

“O why so eloquently speaks the maiden silence”

The Armenian Genocide’s Impact on Women in Armenian Society

by

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Introduction

In 1998, Peproné Andranik Toumassian recalled her family's experience during the Armenian Genocide, when "The Turks kidnapped [my uncle's] eight-year-old daughter Arousyak and took her to a Turkish orphanage."¹ Peproné's cousin shared the fate of many Armenian children, and women, who were absorbed into Muslim households and orphanages as part of the Armenian Genocide. However, as the First World War ended and these women and children rejoined, often by force, the Armenian community, they were seen as the future of Armenia. Women and children would be the medium through which the destruction of the Armenian Genocide would be undone.

According to traditional scholarship, the Armenian Genocide, or *Aghed* (catastrophe), lasted from 1915-1916, with the final genocidal acts concluding in 1923 after the Turkish War of Independence.² The deportations and massacres were ordered by the Young Turks, also referred to as the CUP (Committee of Union and Progress) or *Ittihad*, the ruling party of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War. Within this eight-year period, an estimated 1-1.5 million Armenians died, alongside an estimated 300,000-900,000 Greeks and 250,000 Assyrians.³ These groups belonged to the various Christian *millets*, or nations, that defined the Ottoman social structure. Religion determined which *millet* someone belonged to.⁴ The CUP cleansed Anatolia

¹ Peproné Andranik Toumassian, "Peproné Andranik Toumassian's Testimony" in *The Armenian Genocide* ed. Verzhine Svazlyan, (Yerevan: Gitoutyoun Publishing, 2011), 186.

² Donald Bloxham, "The First World War and the Development of the Armenian Genocide," in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek, Norman M. Naimark, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 261.

³ Benny Morris and Dror Ze'evi, *The Thirty-Year Genocide: Turkey's Destruction of Its Christian Minorities, 1894-1924* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019), 487.

of its nearly four million Christians, marching those who were not killed out of the region. Survivors of the deportation marches were deprived of their homeland and geographically divided between Turkey, the Soviet Union, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, the United States, France, and Iran. Many studies have been produced on the “Late Ottoman Genocides,” a term coined by Benny Morris and Dror Ze’evi to describe the systematic destruction of Anatolian Christian minorities at the hands of the Ottoman government, beginning in 1894 with the Hamidian Massacres and ending in 1924 with the recognition of the Republic of Turkey.

In the immediate aftermath of the genocide, surviving Armenians attempted to rebuild their community and nation. Women and gender, the subject of this chapter, were central to this project. Lerna Ekmekçioğlu’s *Recovering Armenia: The Limits of Belonging in Post-Genocide Turkey* addresses gendered issues of Armenians living in Turkey soon after the Armenocide⁵, as well as the articles “‘Marks Hard to Erase’: The Troubled Reclamation of ‘Absorbed’ Armenian Women, 1919–1927” by Rebecca Jinks and Vahé Tachjian’s “Gender, Nationalism, Exclusion: the Reintegration Process of Female Survivors of the Armenian Genocide” examine the role of gender in Armenian society immediately following the Armenocide. Adding to these works, this thesis seeks to shed light on the relationship between gender and Armenian cultural/national identity in post-genocide society, paying special attention to first-hand accounts and contemporaneous sources, like newspaper and speeches. The Armenian Genocide changed the way Armenians viewed gender with respect to Armenian cultural identity by equating women

⁴ Ronald Grigor Suny, “Religion, Ethnicity, and Nationalism: Armenians, Turks, and the End of the Ottoman Empire,” in *In God’s Name*, ed. Omer Bartov and Phyllis Mack, 1st ed., Genocide and Religion in the Twentieth Century (Berghahn Books, 2010), 29, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qcq8t.4>.

⁵ The term “Armenocide” first appears in Vigen Guroian’s article “Armenian Genocide and Christian Existence,” which was published in 1991. The term Armenocide, Armenian Genocide, Late Ottoman Genocides, and *Aghed* (catastrophe) are used interchangeably throughout this work.

and women's societal roles, especially as mothers, with the nation's survival. Additionally, women's experiences during the Armenocide and in its aftermath, especially through cultural absorption, forced assimilation, sexual violence, and new relations to the nation and state, created new problems, contradictions, and layers of gender identity.

The *Aghed* produced a new facet of Armenian identity that all genders experienced: victimhood. This sense of persecution and victimization continued after the end of hostilities, and continues to this day, through the denialist policies of the Turkish government. The continued denial of the Armenocide further reinforces the victim identity of Armenians, in the diaspora and in Armenia. In response to the genocide and its continued denial, Armenians' identity shifted towards survivorship. Surviving the genocide, and ensuring the Young Turks' goal never be realized, became central to Armenian identity. Through their traditional roles as mothers and educators, women became the symbol of the Armenian nation's survival. They would produce and rear the next generation of Armenians who would push back against the denialism of the Turkish Republic and help ease the pain of the genocide.

Victimhood tied into the Armenian nationalist movement after the genocide. Before the *Aghed*, the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire saw themselves as a disenfranchised minority who sought more autonomy within the empire. Radical nationalists wanted to break away from the Ottoman Empire, and either join with Eastern (Russian) Armenia or form an independent state out of the Armenian *vilayets* (provinces). Moderates sought more autonomy within the Ottoman Empire, but saw increased agency in socio-political affairs as a solution to inequalities experienced by Armenians.⁶ Following the genocide, victimhood became central to Armenian

⁶ Suny, "Religion, Ethnicity, and Nationalism," 36.

collective identity, and simply living, or refusing to die, became a form of revenge for Armenians.⁷

Genocides cannot be studied without paying due diligence to gender and its important role in all involved groups (perpetrator, victim, bystander). The case of the Armenian Genocide presents an opportunity to analyze, contextualize, and attempt to comprehend the gendered aspect of mass killings and ethnic cleansing. Especially in the case of the Armenian Genocide, following the conclusion of the First World War and collapse of the Ottoman Empire, “memory and nationalism had now become the paramount factors,” in Armenian identity.⁸ Memory could not be separated from its gendered tendencies. Men and women experienced the Armenian Genocide in different ways, and the survivors of the deportations were mainly women and children.⁹ Survivors were subject to rape, forced marriage, sexual slavery and many widowed Armenian women became prostitutes in Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan. These memories of gendered and sexualized violence left a profound impact on the way Armenians, especially women, memorialized the *Aghed* and their identities. Forced marriage caused identity crises for many women, for conversion to Islam was compulsory as well, and converting to Islam ostracized these women from Armenian society. The Armenocide offers a plethora of evidence for the impact and centrality of gender in genocide.

⁷ Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia: The Limits of Belonging in Post-Genocide Turkey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 29.

⁸ Vahé Tachjian, “Gender, Nationalism, Exclusion: The Reintegration Process of Female Survivors of the Armenian Genocide,” *Nations and Nationalism* 15, no. 1 (2009): 61, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2009.00366.x>.

⁹ Uğur Ümit Üngör, “Orphans, Converts, and Prostitutes: Social Consequences of War and Persecution in the Ottoman Empire, 1914–1923,” *War in History* 19, no. 2 (2012): 175, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0968344511430579>.

This thesis seeks to answer several questions regarding the effect of the Armenian Genocide on Armenian national and cultural identity. Firstly, how did the vast differences in experience between men and women during and after the genocide change their perspectives on Armenian identity, personal gender identity, and the role of the individual in the nation based on their gender? How did women fit into the new Armenian nationalist narrative spawned out of their near destruction? What constituted “Armenian-ness” and how can it be understood in a gendered context? Also, how do the inconsistencies in treatment of female victims by post-genocide Armenian society show contradictions between traditional values, emerging irridentist nationalism, and national rebuilding efforts?

These questions will be addressed through the use of survivor accounts and memoirs, eyewitness reports, and extensive secondary material covering Armenian history, Ottoman and Middle Eastern history, and gender history and theory in the Middle East and beyond. By focusing on survivor accounts and contemporary sources, like speeches, newspaper articles and other publications, the role of gender in constructing post-genocide Armenian identity occupies the consciousness and memory of individuals; the individual consciousness contributes to the collective memory of gendered violence and suffering experienced during the *Aghed*. This thesis posits that gender played a central role in creating this national identity, and understanding the nuances of Armenian national identity cannot be understood without paying diligence to gender.

Chapter I

Absorption, Recovery, and Cultural Genocide

“Tomorrow when you play outside / you’ll insist you are like / every other child on the street ”

-Eghishe Charents

During the Armenocide, the Young Turk’s sought not only the physical destruction of Armenians and other non-Muslim, non-Turkish peoples in the Ottoman Empire, but the cultural destruction of these communities as well. Armenians who survived the death marches were systematically absorbed, or “Turkified,” in an attempt to erase their Armenian identity and replace it with what the *Ittihad* government considered a Turkish identity.¹⁰ Anthonie Holslag explains that “Because the Ottoman authorities did not imagine Armenians’ ‘Otherness’ to be in their blood, but rather in their ethnicity and culture, they used forced assimilation and enslavement as strategies for cleansing the empire of ‘foreign’ Armenian elements.”¹¹ Considering women and children made up the majority of survivors, they were the specific targets of assimilation and absorption. Women, and children especially, were either abducted, sold, or given away to Muslims, and over time would lose their Armenian identity as they assimilated to non-Armenian culture.¹² Before the effects of absorption and assimilation of Armenian women and children can be analyzed, some attention must be given to the gendered experience of the Armenocide.

