(Ernest Renan, 'What is a Nation?', in Geoff Eley and Ronald Suny (eds), *Becoming National* (New York: Oxford University Press 1996) pp.52–3). At the other end of the spectrum, one finds Stalin's oft-cited definition from 1913: 'A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture' (Joseph Stalin, 'The Nation', in John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith (eds), *Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1994) p.20). Scholars whose definitions are closer to the subjective pole include Seton-Watson (note 2) and Walker Connor (*Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994) pp.42–3, 112–13). Anthony Smith is the closest to the objective pole of the continuum (Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books 1991) pp.14, 69). Other scholars of nations and nationalism fall in between these two poles, combining both subjective and objective elements.

4.  Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997) p.9.
5.  For general overviews of various theories see, Anthony Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London: Routledge 1998), and Umut Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (London: Macmillan 2000).
6.  By using the word 'roots' I do not necessarily refer to a clearly distinguished *ethnie*, but simply to cultural and symbolic links to past ethnic enti*ties*.
7.  Some additional comments are necessary here to clarify my argument. National belonging is predominantly based on notions of 'citizenship' (be it formal or informal) and popular sovereignty – i.e., secular and political ideas of belonging to a collective. This makes nationalism a modern notion. In a fully 'developed' nation, most individuals would conceive of themselves as members and citizens of *one* specific nation (and if the nation does not yet have a state, nationalists would want to create a state of their own, or at least obtain self rule). I agree with Walker Connor that 'national consciousness is a mass not an elite phenomenon' (Walker Connor, 'When is a Nation', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 13/1 (Jan. 1990) p.92). This is a post-1776/1789 idea, figuratively speaking. At the heart of this notion of belonging lies the belief that *everyone* matters as a political entity or subject (even if he or she does not have the right to vote). Everyone is considered to be part of the greater *political* community – at least in rhetoric. It is assumed that there is a common secular and political bond between all sectors of society, between leaders and the masses, between the city and the countryside, between one region and the next. This is a modern phenomenon, and the French Revolution was its most powerful expression, the one 'moment' in which it crystallised.
8.  Ronald Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat. Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1993) p.11.
9.  Homi Bhabha, 'DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation', in Homi Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge 1990) p.303.
10. Edward Tiryakian and Neil Nevitte, 'Nationalism and Modernity', in Edward Tiryakian and Ronald Rogowski (eds), *New Nationalisms of the Developed West: Toward Explanation* (London: Allen and Unwin 1985) p.67.
11. Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996) p.7.
12. Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1986) p.206.
13. Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999) p.15.
14. John Armstrong, *Nations Before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1982) pp.7–9. Armstrong argues that usually 'it is the symbolic rather than the material aspects of common fate that are decisive for identity' (p.9).
15. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (note 12) chapters 6–8.
16. Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press/Canto Edition 1983/1992) pp.7 and 8. See also his 'Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe,

1870–1914' in the same volume.

17.  Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press/Canto Edition 1990/1991).

18.  Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (London: Verso 1983/1991).

19.  Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 1983). For the opposite argument – i.e., that nations came first and then modernity – see, Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1992). There is much commentary on Gellner's complex work; for further commentary see, John A. Hall (ed.), *The State of the Nation: Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998).

20.  For example, e-mail and the Internet are now what the printing press was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in relation to shaping national identity. It is not a foregone conclusion that instant communications will reduce the power of nationalism, rather it often leads to 'long distance nationalism' (the term comes from Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (London: Verso 1998) pp.58–74.)

21.  The actual date of 314–15 does not affect the Armenian claim that they were the first Christian people. The Armenian kingdom remains the first state to officially adopt Christianity.

22.  George Bournoutian, *A History of the Armenian People*, Volume I (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers 1993) p.64.

23.  For a theoretical discussion of a chosen people, and its importance in the survival of ethnic groups see, Anthony D. Smith, 'Chosen Peoples: Why Ethnic Groups Survive', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 15/3 (July 1992) pp.436–56. See also the Special Issue of *Nations and Nationalism* 5/3 (July 1999) on the subject of chosen people.

24.  As cited by Robert Thomson in his 'Introduction' to Elishe (Eghishe), *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, translation and commentary by Robert Thomson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1982) p.2.

25.  Interestingly, when renovations were being done to the Ejmiatzin church by the Soviet authorities in the 1950s, they discovered a pagan fire-worshipping altar right underneath the Christian altar.

