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Exile Government in the Armenian Polity

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Overall Claims and Theoretical Implications

Exile is nearly as old as human polity, but the concept of a government-in-exile is a modern invention, a product of the period in which the nation-state became dominant. During this era, Armenians had a nation-state for only two and one half years, from May 28, 1918 to December 2, 1920. This study will deal with the fate of that state's government after it was deposed by the Red Army, which reconquered the briefly independent former provinces of the Tzarist Empire in the Transcaucasus. But the usefulness of the Armenian case to a more general investigation of the topic of exile governments is not limited to this instance; indeed, the example cannot be understood, and, more importantly, its potential relevance to a needed revision of our theories concerning governments-in-exile cannot be fulfilled, without a more extended consideration of Armenian political culture in exile. This diasporan Polity was and is highly organized, maintains contacts with the population living in the home territories, and over the centuries has developed a government of exiles and by exiles that envisages itself as responsible for and leading the entire nation. Of course, there is always an element of wishful thinking in the claims of exiles; nevertheless, the tenacity and resilience of the evolving Armenian governments of exile is rarely equalled in the history of diasporas. In the perspective provided by the long trajectory of Armenian exile, the government-in-exile of 1921-1924 is a brief though significant episode. Considered in broader context, the Armenian case raises questions about our definitions of the core categories "government" and "exile".

The Armenian example illustrates the limitations of focusing on the formal diplomatic recognition extended to a government-in-exile as the sole or even primary index of its legitimacy and importance, and especially of doing so at the expense of the socio-cultural roots of political phenomena. Such a narrow formalism obscures other factors that are equally vital to the meaningful survival of exile governments. The formalist and statist analysis arrives at conclusions that are already built into the assumptions of the powers that create governments-in-
exile, namely, that they will survive so long as they serve the interests of their patrons; they are "cards, not players," in the words of an anonymous British diplomat. Indeed, the Armenian government-in-exile ceased to exist when tacit recognition of its status by the Western powers lapsed after they signed the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. But its disappearance was not crucial. It was assimilated into the long-familiar government of exile, and its leaders joined the cadres of political institutions already in place.

With the possible exception of traditional despotic regimes, governments perform services for civil society in order to sustain their legitimacy. Governments-in-exile are often an exception: their survival and success can depend on the efficacy with which they serve the foreign policy interests of the major powers that are their patrons. In contrast, the survival and success of a government of exiles like the Armenian depends on the services it performs for its co-nationals in exile — and sometimes even for those under rival regimes at home. It requires no patron-state. Indeed, it flourishes in an absence of state concern, which is why it attained its peak under the weak governments of "confessional" Lebanon between 1945 and 1975. It does require its host's tolerance of its existence; where the centralized state is intent on providing every service and rejecting the claim of non-state institutions to do the same, as in France, even a prosperous community like the Franco-Armenian does not develop a strong "branch" of transnational, diasporan exile government.

During much of its history, the Armenian government of exiles extended far more services to its co-nationals than most diplomatically recognized governments-in-exile tried to or succeeded in providing. Lacking the resources, traditions, institutions, cadres and will, such governments-in-exile (those of the Baltic Republics, or Poland, or Norway, during World War II, say, or Spain's after Franco's victory) have performed few services for the exile population they worked with; even when they endure for decades, as the Baltic ones did, they have not sunk into the exile community the political roots that services of certain kinds engender, whereas in certain times and places Armenian governments of exile performed for their co-nationals functions we associate with local provincial governments, at times even with a state.

In addition, and in compensation for its inability to effect a transition towards sovereignty, the Armenian government of exiles has done considerable work of political organization and cultural production, of the sort which preserves, invigorates and
invents the concepts, narratives and symbols that empower exiles to live on as a collectivity, or at least to represent their situation as such to themselves and others. Direct or indirect participation in cultural production is part of the task of the political class in any polity, national or other. Analyses of the sources of the legitimacy of all governments, at home or in exile, must look not only at their continuity with previous regimes but also at the way in which they influence both material and cultural production. The nature of such production, as well as the resources devoted to it, differs greatly in the cases of exile and sovereign governments, but there is nevertheless an overlap rather than a radical chasm between the two, as the Armenian case shows.

In what is easily the best, as well as the most up-to-date book on political exile, Yossi Shain clarifies the issues. He identifies two urgent concerns that affect all polities in exile and shape their behavior: “loyalty” and “recognition.” “Loyalty” here refers to more than verbal expressions of adherence. First, the term underscores the exile groups’ need to define varieties of “loyal” behavior; it also emphasizes the problems of extracting constant manifestations of loyalty from co-nationals in exile and at home, where they are ruled by the regime the exiles oppose. The gravity of the latter problem is accentuated, first, by the fact that co-nationals usually have the option of offering the same behavior (their “loyalty”) as testimony to the legitimacy of the ruling regime; secondly, they can usually do the latter at less potential cost and with the hope of greater reward, since even illegitimate regimes in power have greater resources with which to reward or punish.

Shain’s second term, “recognition,” refers to the international dimension of exile, to the fact that all operations of an exile group or government depend, at a minimum, on receiving refuge in a host country and permission to operate in as well as from it. Of course, under optimal conditions, host/patron countries extend various levels of diplomatic and material support, up to and including recognition of a group as a government-in-exile. Sometimes, recognition can have barely perceptible results for decades, as when the U.S. continued to “support” the governments-in-exile of the Baltic republics seized by Stalin’s armies. American refusal to legitimize that annexation seemed an insignificant epiphenomenon of the Cold War, but in the Gorbachev era the inventiveness and daring of nationalist movements in precisely these republics results in some part from that refusal. The population of these regions withheld the full measure of legitimating loyalty to the Soviet state in part because it was
encouraged by the continued if symbolic life of governments-in-exile, reminders of the lost past and possible future of such "captive" nations.