¹⁰ Erol Ulker, “Contextualising ‘Turkification’: Nation-Building in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1908-18,” *Nations and Nationalism* 11, no. 4 (2005): 626, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2005.00222.x>.

¹¹ Anthonie Holslag, “Exposed Bodies: A Conceptual Approach to Sexual Violence during the Armenian Genocide,” in *Genocide and Gender in the Twentieth Century: A Comparative Study*, ed. Amy E. Randall (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 97-8.

¹² Rebecca Jinks, “‘Marks Hard to Erase’: The Troubled Reclamation of ‘Absorbed’ Armenian Women, 1919–1927,” *The American Historical Review* 123, no. 1 (2018): 86, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/123.1.86>.

The Young Turk's extermination policies towards Armenians constituted cultural genocide by not only killing Armenians but through institutional absorption into non-Armenian cultures. For the purposes of this thesis, the definition of cultural genocide is as follows: The destruction of a national or ethnic group's culture via replacing the victim's original culture with that of the perpetrator's. In the case of the Armenian Genocide, this applies to the absorption of Armenian women and children into Turkish, Arab, and Kurdish communities where their former religion, language, and traditions were replaced with that of their captors. Cultural genocide adheres to Article II of the United Nations' Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime, which defines the crime of genocide as:

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: Killing members of the group; Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.¹³

Absorption of members of a community can easily be considered an action with the intent to destroy, or erase, a national or ethnic group. Absorption of women and children into Muslim communities is a well-documented result of Ottoman policy and individual opportunism shortly before, during, and after the deportations.¹⁴

The Armenian Genocide shows how gender identity and perceptions of gender manifest in times of mass violence. The notion of gender as an identifier and cultural symbol was visible

¹³ "United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect," accessed November 5, 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml>.

¹⁴Ara Sarafian, "The Absorption of Armenian Women and Children Into Muslim Households as a Structural Component of the Armenian Genocide," in *In God's Name: Genocide and Religion in the Twentieth Century*, Ed. Omer Bartov and Phyllis Mack, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), 209.

in the patterns of massacre and deportation. One survivor, Shogher Tonoyan, describes the destruction of her village:

My aunt's young son, who was staying with me, was also taken away, together with all the males in the town. They gathered the young and the elderly in the stables of the Avzut Village, set fire and burned them alive...From the beginning, they took away the young pretty brides and girls to Turkify them and also pulled away the male infants from their mothers' arms.¹⁵

From the outset of violence women and men were separated by their gender and treated differently because of their genders. Genocidal architects pursued a campaign of “Turkification” through eliminating Armenian men altogether, mostly through murder, while women were abducted and taken into non-Armenian communities, as Tonoyan mentions. Men were perceived as a greater threat than women, and were thus eliminated outright, leaving the women, children, and elderly “defenseless” and more vulnerable on the deportation routes.

Masculinity in Armenian Consciousness:

Men were also traditionally the heads of the family in Armenian culture, and seen as the protectors of the family and the community.¹⁶ The destruction of the male population followed a similar pattern throughout the Ottoman Empire: Men would be drafted into military or labor battalions, and “liquidated in the Ottoman army; then, Armenian community leaders were rounded up and killed.”¹⁷ With the men eliminated, in the eyes of the Young Turks, eliminating and assimilating the rest of the Armenian populace would be easier, and there would be less resistance to their efforts. In addition to the military threat posed by men, they were the largest

¹⁵ Shogher Abraham Tonoyan, “Shogher Abraham Tonoyan’s Testimony” in *The Armenian Genocide*, 98.

¹⁶ Sarafian, “The Absorption of Armenian Women and Children Into Muslim Households as a Structural Component of the Armenian Genocide,” 210.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 209.

obstacle in the path of Turkification of Anatolia. This came from the way in which ethnicity and lineage was understood in Turkish and Armenian cultures at the time.

In the early twentieth century, identity in the Middle East and Caucasus was determined by the father. Cultural identity and ethnicity were passed down through, and preserved by, the father to his offspring. By 1914, this thinking had long been established and ingrained in Ottoman society, and best exemplified by laws prohibiting Armenian men from marrying Muslim or Turkish women, but no such laws preventing Muslim men marrying from marrying non-Muslim women.¹⁸ Armenian men therefore were a long-term issue to the Young Turks, because they could continue to reproduce subsequent generations of Armenians. Women, on the other hand, could be “Turkified” and their offspring with new Turkish fathers would create Turks, not Turco-Armenians. This “patrilineal logic and...hierarchical superiority of Islam and manhood determined the rules regarding sexual partnership and identity of the progeny.”¹⁹ Men were seen as the arbiters of their respective cultures, Armenian or otherwise, and this played out in the execution of the genocidal project by Ottoman officials.

Men’s self-perception as protectors of their communities and nation influenced the ways in which they responded to the threat of genocide and ethnic cleansing. One theme that appears in many primary sources of male survivors is the notion of honor. Resistance to violence was considered honorable in the eyes of Armenian men, whereas submission and acquiescence in the face of ethnic destruction amounted to cowardice and betrayal of the nation. Ephraim Jernazian, a witness to the uprising at Urfa in southern Anatolia, gives an example of this mindset. He

¹⁸ Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, “Scholarship on the Armenian Genocide as a Gendered Event and Process,” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 53 (2015): 186, <https://doi.org/10.1017/npt.2015.35>.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 186.

writes in his memoir, “The choice was between ignominious exile and murder or an honorable death through active resistance...Mgrdich and his band were resourceful enough to escape to the south...they decided to stay and share the fate of their nation by confronting the Turks of Urfa.”²⁰ A tiny armed band of Armenians attempted to resist the Ottoman military’s extermination efforts at Urfa in September 1915, choosing the honor of death for the nation rather than a submissive death.

The connection between masculinity and honor, and what makes certain actions honorable is clear in several Armenian accounts of the *Aghed*. Defending the nation, even in the likelihood of certain death, epitomized Armenian masculinity. In Eghishe Charents’s “Dantesque Legend,” a poem describing his experiences fighting near Van in late 1915, he expresses this view recalling his comrades’ deaths: “Then the dark dreams of Wickedness / descended into those irrational, spotted / fields. (Gentle, brave friends / you passed your road with honor.)”²¹ His comrades died with honor on the battlefield, but also avenged the victims of the Ottomans at Van. Charents viewed dying for Armenia as opposing Turkish will and asserting Armenians’ right to exist. Masculine honor in the face of genocide meant military prowess, toughness, and willingness to die *fighting* for Armenia. It also meant protecting the national family, of which men were the head. The Armenocide, in the eyes of men, was the ultimate failure of the masculine obligation to their nation and families. Allowing women and children to fall victim to and be abducted by non-Armenian actors also contributed to ideas surrounding shame.

²⁰ Ephraim Jernazian, *Judgement Unto Truth: Witnessing the Armenian Genocide*, trans. Alice Haig (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishing, 1990), 75.

²¹ Eghishe Charents, “Dantesque Legend” in *Land of Fire: Selected Poems*, ed. by Diana Der Hovanessian and Marzbed Margossian. (Ann Arbor: Ardis Publishers, 1986), 77.

Absorption into Muslim Communities:

According to a New York Times article from 1919, 50,000 women were being “held captive” by “Turks and Moslems,” while 250,000 children were in Turkish orphanages.²² Ara Sarafian identifies four methods of Armenian womens’ absorption into Muslim households as a result of and component of the Armenian Genocide. They are:

(1) “voluntary” conversion of individuals in the initial stages of the 1915 persecutions; (2) selection of individual Armenian individuals by individual Muslim hosts for absorption into Muslim households; (3) distribution of Armenians to Muslim families by government agencies; (4) the use of Ottoman government sponsored orphanages as a direct means of assimilating Armenian children.²³

The vast majority of women were taken into Muslim households during 1915-1918, but the process continued in smaller numbers during the years 1919-1923.²⁴ It should be noted that not all women were abducted, and that many went of their own volition, albeit in order to escape the deportations and certain death. Women only had the agency to choose between conversion and assimilation, or death and suffering along the deportation routes. Either way, both choices contributed to the genocidal project. Assimilating Armenian women and children into Muslim society and “de-Armenianifying” them served the same purpose as killing them, for it still decreased the Armenian population of the empire.

Nevertheless, most Armenians absorbed into Muslim households did so unwillingly. Many were sold in slave markets, simply abducted from the deportation caravans, or given away by parents who could not bear to witness their child suffer, or figured they had a better chance of

²² “TELLS OF ARMENIA’S WOES.: Dr. Leinbech Says 50,000 Women Are Still Captives of Turks.,” *New York Times*, 1919.