26.  Elishe (note 24) pp.105–30, 153–73.

27.  Khorenatsi claims to be writing in the second half of the fifth century. Most Armenian scholars take this at face value and date him from that period. Robert Thomson, however, presents what seem to be convincing arguments that Khorenatsi belonged to the middle of the eighth century (see, his 'Introduction' to Moses Khorenatsi, *History of the Armenians*, translation and commentary by Robert Thomson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1978) pp.7–8, 58–60).

28.  Khorenatsi (note 27) pp.74–5.

29.  Thomson, 'Introduction' (note 27) p.61.

30.  Leo, *Yerkeri zhoghovatsu (Collected Works)*, Volume III(b) (Yerevan: Hayastan 1973) pp.517–19.

31.  For further elaboration on this point see Panossian (note 1) pp.189–93.

32.  Armenians had rejected the decision of the Council of Chalcedon (451) on the nature of Christ; this paved the way for their separation from Byzantine branch of Christian orthodoxy.

33.  As quoted by Michael Wines, 'Khor Virab Journal: From a Dungeon, a Birth of National Christianity', *The New York Times* (29 May 2001), posted on Groong Armenian News Network, 29 May 2001 (<http://www.groong.usc.edu>), emphasis added.

34.  The British Library exhibit was not formally connected to the official celebrations in Armenia or elsewhere. It was a Library-organised event under the direction of Dr Vrej Nersessian, but largely funded by a private Armenian organisation. For brief articles on the pilgrimage to Turkey see *Turkish Daily News* (8 June 2001), posted on Groong Armenian News Network, 10 June 2001 (<http://www.groong.usc.edu>); Burcu Gültekin, 'Pilgrimage in Anatolia and Armenia', Turkish–Armenian Business Development Council Press Release

(29 June 2001), posted on Groong Armenian News Network (note 33), 29 June 2001. It is also worth noting that Pope John Paul II visited Armenia on a pilgrimage in September 2001.

35.   Angela Charlton, 'Armenia Marks 1,700 Years as Christian State', *The Associated Press* (23 June 2001), posted on Groong Armenian News Network (note 33), 24 June 2001.

36.   As quoted by Vatican Information Service, posted on Groong Armenian News Network (note 33), 24 March 1999. From the perspective of the church, the current Catholicos of All Armenians, Garegin II, has stated, just before his election as the head of the church, 'The Catholicos should be a man of God and of the nation, willing and able to serve both God and nation' ('Interview with Archbishop Karekin Nercessian [sic]', *Azg/Mirror-On-Line*, 14 October 1999, posted on Groong Armenian News Network (note 33), 15 October 1999). Similar views were expressed by his predecessor, Garegin I, and the Catholicos of the Cilician See, Aram I. For example, Garegin I has said, 'For me, the national and the religious are united in their culture, in practices, and in consciousness ... In the Armenian case, the church and the nation are not divided' (Interview with author, 5 November 1996).

37.   See, for example, *Azat Haik (Free Armenia)* magazine (published by the National Unity Alliance) in 1989; *Hayastan (Armenia)* magazine (published by Armenia's National Independence Party) in 1989.

38.   That is, 1988 plus 2492 equals 4480. More extremely, there is a fringe ultra-nationalist group which puts the date 9573, etc., on its publications, dating their calendar from an even earlier 'genesis' point of the Armenians: the 'birth date' of the pagan god preferred by pre-Christian Armenians, Vahagn, the sun-god or the god of war and bravery (see Edvard Kakosian, *Araratian ditsabanutiun (Araratian Mythology)* (Arordineri Ukht: Garni (Armenia) 1990).

39.   This point was made very clearly by Mushegh Lalayan, one of the intellectuals in this school of thought and at that point the editor of the *Republican* newspaper, in an interview with the author (12 November 1997).

40.   In one of their publications it is written: '1700 years ago, Christian Armenians ... destroyed all of Armenian National Culture, both material and spiritual' (*Tseghakertum (Race-building)* (Arordineri Ukht: Garni (Armenia) 9575 (i.e., 1992)).

41.   Stephan H. Astourian, 'In Search of Their Forefathers: National Identity and the Historiography and Politics of Armenian and Azerbaijani Ethnogeneses', in Donald V. Schwartz and Razmik Panossian (eds), *Nationalism and History: The Politics of Nation Building in Post-Soviet Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Centre for Russian and East European Studies, 1994) pp.45–6 (for the original text see, Rafael Ishkhanian, *Hayeri tzagume yev hnaguin patmutiune (The Origins and Most Ancient History of the Armenians)* (Beirut: Altapress 1984)).