The Armenians, who have been equally restive in the Gorbachev era, have not had a comparable Western-recognized government-in-exile to call upon, save briefly and in unusual circumstances between 1921 and 1924. Instead, alternately cooperating and competing elites have worked through several institutions as a government of exiles, plausibly claiming that they represent the authentic interests and aspirations of the "Armenian Nation." This nation has not been coextensive with a sovereign nation-state, and half or more of its member have lived in exile for centuries. Yet it has claimed the loyalty of the majority of Armenians for more than a century, and of a plurality for even longer. Such loyalty has manifested itself in a double sphere of operation: international, as when Armenians sent people they considered representatives of national interests to great-power conferences; but also intranational and intra-state, as when the Sultans of the multi-ethnic Ottoman empire received at Court legitimate Armenian representatives acknowledged as such by their subjects.

When a government acquires legitimacy in democratic elections and is then expelled by brute force (e.g. by Nazi conquest), it carries this legitimacy with it. The legitimacy of a government of exiles cannot equal this; therefore, this study runs the risk of being perceived as a celebration of an implausible legitimacy in exile. But to assert the longevity of the phenomenon is not necessarily to claim that these governments of exile always enjoyed the support of a majority, either in the homeland or in the diaspora. The extent of such support is always notoriously difficult to determine: the Allies found it hard to estimate in the case of de Gaulle's "government" before 1943, say. In the Armenian case, over centuries, in different diasporan locations, under the rule of various kinds of states, ethnic and civic loyalties fluctuated. The number of militant cadres has risen and fallen, as has the number of those who have been actively supportive, passively affiliated, or indifferently oriented away from exilic and ethnic politics and towards assimilation in the host society. Nevertheless, the recognition and loyalty offered to the Armenian exile governments was/is remarkable, whether assessed in terms of duration, self-imposed fiscal levies, degree of commitment of volunteer labor and time, or in some cases the sacrifice of life itself. This loyalty did not materialize as a spontaneous outgrowth of national feeling, though Armenian historians are occasionally guilty of the romantic assumption that its growth
was inevitable. Rather, the development of loyalty to a national ideal and leadership was the result of successful efforts by exile organizations to do the ideological and communal work that renews the commitment of diasporan generations. The forging of a national consensus in a transnational context is one of several features of Armenian political history that makes it an unusual case for students of exile governments.

This paper proposes that the case of the Armenian polity requires that we retheorize governments-in-exile, and indeed the range of meanings given to "government" itself. It will present its argument historically, through an account of the way in which a communal Armenian administration of minor notables eventually came to speak in the name of collective interests, then established and led quasi-governmental coalitions in exile as well as at home, all the while contending with internal challengers who, ironically, briefly came to power as leaders of a sovereign state. This history reverses the normal trajectory, which moves from nation-formation to nation-state, national government and government-in-exile. In fact, the long development of quasi-governmental institutions in exilic enclaves and at home preceded or was coextensive with the shaping of the Armenian nation, which in turn created the nation-state of 1918-1920. This variant of the dominant paradigm points to the limits of our current, statist conceptions of governments-in-exile. A less formalist approach to such governments enables us to encompass under the "Armenian model" comparable — though not identical — attempts at nation-making by quasi-governmental exile elites within or beyond the borders of other multi-ethnic states: Eritreans in Ethiopia or Greeks in the Ottoman Empire, for example.

The Governments of Exile Before the Government-in-Exile (1375-1921)

When the last Armenian Kingdom, the Cilician, succumbed to the Mameluk armies in 1375, its King, Levon V, traveled to the courts of Europe as an exile government of one, failed to obtain assistance, and died there. The triple division of the Armenians, which persists to this day, had already begun to develop. Many remained in the homeland which, like Poland, was partitioned among two and then three empires: Persian, Ottoman and (after 1828) Russian. Others lived in "intrastate diasporas," that is, in exile communities outside the home territories but still within the boundaries of the three multi-ethnic empires that also ruled the homeland. Finally, there were exiles who formed diasporas in the West and Asia (e.g. India). While they
were few, they were important because they included many educated, prosperous and militant Armenians.

From 1375 to 1639, traditional Armenia was (badly) ruled by conquerors; emigration and the size of the Armenian diaspora increased steadily. The sense of belonging to a two thousand year old culture receded in all areas of life except the religious. Linguistic unity declined. The aristocracy, which had survived previous periods of foreign rule, was nearly exterminated. Vestiges of a local leadership consisting of some merchants and of landowners remained, but declined; monasteries also declined in prosperity and learning.

Under these conditions of attenuated collective identity, it was difficult to develop a political elite. The chief Armenian notables were clergymen or wealthy members of the “merchant-diaspora” who gathered around the Church, which was the only institution in Armenian life recognized by all and in touch with all: if the Armenians were a “nation” at all, an azk, it was because such an institution focused their collective activity and identity. Significantly, azk is the word which came to mean “nation” later; during this period it meant “folk” or “people” or, at best, “ethnonation.”

As the chief administrative, juridical and representative agency of this people, the Church had considerable power. After the Fifteenth century, the Ottoman Empire ruled its non-Muslim subjects by a system of millet-s, religious groupings whose members reported to the Sultan through a clerical hierarchy. The Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul spoke for, therefore “represented,” the Empire’s Armenians, both those in the Ottoman-occupied homeland and in the intra-state diaspora. The Patriarchate administered properties, had its own court and was empowered to judge a range of cases; it even had a prison and imposed certain punishments. Clerics and some lay administrators together were the nucleus of what would become the exile leadership. It is worth reiterating that the Ottoman system did not simply consist of a “Turkish” national dynasty ruling other “nations” like the Greek or Armenian; rather, it was a multi-ethnic and multi-denominational tributary empire in which the Armenians in intrastate exile developed an infra-structure of communal government that was put into place at the insistence of the rulers. In the Persian Empire, where there was no millet system, wealthy merchants were prominent earlier, but always acted around the symbolic center of the Church, with clerics as at least nominal leaders. Here, too, Islam recognized religious communities, not nations.