²³ Sarafian, “The Absorption of Armenian Women and Children Into Muslim Households as a Structural Component of the Armenian Genocide,” 210-11.

²⁴ Morris and Ze’evi, *The Thirty-Year Genocide*, 312.

surviving in the hands of a Muslim family.²⁵ Converts were given new names and distributed among individual families, either on the individual level, or through government-sponsored action. Talaat Pasha, Minister of the Interior and oft-credited “architect of the Armenian Genocide” authorized the forced conversion of Armenians, Greeks, and Assyrians to Islam as a measure of ethnic cleansing of the Ottoman Empire.²⁶ Talaat Pasha paid special attention to the Armenian converts, often doubting the legitimacy of Armenians’ conversions. The CUP would often launch investigations into individuals’ conversion to determine if they were “truly” Muslim, or still adhering to their national religion of Christianity.²⁷

The Young Turks used isolation as a tool of cultural genocide in tandem with conversion. For those who arrived in Aleppo and Der Zor during 1915-16 and converted would be immediately separated from the concentration camps surrounding these cities and placed in the homes of Muslims. Many would be sent to distant provinces, so as to prevent them from remaining in contact with Armenians, and to discourage flight and possible reintegration.²⁸ Isolated from their families and previous lives, Armenian women would in theory dissociate themselves from their previous identity, and adopt their new, non-Armenian identity faster. This aspect of the Armenocide mainly effected women, for children were young enough to forget their previous identity more easily than adults, and men usually were not given the option to

²⁵ Ibid, 312.

²⁶ Ümit Kurt, “Cultural Erasure: The Absorption and Forced Conversion of Armenian Women and Children, 1915-1916,” in *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines* 7, no. 7 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.4000/eac.997>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

convert, although some examples do exist. A labor battalion in Aleppo was given the option from the regional governor: convert or march to Der Zor. The battalion converted.²⁹

The way isolation enabled genocide can be seen in the story of Aghavni, a woman from Sivas. Donald and Lorna Miller explain how Aghavni found herself “All alone on the outskirts of Der-Zor, her resources—physical, mental, and spiritual—were spent. Exhausted, she lay down naked on the bank of the Euphrates River, ready to die.”³⁰ Over her seven-month journey from Sivas to Der Zor, she lost both her children and all her relatives. Isolation defined Aghavni’s experience and memory of the *Aghed*. The Millers continue, “By the end of the deportation journey, all her support structures had completely disappeared...By the time she reached Der-Zor, she was completely alone.”³¹ Losing all her connections contributed to Aghavni’s victim-identity, and show how individual experiences revolved around the destruction and deconstruction of the family, whether through separation, death, or captivity.

Existing ideas around gender and identity in the Ottoman Empire at the time also contributed to the absorption of women and children rather than men. Women could be molded and stripped of their previous identity, whereas men could not. Ethnic identity did not leave the male Armenian, or Greek, or Turk.³² Allowing Armenian men to enter Turkish society would be antithetical to the CUP’s goal of Turkifying the Ottoman Empire, as these Armenians would marry Turkish or Muslim women, and pass their ethnicity to their children. Coinciding with the

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Donald E. Miller and Lorna T. Miller, *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 97.

³¹ Ibid, 98.

³² Üngör, “Orphans, Converts, and Prostitutes: Social Consequences of War and Persecution in the Ottoman Empire, 1914–1923,” 182.

notion that women could be “de-Armenianized,” those who were not converted and made wives to Muslims, were kept as slaves, often for the purpose of rendering sexual services. The absorption of women, and ideas surrounding its effectiveness in eliminating “Armenian-ness” shows the gendering of genocide. Women were also seen as symbols of their nation, so stripping them of this symbolism contributed to the genocidal project by violated, dominating, and humiliating the victim community.

The enslavement of Armenian women reflected the CUP’s idea that the Armenian “Other” needed to be destroyed for the empire to survive. Enslavement contributed towards this goal in multiple ways, and offered an alternative to forced conversion. Firstly, it asserted the “cultural superiority” of the Turk over Armenians through physical and mental domination. Without agency, these women and children could not be active members of the Armenian community and had no free will to continue their cultural traditions. To the Ottoman authorities, this meant successful destruction of the Armenian element of the empire. Secondly, dehumanizing and commodifying these individuals stripped them of their identity in a visceral and brutal way which encouraged assimilation and abandonment of their previous ethno-cultural identity.

Absorbed Women and Children and Armenian Reconstruction:

Considering the vast number of Armenian women and children living in Muslim households, one of the major goals of Armenian leaders in the years following the Great War was the recovery of said women and children. Reclaiming these abducted individuals played a role in the national rebuilding efforts of Armenian leaders following the genocide. Armenians felt that their national identity had to be free of all of the Ottoman influences it had acquired over 400 years of imperial rule, as Vahé Tachjian explains:

Thus, immediately after the massacres, the memory and pain, as well as the feelings of hatred towards the Turks that they engendered, became the main cement in the efforts of national reconstruction that began in the Middle East. These two elements were quickly transformed into the main means of ideological homogenisation, by means of which the press of various political currents, educational establishments, publishers and youth organisations tried– and continue to try – to build a new national identity for the refugee Armenians grouped in the Middle East in particular.³³

Hatred and rejection of Turks, and all “they” had done to the Armenians had to be reversed for the nation to rebuild itself. This meant the women and children living throughout Turkey and the Middle East in Muslim households had to be rescued and “re-Armenianized” to secure the future of Armenia.

Rehabilitating absorbed individuals became a national obligation of the Armenian diaspora, especially in the Middle East. Those closest to the deportees living in Muslim households had the means and access to search for and recover women and children living throughout the Levant region.³⁴ Although every member of the Armenian community more or less adopted victimhood as a core tenet of identity, the absorbed members occupied a particular sore-spot in the minds of Armenians. They saw absorbed women as living casualties of the *Aghed*, but casualties that could be reversed if they were recovered. Leaving these women and children in the hands of the Turks meant failing the nation and subsequent generations. It also meant conceding victory to Turkish nationalist goals by increasing the Turkish national population and further decreasing the non-Turkish population.

Children taken during the Armenocide particularly concerned the Armenian leaders in the 1920s. The genocide created thousands of orphans, many of whom were taken to orphanages

³³ Tachjian, “Gender, Nationalism, Exclusion,” 63.

³⁴ Ibid, 66.

throughout the Ottoman Empire or taken by individuals into their homes.³⁵ Orphans were important to the Armenian post-war leaders because they “represented the hopes of the Armenian world...because they personified a certain kind of revenge (*vrezh*).”³⁶ Existence became revenge, and recovering abducted orphans and women even sweeter revenge because they were reclaimed victims of the genocide. Since Armenian identity fixated on erasing any Turkish influence, these children, and recovered women, needed to be purified of any “Turkishness” to be reintegrated into Armenian society.

The orphans of the Armenian Genocide symbolized the national rejuvenation efforts of the Armenians in the early 1920s. They also came to represent the whole of the *Aghed* ; starving, half-naked children begging on the streets of Aleppo and Beirut dotted posters and newspapers of humanitarian and nationalist associations alike.³⁷ They would be the lifeblood of the new Armenian nation, and thus making sure they fell into Armenian hands was crucial. Rescuing and recovering them became a central mission for both Armenian nationalist groups, as well as the League of Nations and Near East Relief. This mission even had a name in Armenian: *Vorpahavak*, literally “gathering of orphans.”³⁸ Many thousands of orphans had been adopted by Muslim individuals or taken to state-run orphanages throughout the Ottoman Empire, where their Armenian identity was supplanted by a Turkish one. Children twelve and under were to be collected and placed in state-run orphanages to be Turkified, thus adding to the Turkish nation-

³⁵ Sarafian, “The Absorption of Armenian Women and Children Into Muslim Households as a Structural Component of the Armenian Genocide,” 213.

³⁶ Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia: The Limits of Belonging in Post-Genocide Turkey*, 29.

³⁷ Üngör, “Orphans, Converts, and Prostitutes,” 175.

³⁸ Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*, 34.

building project while destroying the Armenian nation further.³⁹ After the defeat of the Ottomans in 1918, humanitarian efforts were made by several parties to find and recover Armenian, Greek, and Assyrian orphans from state-orphanages, as well as households they were forcibly taken to.

Orphans then became political fuel for both Turkish national aspirations, and Armenian reclamation and independence efforts. They were desirable for Turkish officials because they were young and disconnected from their families, thus making them easy to assimilate to Turkish culture and society. Assimilating orphans would also decrease the Armenian population further, while bolstering the Turkish population and adding to the Young Turks' genocidal *and* nation-building projects.⁴⁰ Both Armenian and Turkish representatives sought to prove each other's right to self-determination through demographics, so the assimilation and recovery of orphans became vital to this goal. Restoring the family meant restoring the nation, which also put emphasis on recovering Armenian orphans and "purifying" them from their Turkish "corruption."