42.   Ibid p.47. A more 'modest' view has recently been presented by a young nationalist historian, Armen Aivazian. He cites fifth-century primary sources (i.e., Pavstos Puzand) which explicitly define Armenians as those who speak the language, highlighting its prevalence in the region. Based on this, Aivazian infers that as early as the fifth century AD, Armenians had a clear national consciousness and a nationalist ideology (Armen Aivazian, 'Azgayin lezvi pashtamunke yev Haykakan, Angliakan, Fransiakan u Rusakan azgainakanutian sgzbnavorman zhamanake' (The Worship of National Language and the Formative Period of the Armenian, English, French and Russian Nationalism) *Ejmiatzin* 4 (2000) pp.101–103. It is an accepted fact that Armenian was spoken in the region as early as fifth century BC (Xenophon, travelling through Armenia in 401–400 BC, mentions it in his *Anabasis*, as does Strabo in the first century BC in his *Geography*). Aivazian probably realises that the use of a language is not sufficient to prove national identity. Pavstos Puzand, however, does more, and that is why his writings are appealing. The fifth-century historian glorifies the Armenian language and ties it explicitly to collective identity. It is this point that Aivazian is stretching. It is interesting to note that Aivazian is presenting the linguistic equivalent of the 'we were first' argument. Instead of emphasising being the first Christian nation, he is arguing – based on his skewed interpretations of western approaches to national identity which focus on language (most

notably using Adrian Hastings and Liah Greenfeld) – that Armenians were a nation much
before the English, French and Russians.

43. Interview by author with Khachik Safarian, 8 December 1997. An interesting twist was
    added to a similar idea by a young scholar in Armenia, a 'Candidate of the Historical
    Sciences', Artak Movsisian. He skilfully inserted the 'chosen people' idea into the
    discourse. At a seminar hosted by the small opposition party, Constitutional Rights
    Alliance, he presented a paper entitled 'On the Historical Foundations of National
    Ideology' (on 22 November 1997). He took the notion of Armenians being a 'chosen
    people' to 2000 years *before* Christ as he 'traced' the 'foundations of national ideology' –
    as a 'guiding thread' in Armenian history – to at least twenty-fourth century BC! Armenia
    and its people, he argued, were regarded as a 'chosen country' or a 'chosen people'
    according to the religious beliefs of ancient eastern civilisations. They referred to it as a
    'holy country', 'country of the immortals', 'country of the sun', etc. Hence, Armenians
    were the first chosen people ... Then the usual 'logic' followed that Armenia and the
    Armenians were the roots of all Indo-Europeans who emigrated from *this* place of origin;
    the Armenians – the 'fathers' – stayed whereas the 'sons' moved away. The speaker
    concluded that these 'scientific facts' should be the basis of current 'national ideology' and
    taught in schools 'almost like a religion'.

44. (Garegin) Nzhdeh, *Tseghin havitenakan zenke* (*The Eternal Weapon of the Race*) (Yerevan:
    Azgainakan Akumb 1998) p.21.

45. See, for example, its magazine *Zarkan* published in Ashtarak, near Yerevan.

46. The name in Armenian is: *Hayastani Tseghapashtakan Kusaktsutiun*. The April 1991 issue
    of the party's paper had on its front page a huge (about half the page) swastika. It contained
    excerpts from Nzhdeh, Nietzsche, Hitler and an article on the 'Pagan Songs' of the
    Armenian poet Daniel Varuzhan (from the 1910s), etc.

47. For example, they publish booklets under the series name of *azgainakan mitk* (Nationalist
    Mind) which reprint essays, letters, etc., from Garegin Nzhdeh, commentary on him, and
    essays inspired by tseghakron ideas. A similar, but even more fringe and extreme group,
    called the Armenian Arian-Race-Worshipping Pact (in Armenian, *Hai Ariakan-
    Tseghapashtakan Dashink*), publishes the journal *Hai-Aria* (*Arian Armenian*). Its first issue
    was published in December 1998 with the unusually high print run of 5000.

48. During the author's interview with Andranik Margarian (12 November 1997) the latter
    discussed the ideological basis of the Republican Party in terms of tseghakron ideology. On
    an anecdotal level, it is noteworthy that during my research in Yerevan in 1996 and 1997, I
    encountered racist and anti-Semitic ideas most often among former and current Communist
    Party members.