After 1639, centralized authority weakened in both the
Ottoman and Persian Empires. Individual adventurers and visionaries, then coalitions of elites claiming to speak for the Armenian people, began to seek recognition from the European powers, whom they approached in futile attempts to gain protection and even to create an autonomous political entity. These failures were followed by David Beg’s rebellion of the 1720’s in the Syunik and Karabagh regions (precisely those regions which are in the news today for causing massive demonstrations in the Armenian SSR). This rebellion began when Armenian notables, whose quasi-feudal privileges were threatened by Muslim overlords, sent emissaries to the exiles who had settled in the independent Kingdom of Georgia, to the north. They persuaded one David Beg to form and head a government begun in exile rather than a government expelled to exile. A descendant of the minor Armenian nobility, David Beg was a skilled officer of the Georgian Army and seems to have had its tacit support, perhaps in trade for a weakened Persia. He surprised the notables by sustaining the rebellion for a decade, in the course of which he punished, sometimes by execution, the petty lords who resisted him. They wanted an impartial exile not implicated in local conflicts; they got that, but also a leader whose vision of Armenia, not shaped by local interests, was “national” in the modern sense. Exiles and others removed from distracting local disputes are often the first to envisage a nation.

David Beg’s rebellion showed that leaders from the homeland and the diaspora could work together; Armenians could be trained in exile and return to lead military formations. His successes and failures provided the raw material for both literary and popular narratives of resistance and nation-formation; such narratives play a central role in the formation of Armenian political culture, with effects that remain demonstrable down to modern Armenian terrorism and the Karabagh movement in Soviet Armenia.

After the rebellion, from the 1740’s to 1914, Armenians working in the intrastate and overseas diasporas did the ideological and organizational work that fashioned their collectivity as a transnational nation, that is as an entity that saw itself as a nation, but existed without a state and across the boundaries of Empires. This polity was endowed with a vital culture and a high degree of internal, communal organization; elites struggled for the control of its institutions and contested each other’s claim to represent the renascent nation in the eyes of its three imperial rulers or in the courts of the European powers. These quasi-governments were possessed of two features essential to authority and legitimacy: they had continuity (the Patriarchate dated
from 1461) and they were the providers of a remarkably large range of services, especially in the Ottoman Armenian diaspora. Such developments did not result from a plan or blueprint; they evolved in piecemeal fashion. Elites acted to meet specific needs that declining and supremely indifferent empires had no mechanisms which to attend. Such is the cunning of history that those communal institutions which succeeded in meeting these needs found that to do so was to be acknowledged in quasi-governmental terms they had not sought, especially in the Ottoman context, where for the leaders of a Christian millet to be perceived as overtly political was literally to court death. A cynical—or, depending upon one’s temperament, a realistic—assessment of elites that work to meet communal needs may conclude that all such work is a prelude to power-seeking. But in the situation of the diasporized Armenian nation, the original motives of the elites were far less ambitious, far more local and contingent. Yet their successors found they had come to fulfill more functions than governments-in-exile do, and to receive the loyalty and recognition due to the same.

The Armenian elites attained quasi-governmental status because, first in the intrastate diaspora and then in the homeland, they came to assume responsibility for neglected services. The Church and its clergy, which functioned as a uniformed bureaucracy offering an uninterrupted link to the Armenian past, was omnipresent, though its authority slowly declined under the impact of secularism. Within the Ottoman Empire, the wealthy amiras (Armenians who had acquired wealth and status as tax-farmers, financiers, industrialists and government appointees) struggled with the developing bourgeoisie of professionals and smaller businessmen for control of the millet’s administrative machinery, which became steadily more important as the elites competed to endow schools, charitable foundations, hospitals and cultural organizations. Within these institutions, a culture-rich and cash-poor “class” of petty intelligentsia developed as a cadre. After 1789, but above all after 1848, this cadre helped to articulate a national idea and created a national written language (1840-1870) which, without benefit of state machinery, became the unifying language of the Armenians in a fashion that has no exact parallels in pre-state formations. The revival of Gaelic in Ireland and Hebrew in Palestine and Israel are not directly comparable, because of differences in circumstance, and the former, at least, is a failure compared to the success of modern Armenian. It is no accident that this success took place in an Ottoman Empire unwilling and unable to educate even its Muslim subjects, let alone the Christians. This and other respon-
sibilities were left to a communal leadership, with the state only half-aware that to cede them to ethnonational elites is to endow them with a quasi-governmental legitimacy, should they prove successful.

In the Ottoman Armenian diaspora, and then increasingly in the homeland, the Armenian leadership was extraordinarily successful. There was one school for this entire population in 1790; in 1889 there were 540 elementary schools for the approximately 2 million Armenian subjects of the Empire, or one per 3700 inhabitants, a strikingly high figure for that time and place. Exact figures are not available, but it is clear that at this stage, with their Churches, schools and surprisingly large number of small and ephemeral newspapers, the Armenians had a petty intelligentsia of clerics and laymen that numbered in the several thousand and a linked petty leadership of several thousand more — businessmen, professionals, village chiefs who made up the political leadership of the home territories and intrastate exile. A comparable network existed in the Tzarist empire, on a smaller scale within the homeland but on an equally large scale in the intrastate diaspora, particularly in Tbilisi, Georgia’s capital, the majority of whose population was Armenian, and which was the indisputable intellectual center of the Armenians in the Russian empire. There and in the Ottoman empire, the intrastate exile elites dominated the home populations.

Until 1887, the elites had little regular contact across the boundaries of the hostile Ottoman and Tzarist empires. Then transnational political parties were founded: first among students in Geneva and emigrants in Marseilles; then among students at Russian universities, influenced by revolutionary socialism; and lastly in the home territories. Two important parties, the Hnchag and the Dashnag, were founded in 1887 and 1890; the former was more inclined to doctrinaire socialism; both were deeply nationalist. They were later joined in the political arena by more narrowly bourgeois, socialist, and communist factions. Their existence made more explicit the competition for the loyalty of the Armenian nation. Severe divisions arose, but the very fact of competition by political parties underscores the governing if not quite governmental role of the community structures for whose control (or against which) they struggled. This became all the more true as that function of government which includes dying and killing for the nation was undertaken by the Hnchags and Dashnags, who organized self-defense groups in the homeland villages and terrorist activity in the intrastate diasporas. At the same time, the parties sought to politicize the petty intelligentsia — whose most radicalized sector
had founded them — and sought to direct the cultural production of exilic communities.