The idea of moral purity also played into the ideas surrounding Armenian national identity and reconstruction in the decades after the genocide, overlapping with ideas surrounding ethnic/racial sanctity. For the Armenian nation to rebuild itself from the ashes of holocaust, "it is the Armenian woman who has preserved our national existence, clinging to all the sacred relics left to the nation by our forefathers: religion and language, family and morals."⁴¹ By connecting specific values and traits to the Armenian woman, Malezian helped push a new gendered

³⁹ Üngör, "Orphans, Converts, and Prostitutes," 176-7.

⁴⁰ Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*, 32.

⁴¹ Vahan Malezian, 'Hay gine yev ir tere' [The Armenian Woman and her Role], *Arev* (Alexandria), 20 July 1917. Cited in Tachjian, "Gender, Nationalism, Exclusion," 69.

nationalist ideology with women at the center of cultural preservation. Through women's roles as mothers they would transmit the values ascribed to them to the next generation, therefore preserving Armenian culture. The mere act of surviving and preserving cultural traditions served to undo the harm done by the *Aghed*. The morally upright Armenian woman spoke only Armenian, practiced Gregorian Christianity, reigned over the domestic sphere, and rejected all possible Turkish influences "forced" upon Armenians in their 400 years of Ottoman subjugation.

Much of the rhetoric about Armenian national rejuvenation had an irridentist flavor. This cannot be surprising given the racial/ethnic qualifiers ascribed to post-genocide Armenian identity, and the staunch anti-Turkish sentiment espoused by nationalist leaders. Garo Balian, a writer for the newspaper *Hussaper*, wrote in 1918 that "the Armenian who doesn't know how to hate the Turk is a traitor to the nation."⁴² This irridentism created problems for the Armenian women and children in "captivity," and crisis for nationalist leaders and ideologues. Not every woman or child was willing to leave their "captivity."⁴³ In the eyes of Armenian nationalists, these women revoked their Armenian identity and were not just victims of the CUP, but also traitors to their nation.⁴⁴ They were living reminders of the pain of the *Aghed*, and needed to be forgotten and excluded from the Armenian nation.

The rhetoric and attitudes surrounding absorbed women during and after the Armenian Genocide revolved around ethnic purity and national rejuvenation. The absorption of Armenian women and children, as well as the recovery of said individuals emblemized both the Armenian

⁴² Garo Balian. "Mer adelutiune" [Our Hate], *Hussaper* (Cairo), no. 30, 12 June 1918. Cited in Tachjian, "Gender, Nationalism, Exclusion," 68.

⁴³ Tachjian, "Gender, Nationalism, Exclusion," 73.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 74.

struggle for independence and national reconstruction post-genocide, and the Young Turks' desire for ethnic homogeneity in the Ottoman Empire. We also see a removal of agency for these women, as they were often taken forcibly, or given the choice between conversion and assimilation, or death. The ideas around moral and gendered purity in Armenian nationalist circles also led to a contradiction around Armenian women who had been sexually active, forcibly or not, with non-Armenian men. This appears counter-intuitive, considering the ultimate goal of Armenian leaders was to repopulate the Armenian nation, and including as many individuals as possible would help achieve this goal. However, the ideas espoused by Armenian leaders on ethnic and cultural purity got in the way of this, and led to the ostracization and mistreatment of some women who had been absorbed into Turkish households.

Conclusion:

The Armenian Genocide led to temporary shift in the way gender was perceived in the Middle East in the early twentieth century. The emphasis on erasing one culture deemed subversive and dangerous, the alien within, placed increased pressure on women as agents and transmitters of culture. Women also symbolically represented their culture and ethnicity, and thus victimizing them, or absorbing them furthered the genocidal agenda of the CUP government. Not only killing and raping, but abducting Armenian women into non-Armenian communities became a viable route for cultural extermination. Absorption then created many problems for the Armenian National Revival, as absorbed women were recovered from non-Armenian households and placed into orphanages, women's shelters, or married to Armenian men. Some viewed these women as tainted, or those who showed signs of "Turkification" (e.g. forgetting Armenian language, wearing the veil) were considered beyond saving. The Armenian Genocide thus created conditions and circumstances in which women were directly affected by

their gender and sexuality in these dire circumstances. The Armenian Genocide and the National Reconstitution project created new ways of understanding women's roles, place, and levels of inclusions/exclusion in Armenian society.

Chapter II

The Physical Importance of Armenian Women

“Why are you frozen before this bare flesh / As one freezes before all naked things / Forced on you over and over again?”

– Gevorg Emin

This chapter will explore and analyze the centrality of women’s bodies and sexuality to both the Young Turk’s genocidal project, and the Armenian national recovery movement. The role of women and their bodies as a “medium” for nation-building, and the focus on women’s sexual role in (re)populating both the Armenian and Turkish nation, must be given proper attention and analysis to understand women’s experiences in the nation-building that took place after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The use of sexual violence, and sexual exploitation, against Armenian women proliferated greatly from the beginning of the deportations in 1915, and represented a large and integral part of the Ottoman genocidal apparatus. Women became targets of the Ottoman regime *because* of their sexuality and reproductive role, which manifested itself in two ways: women could be “Turkified,” and raped, wherein the offspring would be Turkish, not Armenian, and by raping and sexually violating Armenian women, they would likely be shunned from greater Armenian society, further splintering the Armenian community and contributing to their annihilation.⁴⁵

Women’s bodies and sexuality became a major focus of Armenian national leaders post-genocide, throughout the former Ottoman Empire and in the diaspora. Besides rejoining the community, as was explored in Chapter I, women were of the utmost importance to Armenian

⁴⁵ Holslag, “Exposed Bodies: A Conceptual Approach to Sexual Violence during the Armenian Genocide,” 95-6.

nationalists because they would mother the next generation of Armenians; their role as mothers would be emphasized as “the main marker of the survival of the Armenian nation...”⁴⁶ Statistics and demographics became very important to both the Armenian and Turkish national projects, and this chapter seeks to show how and why women’s biological and reproductive roles played such a large part in both the Armenian Genocide and national rejuvenation following the genocide.

Women as Sexual Targets:

During 1915-1923, Armenian women endured extreme sexual violence and mistreatment at the hands of various perpetrators, mainly the Special Organization (*Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa*), a paramilitary group who carried out the majority of deportations and mass executions during the genocide. Many women who were absorbed into Muslim households were raped before or after their capture, and some even became sex slaves.⁴⁷ Turks, Kurds, and Arabs who carried out the commodification and objectification of women’s bodies as sexual property had two main motivations. Firstly, rape and sexual enslavement of Armenian women gave the individual a feeling of superiority and power. Moreover, it expressed the virility and dominance of the Muslim-Turkish nation over the Armenian minority. As Anthoine Holslag points out, rape and sexual violence had a nationalist underpinning to it:

By selecting the ‘prettiest girls’ (therefore considered the most sexually attractive girls) to be killed in the face of their Christian beliefs, the perpetrators committed an act of aggression not only against the Armenian populace, but also against the Armenian religion.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Sevan Beukian, “Motherhood as Armenianness: Expressions of Femininity in the Making of Armenian National Identity,” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 14, no. 2 (2014): 252, <https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12092>.

⁴⁷ Ekmekcioglu, “A Climate for Abduction, a Climate for Redemption,” 528.

⁴⁸ Holslag, “Exposed Bodies,” 97.

Physical domination meant cultural and national domination of the Turk over the Armenian; the new Anatolia would be for the Turks only, and Armenians, as well as other Christians, would disappear from the Ottoman Empire (Turkish Republic).

The emerging Turkish nationalism of the early 1900s demanded this dehumanizing of the non-Turk, non-Muslim “Other” in order to justify their erasure from the Ottoman Empire. CUP leaders and Turkish nationalists claimed the liquidation of the entire Armenian populace as a security measure, as a result of Armenian collaboration with the advancing Russian military in early 1915. Nazım Bey, a CUP politician and high-ranking Special Organization officer, called for violence against “blameless Armenian women, children and populace.”⁴⁹ Nazım Bey was a rabid Turkish nationalist, who saw the Great War as the perfect cover to achieve the dreams of a solely-Turkish Anatolia. He places importance on the killing of non-combatants, i.e. women and children, as central to the Turkish nation-building project. More importantly though, he says how the entire populace, stripped of its gender identity, must be exterminated. Here Nazım Bey, while calling for the slaughter of man and woman alike, emphasizes the existing gender hierarchy in Ottoman society by labelling women as “blameless.” The blame lies with Armenian men, who occupy the familial and political positions of leadership in the Armenian communities of the empire. Despite the blame lying with Armenian leaders, the whole nation must suffer, and be removed for the Turkish national vision to be realized.

