Belongings: People and Possessions in the Armenian Repatriations 1945-49

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Jo Laycock

Introduction

On July 9th 1947 the *Pobeda* docked in Batumi carrying 2509 items of hand baggage and 2548 items of hold baggage. It was followed a few weeks later by the *Chukotka*, which carried another 2700 items of hand baggage and a further 3408 items of hold baggage.[1] The owners of this cargo were diaspora Armenians from communities in Greece and the Middle East who had responded to a Soviet invitation to repatriate to their 'homeland', Soviet Armenia. By the time the scheme came to an abrupt end in 1949 almost 90,000 Armenians had gathered up their belongings and embarked on similar voyages toward the Republic. [2]

The arrival of the Pobeda and the Chukotka in the USSR occurred against a backdrop of post-war population movement on a vast scale as prisoners of war, evacuees, forced laborers, conscript soldiers and many others sought ways and means to go home.[3] Yet the Armenian repatriations were distinct from this context of movement in important ways. These Armenians had not been displaced during the Second World War, they were the families of Armenians who had been displaced from the Ottoman Empire during the First World War and Armenian Genocide. Few had previously set foot in Soviet Armenia. Nonetheless, this process was presented by the Soviet authorities, and accepted by much of the diaspora, as 'homecoming' on an unprecedented scale.[4]

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1 Armenian National Archive (Hayastani Azgayin Arkhivi, HAA) f.362, op.2, d.34,1. 1, l.14, Acts and agreements of the Batumi eception centre and ustoms on the arrival of repatriates and their cargo, July 1947.

2 Gorlizki and Khlevniuk suggest that Stalin and the Ministry of State Security's interpretation of a fire on the *Pobeda,* bringing Armenian repatriates from the USA to Batumi, as sabotage was the decisive factor in ending the repatriation program. Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk*, Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945 -1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 69.

3 Jaques Vernant reported that by the end of 1945 the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) had already assisted around six million people to return home. Vernant, *The Refugee in the Post-War World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953).

4 I address the image of Soviet Armenia as 'homeland' in Jo Laycock, 'Armenian Homelands and Homecomings 1945-1949: The Repatriation of Diaspora Armenians to the Soviet Union,' *Cultural and Social History*, 9, 1 (2012): 103-123. The term 'nerkaght' – in-migration - is also used to describe this process.

Armenian repatriates were drawn from a wide range of backgrounds.[5] Ninety percent of those who registered to repatriate in Syria and Lebanon in 1946 were said to be 'needy', unable to repatriate without financial support.[6] The better off, in contrast, were able plan and provision carefully, and the contents of their cases reflected their hopes, fears and expectations. In France, Jean Der Sarkissian watched as his family's savings disappeared into wooden crates. They packed sixteen cases, mostly with practical items, such as his mother's sewing machine and his bicycle. That they also packed 'emergency' provisions such as a twenty-five liter carton of sugar, 'just in case' is suggestive of underlying uncertainties regarding their future.[7]

Life in the Soviet homeland did not go smoothly for the Der Sarkissian family, nor for thousands of others. Far from the bountiful land promised in propaganda, repatriates were faced with poor housing, shortages, poverty and isolation. They were also subject to the political repressions of the late-Stalin period, repatriates were also among the 12,000 Armenians targeted in deportations in the South Caucasus during operation *Volna* in 1949.[8] Given these circumstances, many chose to leave as soon as the Soviet authorities permitted, following the death of Stalin.[9] In the short

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[5] The Soviet Armenian repatriation committee documented that by 20th January 1948 86,364 repatriates had arrived. Of the 86,364 that arrived by 1948: 32,238 from Syria and Lebanon, 4383 from Bulgaria, 20,597 from Iran, 1783 from Romania, 18,215 from Greece, 5260 from France, 1669 from Egypt, 1250 from Palestine, 856 from Iraq, 151 from the USA, 16 from China. Armenian National Archive (HAA) f.362 (Committee for the Reception and Settlement of Armenians from Abroad) op.2, d.25, l. 7. In 1948 1046 arrived from Romania, 2023 from Egypt and 23 from China. In 1949 162 arrived from the USA. Hamlet Sargasyan, 'Arevmtahayeri gaghta arevelyan hayastan 1915 t. heto', in *Hayots Tseghaspanutyun Pascharner yev Daser* (Yerevan, 1995), 65.