In the early stages of this competition, the Church held an advantage which was made manifestly clear as late as 1878. After the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, at a conference of the major European powers in Berlin, Armenian requests for Ottoman reforms were on the agenda. The question of who could represent the Armenians was foregrounded because, in a sense, the Empire’s much-abused Armenians were bringing suit against their sovereign in the “court” of the conference. Though an efficient lay elite existed, with new powers granted in a “Constitution” the Sultan gave the Armenian millet in 1863, it was soon apparent that the Patriarch, Khrimian, was the only figure acceptable to all as leader of the Armenian delegation. He went to Berlin and came back empty-handed, but he vindicated his mission in a way that still reverberates in Armenian discussions of exile government.

In a speech to his disappointed flock, he described the Berlin Conference in homely, familiar images as a feast at which harisa, an Armenian dish with the consistency of mashed potatoes, was served: the other guests (nation-states with armies) came with “iron ladles” and served themselves portions, Khrimian said, whereas he had been sent with only a “paper ladle” (promises of reform from the Sultan and European powers). This plain metaphor, elaborated in the rhetoric and political discourse of generations, still recurs in the rhetoric of Armenian exile today. What was for Khrimian a description of the limits of exile government became for the radicals a prescription, a call to arms. The persistence of the metaphor and its ability to structure debate as recently as the 1970’s, during the renewal of Armenian terrorism, is astonishing.

The founders of the political parties soon had to face the urgent questions for which the “Iron Ladle” stood. The Armenian conservatives, the Sultan, the Tzar and the European powers refused to recognize these parties as representatives of the Armenians. However, having failed to protect the peasants of the homeland from persecutions, which increased after 1878, the traditional elites were vulnerable to competition from the new parties. As the Hnchaps and the Dashnags gained popularity among what they correctly described as the oppressed Armenian masses of the Ottoman and Tzarist empires, both responded with an escalation of violence which led to imperial use of massacre and pogrom as instruments of state policy.

Of course, neither government allowed the Armenians a free press or elections that might confirm the loss of support for
the traditional Armenian leaders. Repression accelerated the development of underground party organizations in both empires; these maintained close contact between the home territories, the intrastate diasporas and the overseas diasporas, especially after the massacres of 1894-1896. They fought first to defend the population, then to seek its autonomy; national liberation came late to their agendas. By 1908 the parties had a secret membership in the thousands and were supported by tens of thousands of non-combatants. The Dashnags had an underground militia and the capacity to organize self-defense in certain mountainous areas, to carry out terrorism elsewhere, and to distribute forbidden newspapers printed overseas and brought in from Persia or Bulgaria. Its leadership planned and carried out actions from bases in Europe, the Russian Empire and Persia. Its most spectacular actions included the seizure of the Banque Ottomane in Istanbul, arguably the first act of terrorist occupation or “hijacking” in history, and the raid of Khanassor. Both were envisaged as specifically transnational acts: that is, they were meant to convince the transnational Armenian nation and the European powers that the Dashnag party was a government, functioning both from exile and at home, and that it had what others since David Beg had lacked: arms and men, the will to use them even if it usually meant losing, and a recognized role as a defender of the Armenian nation.

The seizure of the Banque Ottomane ended in publicity, the deaths of most of the attackers and safe-conduct for those surviving the occupation. Khanassor, which took place on July 24-26, 1897, was the more remarkable transnational event. It involved a battalion-size force armed with Russian, Turkish and German weapons, assembled and trained in Russian and Persian territory, equipped with banners and a clear command structure that gave the temporary unit a military cast. Members of the unit came from the home territories and exile. They crossed the Russo-Persian border, raided and severely damaged the encampment of Kurds responsible for the massacre of 800 Armenians. At the time, this event was celebrated by Armenians; over the years, it became a topic of song and story, an event etched in memory as proof that the nation had not only masters like the Tzar and the Sultan, but its own defenders and leaders in the Dashnag Party, which henceforth became the most persistent and successful modern aspirant to governmental status at home and in exile.

The enduring significance of Khanassor is indicated by the fact that some Armenians turn to it as a paradigm even now.
Thus, an Editorial headlined (in Armenian) “We Need New Khanassors” appeared (July 28, 1989) in the moderate weekly *Hye Gyank* (“Armenian Life”) of Los Angeles (circulation 10,000). Pointing to the killings of Soviet Armenian citizens in Soviet Azerbaijan, which have remained unpunished and underreported, it states: "We need new Khanassors to strike at and restrain the Azeris who threaten our compatriots." Running on the name of the Dashnag party, which means "harmonious federation," the editorial calls for the renewal of a federation of defenders, a role the government of the Armenian SSR, which has no army, does not fulfill: "We need those who would make new Khanassors," concludes the article - a new entity that can defend Armenians in and beyond the Soviet Union against Azeris and Turkey (cited elsewhere in the piece). Khanassor enabled a political party, operating in exile and the home territories both, to claim the most indispensable function of government, the right to make war in defense of the nation. Between 1897 and 1908, the Dashnag underground *fedayees* fought frequently against Kurds and Turks in the Ottoman Empire, and in 1905-1907 in the Tzarist Empire, against the Azeris, in the course of events which there is no room to discuss here.

In 1908, the Young Turk junta seized power in the Ottoman state and took faltering steps to modernize its politics. The next six years were marked by the first democratic competition in the ranks of the Armenian elites. To counter the socialism of the Hncags and Dashnags, the bourgeoisie formed the Ramgavar-Sahmanatragan (Democratic-Constitutional) Party (1908), which was allied with the philanthropic Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), founded in 1906; the fiscal resources of the latter remain the single largest economic force in exile public life (an endowment of $75 million in 1988). These groups, allied with the church, competed with the two more radical parties. By 1914, the Dashnags were the most important but not the dominant force in the transnational nation, managing its civic life in a loose and uneasy relationship with others, with room for discursive struggle.