Holslag also points to the blatantly gendered nature of violence, and the general chronology of violence carried out against Armenians by the Ottoman military and gendarmerie. He “refers to the second wave of gendercide; where first men were targeted, now the females

⁴⁹ Mevlanzade Rıfat, “Türkiye inkılâbının içyüzü,” quoted in Fatma Müge Göçek, *Denial of Violence: Ottoman Past, Turkish Present and Collective Violence against the Armenians, 1789-2009* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 202.

became targets.”⁵⁰ One survivor, Arakel Karapet Davtian, succinctly outlines the usual chronology of violence during the Armenian Genocide: “The men above twenty were taken to the army. The Turks attacked and began to massacre. They took away the beautiful girls and women.”⁵¹ Raping and forcing women into sexual servitude furthered the “gendercide” narrative and broke down the social structures of the Armenian community without literally killing the individual members. The family was the center of Armenian life in the Ottoman Empire, thus by attacking and dismantling the family unit, Armenian culture was threatened and weakened. Killing men, and isolating women and children destroyed the Armenian family unit, which viewed the father-patriarch as its leader. Since men were viewed as the leaders of the Armenian family (i.e. leaders of the nation) eliminating them meant stripping the nation of its leaders, weakening the morale and, theoretically, ability to resist of the remaining women and children.

Isolating women and children also made them more susceptible to sexual violence, especially en route to concentration camps in the Syrian desert. Garnik Khachatour Stepanian witnessed this phenomenon near Der Zor, in which he recalls:

They had joined thirty beautiful brides from Zvané to our caravan. One night they took them all away. They had undressed them and had forced them to dance and amuse them. When they brought them back, with disheveled hair and in a disfigured state, they threw themselves, hand in hand, from a height into the Euphrates River.⁵²

Makrouhi Shakian describes a similar, gruesome situation during the razing of her village, Bzhnkert:

[The gendarmes] put the pretty girls on their horses and carried them away. They raised the babies on their bayonets and threw them on the ground, slaughtered, then

⁵⁰ Holslag, “Exposed Bodies,” 97.

⁵¹ “Arakel Karapet Davtian’s Testimony” in *The Armenian Genocide: Testimonies of the Eyewitness Survivors*, ed. Verjiné Svazlian (Yeravan: Gitoutyoun Publishing, 2011), 90-1.

⁵² “Garnik Khachatour Stepanian’s Testimony,” in *The Armenian Genocide*, 226-27.

they put the mothers on their horses and carried them away. My mother hugged her child and ran to her brother's house. The young women, who were taken by the Turks and did not obey them, had their breasts cut and thrown them to the dogs. They killed one of my uncles and threw him into the Shamiram River.⁵³

Both examples recall the extremity of sexualized violence that women experienced during the deportations, and show how women were targeted for their sexuality. The cutting off of breasts, and mutilation of genitals served to “degenderize” the victims, which further dehumanized them.⁵⁴

The deportations were designed not only to kill Armenians, but also to demoralize and isolate them. When analyzing the eyewitness accounts and testimonies, it appears that more women, as adults, experienced the long, torturous marches to the Syrian desert, accompanied by their young children.⁵⁵ This does not minimize the suffering of male Armenians, who were also deported, but as explained earlier, were typically killed before the organization of deportation caravans. The suffering of the deportation routes targeted women, and mothers, specifically. As Donald and Lorna Miller postulate, “but [women] witnessed the starvation of their children, as well as babies dying from dehydration at their breasts, and the pathetic sight of deportees who had fallen from exhaustion and were begging for a cup of water...And it was the mothers who faced agonizing moral choices about which child should live and which should be abandoned.”⁵⁶

The circumstances also forced women to give their children away, or have them taken by force, as Grigoris Balakian witnessed in the summer of 1916: “The young brides and virgins

⁵³ “Makrouhi Mihran Sahakian’s Testimony,” in *The Armenian Genocide*, 149.

⁵⁴ Holslag, “Exposed Bodies,” 89.

⁵⁵ Donald E. Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller, “Women and Children of the Armenian Genocide,” in *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 153.

⁵⁶ Miller and Miller, “Women and Children of the Armenian Genocide,” 153.

were yanked from the embrace of their crying mothers and taken to Turkish harems; even ten year-old girls were subjected to all manner of savage, unbearable Turkish debauchery.”⁵⁷ The translated euphemism of “debauchery” most likely stands for rape and sexual violation, as the actual term “rape” rarely appears in survivor or witness accounts. Ronia Terzian, an Armenian born in Aleppo in 1925, recalls stories told to her of the forced marches to Der-Zor, where “they had seen how their folks had fallen victims of hunger, disease, plunder, rape, and abuse.”⁵⁸ Terzian’s case provides a rare case of Armenian victim actually referring to sexual abuse explicitly as *rape*, rather than using euphemism.

Terzian breaks social taboo by avoiding euphemism, for women who had been sexually violated were often shunned by Armenian society after these crimes took place. This forced exile hurt the Armenian national reconstruction, as it decreased the Armenian demographic, which hurt the chances of obtaining an independent Armenian along the lines of Wilsonian self-determination; for Armenian to gain her independence, she needed every individual she could claim as her own to secure international recognition of her independence.⁵⁹ The perceived need to include every Armenian that was “available,” shows the dualism present in the *Azkayin Veradznunt*: women, despite what happened to them, were of the utmost value to Armenian national leaders, but often at the family level, women who suffered sexual violence during the *Aghed* were cast out and rejected by living relatives or Armenian communities at large: “The social stigma associated with prostitution was virtually impossible to overcome for these women,

⁵⁷ Balakian, *Armenian Golgotha*, 223.

⁵⁸ Ronia Terzian, “Ronia Terzian’s Testimony ‘Memoirs from Der-Zor,’” in *The Armenian Genocide*, 525.

⁵⁹ Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence: 1918*, (California: UCLA Press, 1967), 218.

especially because their clients had been Turkish perpetrators of the genocide.”⁶⁰ Instead of being targeted for their sexuality, women were instead rejected for it, on the basis of “betraying” the nation.

Similarly, Armenian leaders viewed sexual purity as a means to exact revenge, vis-à-vis motherhood and rebuilding the Armenian family unit. This placed pressure on women to be mothers and reduced their duty to producing and rearing children of the “nation.” The ideas around sexuality and sexual purity related to many women’s experiences during the Armenocide, and especially in the aftermath. Many Armenian women who survived the deportation marches and death camps found themselves homeless and destitute, and turned to prostitution in order to survive. These women, who had become stigmatized by their cohabitation with the enemy, felt they could not return to Armenian communities, due to the shame they would feel. Nonetheless, women who had become prostitutes, yet still returned to Armenian society, could wash away their “sin” by marrying an Armenian man.⁶¹ Marriage recovered the sexual sanctity these women had lost during the *Aghed*, and furthered national reconstitution. As Lerna Ekmekçioğlu posits, in marrying widows or orphans “men probably tried to save themselves from feelings of guilt or emasculation.”⁶² It was also a patriotic duty for men and women to marry, for rebuilding the family, and thus rebuilding the Armenian population, would secure an independent Armenia, carved out of the fallen Ottoman Empire.

⁶⁰ Üngör, “Orphans, Converts, and Prostitutes,” 57.

⁶¹ Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*, 37.

⁶² *Ibid*, 38.

Bodies and Borders:

After the defeat of the Ottomans in 1918, the goals of Armenian nationalists shifted from gaining full or nominal autonomy within the Ottoman Empire, to reclaiming and rebuilding the now shattered Armenian community and hopefully gaining their own independent country based on the Wilsonian principle of Self-Determination.⁶³ Many Armenian leaders, such as Boghos Nubar, a representative of Armenians at the Paris Peace Conference, had little confidence in the newly-independent Armenian Republic, which had declared its independence in May 1918.⁶⁴ The small state, which consisted of the formerly Russian-controlled Armenian province, was surrounded by enemies, destitute, and from 1918-19 (the only years it existed before being consumed by the U.S.S.R.) faced political turmoil and a worsening humanitarian crisis. Many Western Armenians, like Boghos, saw the writing on the wall, and that the small republic could not hold out against the Bolsheviks or the Kemalists.⁶⁵ The goal of Nubar and the rest of the National Delegation of Armenians was to secure an independent state of Armenia, carved out of the former Ottoman *vilayets* and Russian Armenia.

Creating this Armenian state, which encompassed what Armenians viewed as “Historic Armenia,” would be done so under the auspices of the emerging international order following the defeat of the Central Powers. Armenian leaders knew that the scattered, impoverished, largely diminished populace could not achieve these goals militarily, as the Kemalists would by 1923, and thus tried to achieve these goals by operating within the international community. For the

⁶³ Ibid, 22.

⁶⁴ Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia: The First Year, 1918-1919* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), 257-8.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 259.

Armenian nationalists, they clung to Wilsonian Self-Determination as a legitimate path towards independence which could be guaranteed by the major powers (namely France and the United States).⁶⁶

The need to prove that a large enough Armenian population existed in eastern Anatolia and the Caucuses placed a new demand on women. Women's bodies were needed more than ever to repopulate the Armenian nation and secure the future independence of all Armenians. Emphasis was placed on women's biological capabilities, and it became a woman's duty to the nation to bear children. Marriage, and subsequent childbirth and motherhood, epitomized revenge against the Turk, and recovery from the near annihilation of the genocide.⁶⁷ Thus Armenian leaders, like Vahan Malezian, called for Armenian women to "do their duty" as mothers:

It will once again be the Armenian woman who will pit herself against ruins and tombs with her two supreme virtues – fertility and purity; she will, as a mother and wife, be the real worker in the task of national reconstruction, giving the fatherland many regiments in place of its martyred generations, and lighting the yertik's fire, so that everywhere smoke-filled hearths may speak of the life of the fatherland. We must ready ourselves, therefore, for that happy day: and, on that day, let no Armenian woman remain outside the fatherland, or be barren. The ruined fatherland needs men. You Armenian women can give it that which the Turk stole, like a wild beast; only you, the fruitful bosom of the fatherland, can, with marvelous fecundity, take our supreme vengeance on our accursed executioners, providing ten generations against them instead of one.⁶⁸

Here the idea of revenge is inseparable from population, and thus revenge can only be exacted through biological means, i.e., women's bodies.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 259.