49. A series of articles were written on this theme by Avetis Haroutyounyan entitled 'Nzhdehin
    Spaselis' (Waiting for Nzhdeh) in the newspaper *Haikakan Zhamanak* (*Armenian Times*),
    27 April 2001 (<http://www.webnet.am/directory/media/armenian_times>).

50. *The Armenian Weekly On-Line*, 15–21 September 2001 (<http://www.hairenik.org>)
    pp.9–10.

51. Ter Petrosian was born in Syria to Armenian parents who migrated to Soviet Armenia in
    1946 when he was one year old; he is married to a Russian Jew.

52. Paraphrased from an informal discussion with the author, 7 November 1997. Similar views
    were expressed in a formal interview with the author on 12 November 1997.

53. For the most extensive text on the Genocide see, Vahakn Dadrian, *The History of the
    Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus*
    (Providence, R.I/Oxford: Berghahn Books 1995).

54. Levon Boghos Zekiyan, *The Armenian Way to Modernity: Armenian Identity Between
    Tradition and Innovation, Specifity and Universality* (Venice: Supernova/Eurasiatica 49
    1997) pp.81–2.

55. Gerard Libaridian, 'The Changing Armenian Self-Image in the Ottoman Empire: *Rayahs*
    and Revolutionaries', in Richard Hovannisian (ed.), *The Armenian Image in History and
    Literature* (Malibu, CA: Undena Publications 1981) p.158.

56. For approximately a decade, 1975–85, anti-Turkish terrorism was used as a means to put
    pressure on Turkey, and to publicise the Genocide. See, Khachig Tölölyan, 'Terrorism in

Modern Armenian Political Culture', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 4/2 (Summer 1992) pp.8–22.

57. On this date in 1915, close to 600 Armenian intellectuals and political leaders were arrested in Constantinople/Istanbul and eventually killed. This decapitated the nation, and it was the opening act of the Genocide.

58. William Safran, 'Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return', *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1/1 (Spring 1991) p.94.

59. Anny Bakalian, *Armenian-Americans: From Being to Feeling Armenian* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction 1993) pp.5–6.

60. Razmik Panossian, 'Between Ambivalence and Intrusion: Politics and Identity in Armenia–Diaspora Relations', *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 7/2 (Fall 1998) p.163.

61. Khachig Tölölyan, 'Exile Governments in the Armenian Polity', in Yossi Shain (ed.), *Governments-in-Exile in Contemporary World Politics* (New York: Routeledge 1991) p.167.

62. The Gharabagh issue highlights very well another linkage between past events and their contemporary reinterpretation to suit national needs. Armenians commemorate the battle of Avarayr which took place in 451 AD. Armenians fought against the invading Persian army which was trying to impose Zoroastrianism on the newly Christianised Armenian population. Armenians lost the battle, but did maintain their religion. It is quite telling how this battle is now remembered. Two diaspora-based publications wrote about it as such: *Nor Gyank* (*New Life*), a mass-circulation Armenian newspaper in Los Angeles equated (in a 11 February 1999 editorial (pp.1, 36)) the battle of Avarayr with the struggle in contemporary Armenia for Gharabagh, while Azerbaijan and Turkey were equated with the attacking Persians of old. Another magazine, *Khosnak* (*Speaker*), published in Beirut, printed a series of speeches made on the occasion of local commemorations of the Battle of Avarayr (January–February 1999 issue). One of the speakers rhetorically asks: 'What has changed from Avarayr to Artsakh [i.e., Gharabagh]? … Hazkert [the Persian Shah], convinced that it is not possible to convert this people, withdrew and granted [to the Armenians] self-rule' (p.13). The implication is that Azerbaijan and the world community should do the same now, and accept Gharabagh's secession from Azerbaijan.

63. Armen Aivazian, *Hayastani patmutian lusabanume amerikian patmagrutian mej* (*The History of Armenia as Presented in American Historiography*) (Yerevan: Artagers 1998), pp.8–9.

64. Ibid., pp.10, 35, 40, cf. Preface and Part I.

65. M.K. Zulalian (Review of A. Aivazian's book), *Patma-banasirakan handes* (*Historio-Philological Journal*) 1/150 (1999) pp.351–4.

66. For a systematic critique of Aivazian's book and his overall approach see Sebouh Aslanian's excellent review, *Armenian Forum*, 2/4 (2002) pp.1–38.