During the period 1908-1914, the traditional elites came into closer contact with their co-nationals across the Ottoman-Tzarist boundary, leading to an alliance of major consequences, and created at the initiative of the Catholicos Kevork V. This cleric held a position that made his ancient predecessors head of the Armenian Church in the Armenian Kingdom; the prestige (but not always the actual power) of the position did and does overshadow that of any other Armenian cleric. To bolster it in the new transnational arena, the Catholicos allied himself with
Boghos Noubar Pasha, a founder of the AGBU, the leading conservative notable of his day and one of the two or three wealthiest Armenians in the world; his family was of Ottoman Armenian descent and had managed the financial affairs of Egypt under the Khedives. Francophone and usually a resident of Paris, the Pasha was appointed the Catholicos’ personal representative to the London conference on the Balkan Wars in 1912. Armenians have often sought to send representatives to international conferences. In the absence of recognition by the great powers of a formal government-in-exile, other forms of sanctioned contact at the diplomatic level or between equivalent organizations have been a mode of self-legitimation for both the Armenians and others: the recognition of even a health organization that acts in the name of an exile community is considered (not always wrongly) a step towards the possibility of greater participation in the international arena, and it always legitimates the sponsors of the move in the community. The Pasha’s appointment, while of no immediate diplomatic consequence, was part of a campaign to regain ground for the old elite.

The significance of this step became manifest after the First World War. Earlier, between 1911 and 1913, a troika had seized control of the “İttihad ve Terakki” Party which ruled the Ottoman empire. As its war against Russia began to go badly in December, 1914, the Party used its total control of the apparatus of the mobilized state to launch the genocide of its Armenian subjects. Between 1915 and 1917, some 1.5 million Armenians were killed and nearly half a million made refugees. By mid-1917, military fortunes reversed as the Russians collapsed under the impact of their Revolution, and the resurgent Ottoman armies came close to conquering the portion of the Armenian homeland that had hitherto been under Russian protection; the genocide threatened to become total.

In a moment of unrivalled crisis, Armenians turned to the Azkayın Khorhourt, literally the National Council, which already existed, but whose task it now became to coordinate the efforts of all surviving Armenians, whatever their class or faction. It is indicative of the importance of the intrastate diaspora that this government of exiles met in Tbilisi, then the administrative center of the Transcaucasus. It mobilized funds, medicine and supplies and kept thousands alive in the chaos of 1917-1918; but the most visible “savior” of the population was a ragtag army — consisting of Armenians trained in the Tzarist army and of the underground militia of the Dashnags — that held the Ottoman forces at bay after the Tzarist army dissolved. When the sovereign Armenian state was founded on May 28, 1918, Aram Manoogian,
a Dashnag leader, was given (provisional) dictatorial powers, and when free Parliamentary elections were held in 1919, the Dashnags won an overwhelming victory among the one million surviving Armenians who lived in the new republic.

However, many Armenians lived in various forms of exile — some as survivors in refugee camps, others safe in Paris or Moscow, Boston or Cairo. While they also celebrated the new state, they deferred to the conservative bourgeoisie whose wealth and political ambitions were intact, and who were reluctant to acknowledge the militant intellectuals and peasant soldiers of the Dashnag party as the legitimate leaders of the nation. Their hopes for contesting the issue crystallized around Boghos Noubar Pasha.

Several factors were at work: first, the Dashnags had been a party of exile, but, having come to power in a nation-state, seemed prepared to claim priority for it and themselves in all political matters. Yet the bourgeoisie of the diaspora knew that its wealth and contacts with European leaders were indispensable. The old "Delegation" to London, which in 1912 had consisted of the Pasha and his entourage, became the frame for a loose coalition to contest the claims of the Dashnag government of the new Republic to sole leadership, while managing not to seem to threaten the fragile state itself. It was a delicate task, all the more so because as the peace conferences which were to arrange the map of postwar Europe became urgent realities in 1919, a question was posed that characterizes the exilic nature of Armenian political life to the fullest: would the nation be represented solely by those who legitimately ruled the new nation-state, or would it also be represented by leaders of the still-exile sector of the nation, whose legitimacy was due not to election but to tradition and the fact that they performed services carried out by government functionaries in other polities? The question is familiar to experts on the relations between the Jewish Diaspora and Israel. It is also a question likely to emerge in the event of Palestinian nationhood, since at this point there are around two million Palestinians in the old home territories and nearly three million in diaspora.

The Armenian solution was a damaging compromise. The contestants needed each other. The bourgeois elite could not openly challenge the leaders of the longed-for state, whose existence was joyfully celebrated by its constituency, whether in salons or survivors' camps. In turn, the Dashnags were a party in control of a government that had to have help from those leaders who remained relatively wealthy in the overseas diaspora or the Transcaucasus. These leaders were allied with their fellow
upper bourgeoisie in the "West," in Cairo and Paris — with the followers of the Pasha. The extraordinary compromise forged by the mediation of the Khorhourt was to go to the conferences of Versailles and Sevres (1919-1920) with two delegations, a "National" delegation headed by the Pasha and the Republic's delegation, many of whose members were revolutionary intellectuals led by Avetis Aharonian, a writer not necessarily suited to diplomacy but a "cultural producer" whose immensely popular, politicized stories had mobilized the Dashnags' mass following for two decades.\(^{17}\)

There is no scholarly work in any language that fully assesses the impact of this double presence of the Republic and exile governments at the peace conferences\(^{18}\). Some of the correspondence of the Republic's Dashnag leaders has been published, and their assessment is more negative than their public stance at the time, which amounted to saying that the prevailing cooperative spirit transcended the tensions. The dissenting private assessments\(^{19}\) point to the fact that Western, especially British diplomats preferred to discuss matters with the urbane and wealthy Pasha than with a poorly funded radical like Aharonian. There is evidence that the Pasha negotiated with Kurdish and French representatives without consulting with Aharonian; representing the survivors of Ottoman Armenians, his delegation had somewhat different territorial ambitions. Beyond that, it is difficult to assess the specifically diasporan interests which it sought to promote. Was there a specifically exile view of what the new Armenian Republic should be? The question may not have seemed urgent when the U.S. recognized the Republic (April, 1920) and others followed suit (France, Britain, Japan, Italy, Brazil, Belgium, Persia, Georgia, Azerbaijan), and promises were made to the Armenian victims of Ottoman Turkey. But by the summer of 1919 Mustapha Kemal (Ataturk) had launched the struggle which, coupled with the rise of the Soviet State, would catch the new republic in a pincer and eliminate it before all but the most modest hopes of the Armenians were realized.