⁶⁷ Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia: The Limits of Belonging in Post-Genocide Turkey*, 45.

⁶⁸ Malezian, 'Hay gine yev ir tere' [The Armenian Woman and her Role], *Arev* (Alexandria), 20 July 1917. Cited in Tachjian, "Gender, Nationalism, Exclusion," 69.

Many Armenian women captured and absorbed into Muslim households received tattoos from their new masters, often on their faces and hands. The main purpose of this action was to integrate these new women formally, and permanently into Bedouin culture; it marked the shedding of their previous cultural identity and “embracing” their new one. However, a result of these tattoos was the further isolation and alienation of the Armenian women, and making the prospect of reintegration into Armenian society more difficult. Rebecca Jinks describes the story of Zumroot, a young woman taken into Arab custody following the destruction of her village:

Some Arabs found Zumroot and took her to their village, where one of them married her. Four months later, she was sold for five sheep to another Arab, with whom she lived for eight years. At some point, Zumroot’s face was tattooed by her captors—small, simple patterns inked into her forehead, her cheeks, her chin, and underneath her lips—a tribal custom that marked her as a woman and a wife, and also, symbolically and visually, completed her absorption into the Bedouin community.⁶⁹

These tattoos served not only to mark Zumroot as a wife, in this case property, but to set her apart from her previous culture. Tattooing the face or hands of Armenian women resulted in their increased stigmatization. These tattoos shed any Armenian-ness she had, and as Jinks states, finalizes her “becoming” a Bedouin woman.

Another way to look at these tattoos is to view them as “de-Armenianizers.” These marks acted as literal boundaries; they were not simply lines denoting marriage and subordination, but denoted de-Christianization and de-Armenianization. As many relief workers noted while on humanitarian missions, many of the refugees, especially those who spent prolonged periods with Turk, Arab, or Kurd groups, showed signs of

⁶⁹ Jinks, “Marks Hard to Erase,” 86.

Islamization.⁷⁰ The tattoos also suggested the victim's loss of virginity, and entering, coercively, a sexual relation with their non-Armenian captors. The sexual violation of these Bedouin brides, and tattooing them, made their victimization permanent, in the eyes of Armenians and non-Armenians alike. For example, save for Zumroot and a few others, humanitarian groups like the Near East Relief seldom made note of tattooed, rescued women, with some seeing their tattoos as being barriers to re-inclusion, and signs of "Asiatic barbarism." As Rebecca Jinks writes, "Thus, while some relief workers were sympathetic, their characterizations of the tattoos—disfigurement, scars, slavery, shame, stigma—delineated the rescued women as an outcast group."⁷¹

Not all humanitarian workers viewed tattooed women this way, with many being more concerned with these women's willingness and desire to return to the Armenian community. Karen Jeppe, a Danish missionary who operated an orphanage in Aleppo for Armenian refugees, believed that "that the surest basis for national reconstruction was to concentrate on those whose Armenian identity was strongest, and she did not differentiate between those with tattoos, and those without."⁷² The same applies to Armenian leaders and the Armenian population at large. Some saw the tattoos as de-Armenianizing; they prevented *true* reintegration into Armenian society because they had been defiled and disfigured by their Arab captors. Their sexual violation produced one layer of stigmatization and ostracization, and the tattoos added a deeper layer; one that could not

⁷⁰ Keith David Watenpugh, "The League of Nations Rescue of Trafficked Women and Children and the Paradox of Modern Humanitarianism, 1920–1936," in *Bread from Stones* (University of California Press, 2015), 134, <https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520279308.003.0005>.

⁷¹ Jinks, "Marks Hard to Erase," 106.

⁷² *Ibid*, 91.

be overlooked or hidden in the same way rape could. The tattoos permanence would be a constant reminder of the shame of the *Aghed*, and the moral degradation of the Armenian nation.⁷³ Others celebrated them, viewing them as “battle scars,” and these women who had been marked property of non-Armenians rejoining their mother culture as revenge.⁷⁴ In reality, these tattoos were quite faint, and western fundraising campaigns would often fill in the tattoos with dark ink for photography shoots, like *Orient im Bild*’s coverage of Zumroot.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, tattooed survivors experienced different levels of stigmatization, and their experiences show the varied responses of the Armenian community and humanitarian organizations towards recovered women.

Conclusion:

Women’s experiences during and after the Armenian Genocide show the social complexities presented in dealing with extreme sexual violence and trauma. One can observe the different ways in which individuals and communities viewed sexual violence, as well as sexuality in regard to nationhood. Women’s sexualities were a source of victimhood and stigmatization, *and*, vengeance and redemption. Women’s fullest participation in the *Azkayin Veradznunt* demanded they give their bodies to the nation, and produce the next generation of Armenians that would ensure their independence and prevent any future existential threats. In the case of post-Genocide Armenian nationalist discourse, it would be men who fought for the nation, but women who guaranteed it, as well as safeguarded the future of the nation through their traditionalist roles as mothers.

⁷³ Tachjian, “Gender, Nationalism, Exclusion,” 67.

⁷⁴ Jinks, “Marks Hard to Erase,” 105.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 89.

The *Azkayin Veradznunt* generated new understandings of the Armenian woman's sexuality in regards to the nation; she was the raped, abused, prisoner of the Turk, while simultaneously hailed as the pure virgin, *Mayr Hayastan* (Mother Armenia) who would birth and rebuild the nation from the destruction of the *Aghed*.

Chapter III

Armenian Women's Organizations and the Genocide

“Gloomy premonitions dazed me with their somber dance and my soul, suspended in morbid / inspiration, was thrust into the center of an illusionary world.”

- Zabel Yesayan

The final chapter will analyze the relationships between Armenian women and conceptualizations of the state. Some attention will be given to the short-lived First Armenian Republic (1918-1920) which became the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (A.S.S.R.) after Sovietization in 1920. It will also look at women's perceived roles in the state, or in the forming of a state and the *Azkayin Veradznunt*: namely, how did women contribute to the quest for statehood, and how did Armenian nationalism change perspectives on women and women's roles in Armenian society? Aside from women's roles and participation in the state and statecraft, women played important parts in organizations associated with the reconstruction effort. They started organizations like the Armenian Women's Association, published journals like *Hay Gin*, and managed and ran humanitarian projects like refugee stations, orphanages, and schools.⁷⁶ Women intrinsically involved themselves in the national movement as agents, and acted in an attempt to realize their nationalist dreams.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries marked the high point of the Armenian feminist movement. Ironically, the peak of the Armenian feminist movement took place in the years following the *Aghed*, after the worst catastrophe Armenians had ever experienced. The movement centered around cosmopolitan cities like Constantinople (Istanbul), Tiflis, and

⁷⁶ Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*, 16.

Yerevan (Erevan), where the population was much more literate than the rural villages.⁷⁷ The publications, the most important being *Hay Gin*, expressed the views held by Armenian feminists, especially that of the “New Woman” who would participate in the *Azkayin Veradznunt* not just as mothers and caretakers, but as agents of real political and social change. Women would be intimately involved in national rejuvenation, and as was discussed earlier, the *Azkayin Veradznunt* could not be achieved without women’s cooperation and participation. The Armenian Press, and feminist journals like *Hay Gin* demonstrate the active roles women had in the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide and recollection and reconstitution of Armenian communities throughout the Middle East.

The State of Armenian Statehood:

Before delving further into women’s specific contributions, perspectives, and involvement in the Armenian national reconstruction project, some attention must be given to the political situation of Armenia and Armenians towards the end of the Great War and its aftermath. At the outbreak of war in 1914 there was no independent Armenian state, with the land of Armenia divided between the Ottomans in the West, and the Russians in the East. The provinces of Erevan and Nakhichevan composed Russian Armenia, and the *vilayets* (provinces) of Van, Bitlis, Erzerum, Diyarbakir, Sivas, and Mamuret-ul-Aziz (*Kharput* in Armenian) made up the Armenian provinces of the Ottoman Empire.⁷⁸ There existed a sizeable Armenian population in Cilicia, on the southern coast of Anatolia, in the Adana *vilayet*.⁷⁹ As the Russian Empire

⁷⁷ Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia: From Versailles to London, 1919-1920* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 311.

⁷⁸ Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 24-5.