[6] HAA f.362, op.2, d.4, l.18, Letter from Syria-Lebanon committee to Yerevan committee 16 February 1946. It was also reported that there were a number of 'very rich' Armenians who requested guidance on transferring large sums of money.

[7] Jean and Lucie Der Sarkissian, *Les pommes rouges de l'Arménie* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), 31.

[8] These Armenians were targeted as 'Dashnaks' or nationalists. The deportations demonstrated that securing a Soviet society overrode any concessions to Armenian national interests Mamoulia, 'Les Premières Fissures de l'URSS d'après guerre,' 601. The Armenians were amongst almost 58,000 people deported from the Black Sea Coast. Pavel Polian, *Against Their Will:The History and Geography of Forced Migrations in the USSR* (Budapest: CEU Press, 1994),169, 333. The 'Dashnak' deportees may have been vulnerable not only because of their supposed nationalist aspirations but also because of their ties with the 'West'. On deportations in the South Caucasus see N. F. Bougai, *Kavkaz: narody v eshelonakh: 20-60e gody* (Moscow: Insan, 1998) esp. p.211-222. See also Armine Kondakchian 'hayrenadardzneri brnachnshuner stalinian jam HAAkashrzanum' [The repression of repatriates during the Stalinist period] in The 1948 Repatriation and its Lessons conference proceedings available on, Armenian Ministry of Diaspora Website http://www.mindiaspora.am/en/Conferences/776. Deportation experiences are beyond the scope of this article but the stories of some deported families are provided in the personal testimonies in the 'Museum of Repatriation' site e.g., http://www.hayrenadardz.org/en/lifestory/harowt-avagyan (Accessed 12/19/2016).

[9] In later decades the process accelerated '…from the mid-70s to the second half of the eighties, most of the Armenians who emigrated from Soviet Armenia were those who chose to return to Soviet Armenia and their descendants.' Stephen H. Astourian, 'Armenian Demography, the Homeland and the Diaspora:

term, however, they had little choice but to negotiate the Soviet system. For some, it was possible to find a sense of belonging. According to Susan Pattie, 'within a generation those who have stayed say they are firmly rooted and speak of their dedication to Armenia. They talk of continuing the contribution of their parents to the society.'[10]

Among the contemporary Armenian diaspora the repatriations are widely viewed as a failure, and often as the intentional victimization of the Armenian population by the Soviet regime. In 2008, in the interest of improving relations, the newly established Armenian Ministry of diaspora issued an apology for the shortcomings of the repatriation campaigns.[11] That repatriation did not live up to expectations is beyond doubt. In this article however I aim to shift the focus from the narrative of Soviet betrayal and Armenian victimhood to provide a more nuanced account of repatriation at the level of both state practice and social experience.

I draw upon the records of the Soviet Armenian committee charged with the organization of repatriation along with a series of memoirs written by repatriates.[12] Most of these memoirs were written by repatriates who eventually left Soviet Armenia and reflect their authors critical stance toward the the Soviet Union in general and repatriation in particular.[13] The traces of a greater diversity of repatriate experiences are evident in the archive of Soviet Armenian committee charged with the organization of repatriation. Read together, although they cannot encompass the full range of repatriate experiences, these sources powerfully illustrate the disjuncture between the ideal and reality of repatriation

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Trends and Consequences' in *Arméniens et Grecs en Diaspora: Approches Comparatives: Actes du Colloque Européen et International Organise a L'école Française d'Athènes,* ed. M. Bruneau et al., (Athens, 2007), 206.

10 Susan Pattie, 'From the Centers to the Periphery: Repatriation to the Armenian Homeland in the Twentieth Century' in *Homecomings: Unsettling Paths of Return,* ed. Anders Stefanson and Fran Markowitz (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004), 118.

[11] The apology was issued during a conference on repatriation in Armenia in December 2008. See: http://www.mindiaspora. am/en/Conferences/776 (accessed February 23, 2016).