The existence of two delegations in Paris was to prove prophetic of the future divisions of post-genocide exile. On December 2, 1920, the Dashnag government of the Armenian Republic surrendered to the Red Army, on generous conditions which were immediately violated as the nascent secret police began to arrest and execute Dashnag leaders. On February 18, 1921, a Dashnag-organized revolt sought to overthrow the Communists; a doomed struggle continued until July 1921, after which the surviving members of the Dashnag government fled to
France, where they joined the members of the Republic's delega-
tion to the 1919-1920 peace conferences.

**Government-in-Exile and After: The Contemporary Moment**

By 1921, the population distribution of the Armenian
nation had changed radically. Three fourths of the world's
surviving Armenians lived in the USSR: just over a million in the
Armenian SSR and half a million as an intrastate diaspora. In
Ataturk's new Turkey, 125,000 Armenians were left, cowed and
no longer permitted to take part in any non-religious activity.
(Today only 55,000 are left.) Around half a million Armenians
lived in Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Greece, France and the
U.S.A., later also in Australia, Canada and Argentina. The
problems facing the exile leadership were both massive and new: who would lead? to what purpose, given that the larger propor-
tion of the homeland was denuded of Armenians and incorpo-
rated into the territory of the Turkish Republic, with the assent
of the Western signatories to the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), while
the rest was part of the USSR?

In 1921, the government-in-exile was acknowledged by
one country, France. The lack of a more general recognition was
not itself an insurmountable problem: other exile governments
survive thanks to the patronage of one major state. France's
position owed much to the fact that Armenian refugees who were
former citizens of the defunct Ottoman and Tzarist empires had
neither documentation nor citizenship. The government-in-exile
issued identity-cards to Armenian refugees, which also func-
tioned as passports across European boundaries. That was the
primary service they extended to their impoverished co-nationals
until early 1924, when France recognized the Turkish Republi-
cand the USSR. In the immediate postwar Diaspora, the govern-
ment-in-exile was wholly dependent on the Dashnags: most of its
members had been party members all along, and with the fall of
the Republic they reverted to it. Among Armenian supporters,
they were revered as reminders of past hopes. Bearing the name
"Badviragootyun" (Delegation), the shell of the government-in-
exile was maintained, in a Paris building and museum, until
1939, then again from 1945 to 1965, when even the pretence
lapsed.

However, as this essay has argued throughout, the
Armenian diaspora had long been organized and governed by
elites who performed services and had access to human, ideologi-
cal and fiscal resources. While these resources were a pale
shadow of their prewar selves, there were enough militants and
embittered sympathizers among the survivors to reconstitute the
old organizations, which debated and continue to debate questions concerning exile government.

Among the issues that have remained important to this day is the role of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic in the diaspora. After 1921 it was clear that the final arbiter of the SSR's affairs was the Kremlin; the SSR was powerless to defend Armenians in the Soviet intrastate diaspora (e.g. Karabagh was attached to the Turkic Azerbaijani SSR, thus laying the foundations for renewed conflict during Gorbachev's reign). On the other hand, the SSR was the only intact part of the homeland, and an Armenian Communist Party ruled it as the Kremlin's satrap. What was to be its role vis a vis the exile leadership in largely capitalist countries? The question, debated by exiles since 1923, has been whether they should seek to be (junior) allies of the SSR, hence of the USSR, or independent actors. Because of anti-Bolshevism and the Cold War, the former position has long been a difficult one to maintain, yet tenable in so far as the segment of the exile elite which took it supervised the "traffic" of people and cultural groups to and from Soviet Armenia. Ironically, driven by anxiety about Dashnag legitimacy as the heir of the Republic and by the possible claim that realism meant accepting the primacy of the SSR, the Armenian bourgeoisie's elites (AGBU, ADL, the clergy obedient to the Catholicos in Armenia) became the allies of the SSR. The Dashnag Party took the position that the diaspora must maintain an independent government of exile, with the hope of eventually returning to power in Armenia. This party, though more radical than those of the upper bourgeoisie, received U.S. support during the Cold War.

Other issues that have mattered to the debates of the exiles include the provision of services; the question of what to do, in the aftermath of Genocide, given that the new Turkish Republic not only absolved itself of any responsibility for the genocide its predecessor state had perpetrated but also denied the event had happened; what territorial claims, if any, a government of exile could sustain in a world of nation-states, where neither the League of Nations nor the U.N. Charter make provision for the pursuit of such claims; and what, if anything, can be done to stem the rising assimilation of Armenians in the Western diaspora.

The question of services has been differently addressed across the diaspora. In the Middle East, before nationalism and oil money altered the situation in the 1960's, governments were unable or unwilling to provide services to Armenian refugees and their descendants. Here, funds raised in the Armenian-American
diaspora played a key role, which meant that the AGBU and ADL elites, with better access to such funds, gained a greater legitimacy from administering aid than the relatively poorer Dashnags. But both used their fiscal resources skillfully. The immi-
erated refugees had been reasonably well educated in the schools of the prewar Armenian system of intrastate exile; Arab govern-
ments and their colonial masters (British and French) welcomed the Armenians’ ability to care for themselves. The result in Lebanon (where the confessional state has always been weak) was the creation of Armenian enclaves with Armenian mayors in which the principal language of daily life is Armenian, where separate hospitals and old-age homes exist, as does an Armenian college; there are designated Armenian seats in Parliament, for which the Dashnags fight and usually win electoral battles against other factions. Finally, in Lebanon the Dashnag and Hnchag parties have militias. The Armenian Middle East has its own Catholicos, inferior in status but not in influence to the one in the USSR, and a strong Armenian intelligentsia and press, in which debate is fierce. While the Lebanese civil war (after 1975) and the Iranian revolution (after 1979) have left these communi-
ties a pale shadow of their former selves, its emigrants have moved West (some 150,000 to Los Angeles) and brought much of their vigor with them. Between 1975 and 1983, a few such Armenians in Beirut launched a new episode of transnational terrorism.