⁷⁹ Bedross Der Matossian, “Contending Trends in the Armenian Historiography of the Late Ottoman Empire: Inclusion vs. Exclusion,” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 53 (2015): 175, <https://doi.org/10.1017/npt.2015.33>.

collapsed in 1917, the Armenian provinces sought to break away from Russian hegemony. They briefly entered into the Transcaucasian Commissariat, which became the Transcaucasian Siem, then the Transcaucasian Federative Republic, and eventually declared their independence on May 28, 1918.⁸⁰

Nearly six months after Russian Armenia declared independence, the Ottoman Empire officially surrendered to the Allied Powers on October 30, 1918, signing the Armistice of Mudros.⁸¹ After the conclusion of all hostilities, the fledgling republic sent a delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, that argued for a unified Armenian state consisting of the newly independent Republic of Armenia and the Ottoman *vilayets*. At the peace conference, the Allies and Ottoman Empire signed the Treaty of Sèvres on August 10, 1920, which gave Armenia the *vilayets* it desired.⁸² However, these promises could not be fulfilled, as the Turkish War of Independence ended in 1922, with Atatürk's Nationalists' defeating the allied forces of France, Britain, Greece, and Armenia. The subsequent Treaty of Lausanne nullified Sèvres and ensured that the Anatolian territories of the Ottoman Empire would remain part of the infant Turkish Republic. Armenia had been absorbed into the Soviet Union in 1920, and with the signing of Lausanne in 1923, the hopes of an independent Armenian state were all but crushed.⁸³ Despite the loss of Armenian statehood, the *Azkayin Veradznunt* still continued on a social and cultural level. Armenians negotiated their positions and status in the Soviet Union and Republic of Turkey, and still interacted with the state.

⁸⁰ Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia: The First Year, 1918-1919*, 33.

⁸¹ Ibid, 56.

⁸² Akçam, *From Empire to Republic*, 180.

⁸³ Suny, *Armenia in the Twentieth Century*, 32.

The New Woman and the Old Woman:

In the chaotic aftermath of the Ottoman Empire's dissolution, with the question of Armenian statehood on the minds of the elite and plebiscite alike, Armenian leaders, spread throughout the Middle East and beyond, discussed the ways in which the *Azkayin Veradznunt* would best be achieved. One dimension of this question would be the role of men and women in the *Azkayin Veradznunt* regarding their genders; how would men serve Armenia as *men*, and how would women serve *as* women? Both genders would need to perform specific duties to their fatherland in order for it to prosper, or simply survive. The First Republic took in nearly 300,000 refugees from 1918-20, the vast majority being women and children survivors of the deportation marches.⁸⁴ The refugee crisis more women into humanitarian work, chiefly as nurses or assistants at orphanages. These working women emblemized the "New Armenian Woman:" employed, politically-involved, educated, and operating outside the domestic sphere. They were the foil to the traditional, or "Old," Armenian woman, who was a matriarch, conservative, child-bearer *and* rearer, and remained in the private, domestic sphere.

Debate emerged amongst Armenian leaders and journalists as to which Armenian woman, new or old, offered the best chances for national revival and possible statehood. One Mrs. Hripsime wrote in *Hay Gin* that the old iteration of Armenian women would be better for generating the "'numerical superiority of the race.'"⁸⁵ The family would be the bedrock on which Greater Armenia would be (re)constructed, and the traditional, conservative, matriarchal Armenian woman would secure and ensure the survival of the family unit. She would also transmit and perpetuate traditional Armenian culture to her offspring, and the idea of keeping the

⁸⁴ Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia: From Versailles to London, 1919-1920*, 7.

⁸⁵ *Hay Gin* 2, no.19 (August 1, 1921), quoted in Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*, 53.

culture alive became ever more important after Sovietization in 1920. Marianne Hirsch writes, “Familial structures of mediation and representation facilitate the affiliative acts of the postgeneration. The idiom of family can become an accessible lingua franca easing identification and projection across distance and difference.”⁸⁶ Being able to ease the distance and difference became increasingly important as subsequent generations of diaspora Armenians assimilated more and more to their adopted homes. As Khachig Tölölyan summarizes, “The path of homeland-diaspora interaction has been rocky.”⁸⁷ The “Old Woman” was familiar, familial, and a symbol of purity and stability that would help correct the wrongs experienced by Armenians during the genocide.

Despite the positive views many Armenians held regarding the old, traditional image of the Armenian woman, more actually believed it would be the “New Woman” who would have the greater impact and importance to the Armenian National Rejuvenation.⁸⁸ The New Woman’s appreciation for and knowledge of science, alongside her increased participation in the public sphere would not threaten the *Azkayin Veradznunt*, but complement it.⁸⁹ Vartuhi Kalantar, a contributor to *Hay Gin*, argued that National Reconstruction would fuse the old and new Armenian women together, and launch Armenian women, and the Armenian nation, into the future.⁹⁰ Newspapers and advertisements urged women to become nurses “so that they would educate refugee women in modern, scientific methods of child care and offer lessons in hygiene,

⁸⁶ Marianne Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory,” *Poetics Today* 29, no. 1 (2008): 115, <https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-2007-019>.

⁸⁷ Khachig Tölölyan, “Stateless Power and the Political Agency of Diasporas: An Armenian Case Study,” in *Opportunity Structures in Diaspora Relations*, ed. Gloria Toticagüena (Nevada: Center for Basque Studies, 2007).

⁸⁸ Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*, 53.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 53.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 54.

and would be ready to serve as medical personnel in the soon-to-be-established Greater Armenia.”⁹¹ These New Women would not forget their “duty” to the Mother Fatherland to bear children for the future, and assume the patriotic role of motherhood, but would do so while participating in the public/national sphere. The New Armenian woman represented a modern alternative, where the Old Woman had failed; the old Armenia had nearly been exterminated, and if Greater Armenia would be realized, it would be on the backs of the New Woman.

The sheer magnitude of the destruction caused by the Armenocide helped facilitate the attitudes surrounding the role women would play in helping establish Greater Armenia. The debate surrounding the Armenian feminist movement could not be isolated from the societal impact of the *Aghed*. As previously mentioned, one of the avenues through which Armenians believed the *Azkayin Veradznunt* could be achieved was through rebuilding the family unit. The genocide not only physically dismantled and weakened the family, via separation, isolation, and murder, but through physical disintegration Armenian familial relations were emotionally and mentally strained. Mariam Mirzayan, a descendant of Armenian refugees from Tomarza, recalls the exile of her father’s family: ““These girls will also die. The French Sisters’ Monastery is somewhere here. Let’s leave them there. Let them survive.’ . . . Years later my father and my uncle went back to their town, Tomarza, but they always regretted that they hadn’t taken the two girls from the French monastery.”⁹² Even though the girls likely survived the genocide, Mirzayan’s relatives felt regret at the diminishing of their family and their perceived inability to regain these lost, yet still living, members. In relation to this dilemma not unique to the Mirzayan family, both the “New” and “Old” woman could right the wrongs caused by the genocide. Both offered, albeit

⁹¹ Ibid, 47.

⁹² Mariam Mirzayan, “Mariam Mirzayan’s Testimony” in *The Armenian Genocide*, 516-17.

through different means, a way to secure and rebuild the Armenian family, and by proxy, the Armenian nation.

Organized Groups Respond to the Aghed:

The National Revival involved humanitarian and political groups, both international and domestic, that operated at different levels and capacities during the Armenocide and the decade after. The various Armenian political parties lobbied foreign powers, namely the British, French, and Americans, in the hopes of receiving aid for, and in establishing Greater Armenia.⁹³ The government of the First Republic was heavily dominated by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (*Dashnaktsutyun*), with every Prime Minister coming from the ARF, and the ARF won 72 out of 80 seats in the 1919 parliamentary elections.⁹⁴ Three of those *Dashnaks* elected were women: Perchuhi Partizpanyan-Barseghyan, Varvara Sahakyan, and Katarine Zalyan-Manukyan. The First Republic also had the first woman ambassador in the modern era, Diana Agbar, who was ambassador to Japan.⁹⁵ Women became more politically active, especially in the short-lived First Republic, following the genocide.

Women became more politically active as a result of the Armenocide, and the genocide brought Armenian women out of the domestic sphere and into the public sphere. The First Republic gave universal suffrage to all Armenians, including Western Armenian refugees residing in cities and refugee camps, and thus women could take direct political action via the ballot.⁹⁶ However, given the First Republic's brief tenure as Armenian de-facto state, the ballot

⁹³ Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia: The First Year, 1918-1919*, 293.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 473.

⁹⁵ “Առաջին Հանրապետության Կին Պատգամավորները.”