[12] Albert Andonian, *A chacun son destin* (Paris: Maisons des Ecrivains, 2000) Armand Maloumian, *Les fils du goulag* (Paris: Presses de la Cite, 1976),Rebecca Batrikian, *Jeff et Rebecca* (Paris: Theles, 2005), Lazare Indjeyan 'Les Annees Volées' in *Cahiers d'Histoire Sociale* 16 (2000). Sona Meghreblian, *An Armenian Odyssey* (London: Gomidas, 2012), Hagop Touryantz, *Search for a Homeland* (New York, 1987) and Tom Mooradian, *The Repatriate: Love Basketball and the KGB* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008). Other projects to document the experience of repatriation include Hazel Antramian Hofman, http://hazelantaramhof-com.webs.com/about (accessed 12/19/2016)

[13] I address the implications of these memoirs as historical sources in depth in Jo Laycock, 'Soviet or Survivor Stories: Repatriate Narratives in Armenian Histories, Memories and Identities' *History and Memory* 28, 2 (2016): 123-151

Taking the word 'belongings', and its multiple meanings as a starting point, the first part of this article re-frames the Armenian repatriations within the broader historical contexts of post-war population movement.[14] It examines how and why the post-war Soviet Union could successfully articulate the claim that diaspora Armenians 'belonged' within its borders, considering how the nature of nationalities policy in Armenia and the economic imperatives of the post-war period came together to shape the campaign.

The second part addresses belongings of a different nature – the material possessions that the repatriates took with them. As David Parkin has explained, the study of refugee belongings offers vital insights into the experience and aftermaths of displacement, not least because 'it is through the skills and objects that one may take that one's future may be given shape, at least from the perspective of the departee.'[15] Although they were not forced to flee, the same may be said of the repatriate belongings. Focusing on the of these items, illuminates a further dimension of belonging, the integration of repatriates into Soviet Armenian society, offering insights into not only the hardships the repatriates endured but also the strategies they were able to deploy in order to negotiate an unfamiliar world.

The Post-War World: Resources and Reconstructions and Repatriations

Despite the emergence of forms of international co-operation, the management the of displacement in post-war Europe proved to be a protracted problem.[16] The settlement of scores and the re-drawing of national borders meanwhile generated

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[14] Existing accounts of repatriation tend to address it from a national perspective. Claire Mouradian, 'L'Immigration des Arméniens de la diaspora vers la RSS d'Arménie 1946-62' *Cahiers du monde russe* 20, 1 (1979): 79-110. Hovik Meliksetyan, *Hayrenik-Spiurk Arnchutiunnere yev Hayrenadardzutiune* (Erevan, Erevan State University, 1985) and Armenuhi Stepanyan XX *Dari Hayrenadardzutyun Hayots Inqnutyan Hamakargum* (Erevan: Giutyun, 2010) Lehman's 'A Different Kind of Brothers' has a different focus, drawing on the case of the Armenians to illuminate wider questions regarding national identities and social inclusion in the post-war Soviet Union.

[15] D. Parkin, 'Mementos as Transitional Objects in Human Displacement,' *Journal of Material Culture* 4, 3 (1999): 303-320, 305.

[16] At the end of the war there were around eight million civilians in Germany who qualified as displaced persons under UNRRA directives. Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 5. UNRRA was created to facilitated inter-allied cooperation in the management of displacement. On displacement in post-war Europe: Jessica Reinisch and Elizabeth White (eds.), *The Disentanglement of Populations: Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Post-War Europe 1944-49* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), Anna Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: DPs in Postwar Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), Ben Shephard, *The Long Road Home: The Aftermath of the Second World War* (London: The Bodley Head, 2010), Mark Wyman, *DPs: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

new, and often violent, forms of displacement and between nine and twelve million ethnic Germans were expelled from Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary.[17] Organized population transfers which blurred the boundaries between voluntary and coerced migration displaced many more, including around 1.3 million in the borderlands of Poland and Ukraine.[18]