That terrorism resulted from the breakdown of the consensus prevailing among the elites of the government of exile, and especially the Dashnags, since the last outburst of Armenian terrorism, between 1919 and 1923. The earlier episode, though murky, is linked to the later. In 1919, the Dashnag Party set up a special revenge unit, Nemesis, whose existence was deniable by both the Party and the government of the Republic. Over three years, the unit assassinated some of the top executives of the “Ittihad” Party responsible for the genocide. In 1922-1923, in a still partially-secret debate at a Party Congress, Dashnag officials debated whether to continue armed struggle against Turkey by carrying out terrorism and minor guerrilla raids, and whether the Party had a task appropriate to the new conditions. One official, H. Kachaznuni, argued that “The Dashnagtzootyun No Longer Has Anything To Do,” that the party should dissolve itself and let a new diasporan agenda and party emerge. (True to his opinions, he resigned and returned to Soviet Armenia). The Dashnags chose to go on, but armed struggle was abandoned. In 1931-1934, a group of cadres, including some of the most promising, were expelled because they demanded a return to at
least occasional terrorism as a symbol substantiating the exile government’s claims that the genocide was still an issue, that Armenian territories would be reclaimed some day, and that the exiles still had armed force (however puny), an essential feature of government, along with “martyrs” ready to fight in its name.

When the Nazis attacked the Soviet Union, two former commanders of the prewar militias sought Dashnag sponsored Armenian units to fight Stalin and “liberate” Armenia. They failed, but kept alive the question of when exiles should fight, against whom, and under what aegis. During the first Lebanese civil war (1958), Dashnag and Hnchag militias fought each other in a minuscule Armenian civil war embedded within the larger conflict for control of the machinery and substantial income of the exile government in Lebanon. This fratricidal conflict underscores the importance of exile government to daily life in the Armenian diaspora.

Memories of these conflicts were fresh between 1965 and 1975, the decade of the incubation of terrorism in articles and meetings; unaffiliated youth as well as cadres of the Hnchag and especially Dashnag parties, influenced by the PLO, disturbed by the erasure of the Genocide from Western historiography, the exclusion of Armenian demands from international agendas, and by the quietism of elites, debated armed struggle. An underground faction, ASALA, launched Armenian terrorism in 1975 and was joined by other groups. Before it stopped in 1983-1985, ASALA terrorists had assassinated half a dozen Dashnag leaders of the exile government, as well as Turkish diplomats and others in Western Europe and North America. In the 1970’s, attempts to create a new pan-Armenian organization, non-violent but supportive of some ASALA demands, led to the short-lived Armenian World Congress. Rejecting all these groups but riding a renewal of diasporan commitment, new organizations have explored alternative paths. One example is the Solidarite Franco-Armenienne, which successfully lobbied the European Parliament to issue the Strasbourg Resolution of June 18, 1987: in response to Turkish abuses of Armenians, Kurds and Cypriot Greeks, the Parliament demanded reforms as a precondition of Turkey’s admission to the Common Market. A transnational community dealt with a supranational agency to influence a sovereign nation, in a move which may prefigure one future direction of action by the Armenian government of exile.

Elsewhere, competition in the exile elite has been at the level of community development and patronage of cultural production. Armenians living in France or the U.S.A., for example, do not require the level of services needed in parts of the
Middle East, but the construction of specifically Armenian day schools (there are 20 in the U.S. A.), churches (107), newspapers and other communal facilities demands the raising and expenditure of tens of millions of dollars every year and employs hundreds. Millions are also raised and channeled to needy Armenians overseas, as for example after the December 1988 earthquake to Soviet Armenia. Such activity is accompanied by discursive war within what some community leaders now prefer to call the leadership of the ethnic community, rather than the exile government of a diaspora, though there remains considerable overlap between the two concepts. All but two leading Armenian organizations in the U.S.A. are still transnational and have to deal with tensions between their ethnic and diasporan inclinations. Of the exceptions, one, the Armenian Assembly, is organized as a Washington lobbying effort, but a vacuum of leadership elsewhere is increasingly causing it to become the leading organization of Armenians in America. The other, the Zoryan Institute, is an innovative think-tank which consults with diasporan and Soviet Armenian analysts of the Armenian condition, shaping a new pan-Armenian discourse while retaining its American base.

The transnational nation is on the verge of another political transformation, due to Gorbachev's reforms, the Karabagh issue and the attacks upon Armenians in Soviet Azerbaijan (over 100 have been killed and 200,000 have fled or have been deported), the earthquake and, above all, the popular reform movement in Armenia. These events evoke the genocide, the earthquake does so because of its unusual destructiveness, the Karabagh crisis because Azeris are attempting to expel Armenians from the last fragment of historical Armenia outside the SSR still inhabited by a majority Armenian population. Lost people and lost lands evoke loss, the central experience of exiles. The feeling has mobilized the diaspora, and the easing of constraints on contacts between Soviet Armenian and exile leaders makes transnational action more likely.

It is now easier for the exile government to deal with and perhaps to influence Soviet Armenian leaders than it has ever been. Of course, the reverse is theoretically also true, but in fact the delegitimization of all things Soviet is so complete that the exile government is more confident of itself than it has been for decades. The ADL faction, which for too long served as the SSR's junior partner, is discredited; the Armenian Assembly is courted by Soviet Armenia for its access to U.S.-Armenian capital and to Congress, and as a result is growing in influence and prestige in the diaspora. The Dashnags, in particular, are bolstered by the
fact that the outlawed flag of the Republic they governed is again the flag of the Armenian SSR, Dashnag heroes are rehabilitated, and demonstrators have called for its legalization as an opposition party inside the Armenian SSR. The elites of the exile government matter more than before, and different elites matter differently. The age-old dream of a pan-Armenian polity jointly led by consulting and cooperating elites at home and in diaspora is once again a beckoning temptation. Without a nation-state to call their own, the Armenians still seek their transnational nation. The enduring shape of the Armenian polity provides a model for those collectivities which for the foreseeable future will exist in the global system as nations with a small home territory and a large overseas population led by an "exile" or diasporan elite.