⁹⁶ Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia: The First Year, 1918-1919*, 471.

could not facilitate National Reconstruction in the most efficient manner. That fell to groups and organizations operating outside of official government. This does not discredit the good, albeit short, work accomplished by women like Varvara Sahakyan and Diana Agbar, who lobbied on behalf of the Armenian national cause and helped establish schools and promote educational reform, but rather shows that the chaotic aftermath of the Armenian Genocide meant that governmental political bodies could not be the sole source of national mobilization.⁹⁷

Groups like the Armenian Red Cross, Armenian Women's Association (AWA), Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), or Armenian Women's Patriotic Association (AWPA) served as outlets for women to engage in the public, and therefore national, sphere, in a different manner than before the genocide. Journals like *Hay Gin* and *Artemis* became ever more important as outlets for women to reach the educated, elite readers who would either sympathize with women's struggles, or give to benevolent associations.⁹⁸ As Victoria Rowe posits:

The authors recognized that in order for the Armenian woman to participate in the public sphere and alter existing patterns in marital relations a new concept of Armenian femininity had to be articulated: one in which Armenian women were portrayed as equals to Armenian men and one in which Armenian women's participation in national affairs and the economic and political spheres was not viewed as unnatural but as legitimate.⁹⁹

The societal and cultural upheaval caused by the Armenocide lent credence to Armenian feminism being legitimate and viable in the future of Armenia. Furthermore, as *Hay Gin*'s first issue laid out in grandiose terms: “Rather, the rebirth of our sex will take us to the summit of

⁹⁷ “The Women MPs of the First Republic of Armenia | Hayern Aysor,” June 29, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190629193718/http://hayernaysor.am/en/archives/110684>.

⁹⁸ Victoria Rowe, “The ‘New Armenian Woman’: Armenian Women’s Writing in the Ottoman Empire, 1880–1915” (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2000), <https://search.proquest.com/docview/304657881?pq-origsite=primo>, 159.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 161.

our nation and to the summit of our fatherland.”¹⁰⁰ Armenian womanhood was inherently patriotic, and women’s work could no longer be confined to the home if the Armenian nation were to survive. Hayaganush Mark, the founder of *Hay Gin* and figurehead of the Armenian Feminist movement, emphasized the immense and *unique* suffering women endured during the *Aghed* and how this showed not only the resilience of Armenian women, but how they would persevere in the future for a Greater Armenia.¹⁰¹

The impact of the *Aghed* on all facets of Armenian life encouraged women to participate in the National Rejuvenation in any way they could, and for many women this meant membership in the various groups previously mentioned. The AWA published in 1919:

taking into consideration the imperative demands of the present day, the *immediate* aim of our association is to defend the Armenian Cause by the voice of the Armenian woman and together with the National Assembly, to assist in the reconstruction of the Mother Fatherland.¹⁰²

The AWA conflated women’s struggles for equality and modernity with the national struggle for existence and reconstruction and made deliberate reference to women’s cooperation with the National Assembly that the Armenian Constitution of 1878 established and served as the political body through which the Armenian *millet* managed internal affairs until the fall of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰³ For Armenian women, the reconstruction of the *Mayr Hayrenik* demanded they break from traditional political inactivity, and instead do everything in their power as women, and as Armenian individuals, to assist in it’s ultimate mission of a united east-west

¹⁰⁰ Hayaganush Mark, “Khmpakragan: Amusnaludzumnere,” *Hay Gin* 2, no. 12 (April 16, 1921), quoted in Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*, 66.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 66.

¹⁰² “Dzrakir Nakhakidz Hay Ganats Engeragtsutyanyan,” *Hay Gin* 1, no. 1 (November 1, 1919), quoted in Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*, 56.

¹⁰³ Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*, 26-29.

Armenia. This meant fundraising drives in the diaspora, both of which were carried out by the AWA and AWPA.¹⁰⁴ In *Hay Gin*, Hayganush Mark encouraged Armenian women trade in their gold jewelry to fund the Armenian nationalist effort, as did other journals and newspapers, like *Zhoghovurti Tsayne* (Voice of the People).¹⁰⁵ Armenian women's struggles were conflated with the nation's struggles, and thus feminist discourse became centered on the nation and how women could advance their own standing within the scope of national rebuilding.

Women and women's associations attained newfound importance and attention following the Sovietization of the Republic of Armenia, and after the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne, effectively ending any hope for the Wilsonian Armenia outlined in the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres. National rebuilding could still hope for an independent Armenia, but the more immediate concern, and achievable goal, was the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the various Armenian communities in Turkey, the U.S.S.R, and abroad. Following Eastern Armenia's conquest by the Red Army, poet Hovannes Tumanian wrote of Armenian women's "capacity to safeguard the nation's values is more effective than military power."¹⁰⁶ Humanitarian and financial aid, coupled with the continuation of the *Vorpahavak* and tying motherhood to patriotism, served as the Armenian woman's way to undo the destruction caused by the genocide after the political upheaval following the end of World War I. Armenian women worked tirelessly with the League of Nations' Commission for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East and the American-led NER to reclaim kidnapped women from Muslim households. As the political

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 57.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 57.

¹⁰⁶ "Ganats Ashkharhen: Tumanian," *Hay Gin* 2, no. 2 (November 16, 1921), quoted in Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*, 59.

aspirations of Armenia became less achievable, women turned to self-administered organizations, as well as multi-national nongovernmental organizations that operated in the area, using these methods to help recover the Armenian nation and improve women's conditions and standing in Armenian society at large.

Conclusion:

Armenian female political participation and agency changed significantly following the Armenian Genocide. It created conditions in which women's greater participation in the public and political spheres was encouraged and expressed in various ways. Journals like *Hay Gin* gave women a voice to argue for greater female emancipation in relation to the national reconstruction and struggle of all Armenians. Groups like the AWA and AGBU fund-raised and lobbied for the national cause in Constantinople and beyond, and the direness of the Armenian situation in the late 1910s and early 1920s gave these groups more power and autonomy within the Armenian community. The aftermath of the Armenocide also placed political and patriotic duty on being a mother, and bearing and educating children for the future of Greater Armenia. The Armenocide also spawned debate on whether Armenian women would best serve the National Reconstruction project as traditional, matriarchal, domestic figures, or as Victoria Rowe's "New Woman."¹⁰⁷ Armenian women experienced a radical change in political position and societal status during the upheaval that followed the end of World War I, and the National Reconstruction contrarily called for women to serve their nation in the traditional, domestic sense, and in the modern, public, political sense.

¹⁰⁷ Rowe, "The 'New Armenian Woman,'" 160.

Conclusion

The Armenian Genocide destroyed, deconstructed, and thus led to the reconstruction of every aspect of Armenian society. Armenian society and culture reorientated itself around the trauma and memory of 1915-23, and Armenian history is often portrayed in a *pre-* and *post-* genocide framework.¹⁰⁸ This thesis looked at three ways the Armenian Genocide impacted Armenian gender identity relations: absorption, biological emphasis, and socio-political mobility and access. The different gendered experiences of the Armenocide created vastly different experiences for male and female victims, and also different responses from these different victims. Each of the aforementioned areas changed and affected Armenian women and their relation to their nation and the various states they found themselves in after 1915. The Armenian Genocide, as Razmik Panossian points on in “When is a Nation?” “The Genocide was the great ‘equaliser’ of identity. Everyone became a victim or was affected by it.”¹⁰⁹ Although this is true, and certainly manifests itself in the collective memory of the *Aghed*, when examined through a gendered lens, the ways in which men and women interacted with and were affected by the Armenocide shows a more nuanced history.

This thesis posits that the Armenian Genocide not only caused the deaths of 1-1.5 million Armenians, but it radically reorganized Armenian society, which cannot be understood or analyzed without regard to gender and how heavily gendered the Armenocide was. This especially reigns true when looking at the years immediately following the genocide, and the different rhetoric surrounding Armenia’s future and what role women would play in it. As was

¹⁰⁸ Razmik Panossian, “The Past as Nation: Three Dimensions of Armenian Identity,” *Geopolitics* 7, no. 2 (2002): 137, <https://doi.org/10.1080/714000931>.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 136.

shown, women would play an extremely important and central role in the National Reconstruction project, and Armenia's future would be a rejection of the Young Turk's genocidal policy; women would be the keystone in the arch of Armenian nationalist rhetoric and the implementation of the *Azkayin Veradznunt*. The need to recover, heal, and overcome the trauma and shame of the Armenian Genocide as an entire community thus placed specific onus on Armenian women. They would be the mothers of the next generation, i.e. preserving Armenia and refusing to die. Women's journals like *Hay Gin* showed that women had agency in the immediate post-genocide, and that women's interests lay with national interests. Women's roles as mothers and educators became patriotic, as well as being nurses and educating themselves. The images of the "New" and "Old" Armenian woman as *both* being viable options to facilitate the Armenian recovery and secure Greater Armenia's future show the fluidity and agency women exercised in this period and under the circumstances of genocidal rehabilitation.

The Armenian Genocide changed the way in which Armenian society thought of, and viewed gender identity. Gender became omnipresent and more important in the formation of the *Azkayin Veradznunt*, in that men would be the founders and the soldiers of Greater Armenia, while women would be the mothers and caretakers of Armenia, in both their traditional and modern iterations.¹¹⁰ The Armenian Genocide created a perpetual victimhood and fear-of-annihilation that, in the eyes of Armenian leadership, could only be completely defeated by Armenian mothers. Therefore, the Armenocide, and its immediate aftermath, cannot be thought of without considering the gendered aspects, and the massive, radical change it brought to Armenian society.

¹¹⁰ Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*, 21.

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