Mark Mazower has suggested that the main reason for these wartime and postwar population transfers was 'the inter-war era's unsatisfactory experience with minorities in the new nation states; people were being moved in order to consolidate political boundaries.'[19] Although the campaign to repatriate diaspora Armenians to Soviet Armenia was based on the principle of voluntary movement, it was entirely in keeping with this broader desire to consolidate boundaries and create ethnically homogenous states. Achieving these aims through the transfer, exchange and expulsion of populations was, even before the outbreak of war, a well-established part of modern state practice in Europe.[20]

Yet post-war displacement was not simply a European phenomenon, it was an integral part of the making of new nation-states on a global scale. [21] As Pamela Ballinger has demonstrated, European and colonial displacements which have been retrospectively bracketed off from one another, 'not only run on parallel tracks but cross and entangle at many points.'[22] This was true of the Armenian repatriation campaign. Civil war in Greece, the stirrings of decolonization in Syria and Lebanon and the crisis in Northern Iran all helped shape Armenian decisions to resettle in the Soviet Union.[23]

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[17] Cohen, *In War's Wake*, 6. Also Philip Ther and Ana Siljak (eds.), *Re-drawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944 - 1948* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), Matthew Frank, *Expelling the Germans: British Opinion and Post-1945 Population Transfer in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[18] Catherine Gousseff, 'Evacuation versus Repatriation: The Polish-Ukranian Population Exchange 1944-46' in Renisch & White, *Disentanglement of Populations,* 93.

[19] Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Vintage, 2000), 215

[20] On 'population politics' see Introduction *Landscaping the Human Garden* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 2-18, especially 9-10 on deportations. Amir Weiner highlights the pan -European scale of the acceptance of 'voluntary' resettlement policies by the inter-war period in 'Nature, Nurture and Memory in a Socialist Utopia: Delineating the Soviet Social Body in an Age of Socialism' *American Historical Review* 104,4 (1999), 1117

[21] Europe has been the focus of existing historiography. Anna Holian and Daniel Cohen 'Introduction' *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, 3 (2012), 313. Gatrell provides an overview of the global dimensions in *Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press, 2012) part 2.

[22] Pamela Ballinger, 'Entangled or Extruded Histories? Displacement, National Refugees and Repatriation after the Second World War' *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25:3 (2012), 369

[23] On Armenians in post-war Syria and Lebanon see Nicola Migliorino, *Re Constructing Armenia in Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Berghann, 2008), chapter 3. On Greece Ioannis K. Hassiotis, 'The Armenians', in Richard Clogg ed. *Minorities in Greece: Aspects of a Plural Society* (London: Hurst, 2002), 100.

Resolving post-war displacement posed particular problems for the Soviet Union. When fighting ceased millions of displaced Soviet citizens remained in Europe.[24] According to the Yalta agreements, they would all be returned to Soviet territory, regardless of individual preference. Their repatriation, both coerced and voluntary, initially proceeded quickly.[25] However, as resistance to this process increased, European and American authorities ceased complying with forced repatriation.[26] By late 1945 mass repatriation to the Soviet Union was essentially over.

This history of coerced repatriation and DP resistance to return played a powerful role in a shaping the Cold War image of a refugee as a person fleeing communism.[27]At first sight, the voluntary repatriation of Armenians to the Soviet Union seems to stand in sharp contrast to this image. The Armenian repatriation campaign commenced as mass repatriation of Soviet DPs was coming to an end. Unlike repatriated DPs the Armenians had never before set foot in the territories to which they were supposed to 'return'.[28] The Armenian campaign was also organized and administered at Republic level by a Committee for the Repatriation and Resettlement of Armenians from Abroad (Repatriation Committee), quite separately from the central Repatriation Administration responsible for DPs.[29]

Nonetheless, there were some striking similarities between the two processes. Potential repatriates in the Armenian diaspora and the inhabitants of DP camps alike became the targets of large scale Soviet recruitment drives. Both were showered with pamphlets and shown films replete with idealized images of a bountiful homeland

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[24] Mark Edele suggests that 'the typical Soviet subject between 1937 and 1949 was a displaced person. 'The Second World War as a History of Displacement: The Soviet Case,' *History Australia* 12, 2 (2015), 17. In addition to those returning from Europe, those evacuated within the Soviet Union were also still in the process of returning home. Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009): 238-269.