**FOOTNOTES**


2. Ibid., p. 165.

3. The central role of political culture in defining the authentic aspirations and interests of the exile polity is the subject of my manuscript, *Stateless Power: Representation and Hegemony in the Armenian Diaspora*, in progress.

4. Daniel J. O'Neil offers an interesting if not fully convincing argument that modern Irish nationalism is an example of "successful nation-building on the part of an enclave-people." *J. of Ethnic Studies* 15:3 (Fall, 1987), pp. 1-27.

5. The archaic classical Armenian used by the clergy endured. Otherwise, there was a multiplication and fragmentation of dialects. See Marc Nichanian, *Ages at Usages de la Langue Armenienne* (Paris: Editions Entente, 1989).


7. Philip Curtin originated the term to refer to an African phenomenon, but it has been applied to the Armenians by Bruce Masters, *The Origins of Western Economic Dominance in the Middle East* (N.Y.: NYU Press), 1988.

*For a comparable case, one has to look at earlier rather
than more contemporary cases. The best parallel is the extensive civic and juridical independence enjoyed by the Jewish diaspora of Ptolemaic Egypt ca. 300 B.C. - 30 B.C. See David Konstan, “Ethnicity and Citizenship” (unpublished MS) and A. N. Sherwin-White, *Racial Prejudice in Imperial Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.K.).


11 For the full and fascinating story, see Nichanian, *op. cit.* A very unusual diasporan organization, the Mekhitarist Brotherhood, an Armenian Catholic order with monasteries in Venice and Vienna but with emissaries everywhere, played a large role in creating the ideology of nationhood and in reshaping the Armenian language; these clerics educated important segments of the non-Catholic laity as nationalists and hold a singular position in Armenian history that has few parallels elsewhere.

12 A better analogy may be offered by the Bulgarization of the language and national self-identification of the South-Slavic population of Macedonia in the late nineteenth century, to which exiles contributed significantly. For the best account, see Duncan Perry, *The Politics of Terror: The Macedonian Revolutionary Movements, 1893-1903* (Duke University Press, 1988), Ch. I.


14 The image of the iron ladle marches through the major discussions of whether the use of force — in the form of terrorism — makes sense in the conditions of exile in the post-Genocide Armenian diaspora (1923-1989). These discussions played a major role in the struggle against the authority of the leading diasporan elite, the Dashnags, in 1931-1934 and 1965-1975. The last dispute, unresolved, led to the resurgence of Armenian terrorism after 1975. The terrorists explicitly pointed to the PLO’s claims to being the de facto government of the Palestinian people,
asserting that this was based in part on their use of armed force. A faction of the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) published an underground journal named Yergateh Sherep, “Iron Ladle,” in Athens and Beirut in the early to mid-1980’s.

This part of the essay focuses on the Dashnag struggle against non-Armenians. Like most competitors for leadership, however, the Dashnags conducted an intra-Armenian struggle, both in exile and at home, against traditional groups to their right and radical socialists to their left; this struggle ranged from ugly mutual polemic to kidnappings of the rich to raise funds, and occasional assassination of informers and rival leaders. Though Dashnag strategy developed piecemeal, its factions debated whether they were (to use Lenin’s later term) a “vanguard party” that would lead and teach the masses, whether the Party was the model of the Nation to be, which it helped to make (kertel), or whether the Party was the Nation. This last position resembles that of the Indian Congress Party, which identified itself with an actually heterogeneous and fictional “India.” See G. Chaliand, Terrorism (London: Saqi Books, 1987), p. 26.

Boghos Noubar Pasha had impeccable credentials as a philanthropist and diasporan diplomat who had performed quasi-governmental roles. He commanded no armed force, but had helped to organize the Legion d’Orient, a unit of Armenians commanded by French officers which fought against the Turks in Egypt, Palestine and Syria during World War I (1916-1918).

Part of the mass appeal of the Dashnag Party was due to its role in cultural production and to the loyalty it commanded from politicized artists and intellectuals (publicists and editors, teachers). For a survey of the role of cultural production in resistance movements of all kinds, see Barbara Harlow, Resistance Literature (NY: Methuen, 1987).

James Gidney’s judgment in A Mandate for Armenia (Kent State University Press, 1967) is contradicted by the available evidence. He writes: “while it is not to be expected that a popular party like the Dashnagtzootyun would always see eye to eye with a group backed chiefly by the clergy and the bourgeoisie, the Armenians (in the two delegations) stuck together during the critical spring months of 1919 (when the Versailles Conference was being arranged). There is nothing at all to support the charge that their own factionalism cost them” (p. 85). This is a breathtakingly confident generalization from a scholar who had no access to most sources in Armenian.

The most important of these are the memoirs of Simon Vratzian, the last prime minister of the short-lived Republic,
whose works have been published by the Dashnag Party in the diaspora. While usually accurate, Vratzian's portrayal of the situation cannot be taken as wholly reliable. After 1920, all such depictions were interventions in the renewed struggle to control diasporan political institutions. I have relied primarily on Antzink Nviryal (Beirut: Hamazkayin Press, 1969), in which Vratzian cites the letters of eyewitnesses and participants who were in Paris at the crucial time, like Karekin Pasdermajian.

There is no foreign-language study of this movement, but the French journalist Jacques Derogie based a well-researched political thriller on the events: *Operation Nemesis* (Paris: Fayard), 1986.


Two books and several articles offer an overview of this phase of Armenian terrorism. However, they discuss international issues, not the intranational context — struggle over exile government — which made terrorism seem an option. See Michael Gunther (*Pursuing the Just Cause of Their People*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986) and Anat Kurtz and Ariel Merari, ASALA, Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1986, and their review by this author in *Conflict Quarterly* (Summer 1988), pp. 101-105.

The under-reporting of these events in the US press is one more indication of American unwillingness to do anything that might make Gorbachev's position seem less secure. It is a measure of local anarchy that the Soviet authorities allow disputes between the republics to be solved by small massacres of Armenians and by mass deportations (fearing reprisal, 170,000 Azeris have left the ASSR). For a rare, albeit passing, mention of the killings see: Rasma Karklins, "Perestroika and Ethnopolitics in the USSR", *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 21:2 (June 1989), p. 213.