[25] By the end of 1945 around 5 million people had been repatriated to Soviet territory.

[26] In the words of Fitzpatrick & Edele, 'Allied occupation authorities and international organizations quietly shifted their definition of DPs from victims of war and fascism to victims of communism.' Sheila Fitzpatrick and Mark Edele, 'Displaced Persons: From the Soviet Union to Australia in the Wake of the Second World War: Introduction,' *History Australia* 12, 2 (2015), 8. In 1947 UNRRA was replaced by the International Refugee Organisation (IRO) which the USSR was not a member of.

[27] On the fate of DPs as an early Cold War 'battle' see Cohen, *In War's Wake*, chapter 1.

[28] Some Soviet Armenians found themselves in the DP camps after the war. By March 1st 1946 4,406 Armenian civilians and 20657 Armenian prisoners of war had been repatriated to the Soviet Union. 'K voprosu repatriatsii sovetskikh grazhdan 1944–1951 gg.,' *Istoriia SSSR*, 4 (1990): 35 See also John Roy Carlson 'The Armenian Displaced Persons: A First Hand Report on Conditions in Europe,' *Armenian Affairs* 1, 1 (1949-50): 17-34.

[29] The Repatriation Administration existed from 1944 until 1952.

and emotive images of family and national reunions.[30] Furthermore, recent research has shown that DP returns to the Soviet Union were not universally a matter of coercion and that the treatment of returnees was characterized not by wholesale persecution but by inconsistency and sometimes ambivalence. [31]

Both DP repatriations and the Armenian case may be understood as part of the broader project of reconstructing the Soviet Union in the aftermath of war. Across the Soviet Union, as Donald Filtzer has explained, recovery 'was constrained not just by shortages of materials, plant and equipment, but also by a shortage of labour power'.[32] The Armenian repatriations were not the only attempt to address this by targeting diaspora communities. According to Bruce Adams, 'At the end of WWII, the Soviet government was deeply concerned about its disastrous loss of population during the war. It appealed to emigres around the world to come home and help rebuild the motherland.'[33] Such 'reclamations' were not solely a Soviet phenomenon. Tara Zahra has suggested that the repatriation and re-nationalization of children in Germany and Austria was also linked to the 'acquisition of the productive and reproductive labor necessary for reconstruction.'[34]

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[30] Soviet repatriation propaganda was translated into different languages but further research is required to address whether this propaganda simply emphasized return to a Soviet motherland or to particular national homes. Personal communication, Seth Bernstein November 2016. On repatriation propaganda in general: Marta Dyczok, *The Grand Alliance and Ukranian Refugees* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 54-56; Nick Baron, 'Remaking Soviet Society: The Filtration of Returnees from Nazi Germany 1944-49,' in *Warlands: population resettlement and state reconstruction in the Soviet-East European borderlands, 1945-50*, ed. Nick Baron and Peter Gatrell (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2009),93. In 1946 a repatriation campaign was undertaken among emigres who had left the Soviet Union in the wake of the revolution to repatriate. Mark Elliott situates appeals to Armenians (for example the film *Vstrecha o Rodnoi*) as part of these campaigns but unlike the Russian emigres the Armenians did not have family origins in the Soviet Union. Mark Elliott, *Pawns of Yalta: Soviet Refugees and America's Role in their Repatriation* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1982), 149. The Russian émigré repatriations did not end happily either, see Nicolas Jallot, *Piégés par Staline* (Paris: Belfond, 2003) and the film *Est-Ouest* (Regis Wargnier, 1999).

[31] For example, Andrew Janco, 'Soviet 'Displaced Persons' in Europe, 1941-51' (PhD. Diss., University of Chicago, 2012) and Seth Bernstein, 'Burying the Alliance: Internment, Repatriation and the Politics of the Sacred in Occupied Germany'*, Journal of Contemporary History* (2017), especially p.11-12. Bernstein, 'Burying the Alliance', 12, notes that the recent Russian historiography is divided: Zemskov, in 'K voprosu o repatriatsii' suggests that most returnees were willing whereas Polian, *Zhvery Dvukh Diktatur*: *Zhizn', trud, unizhenie smert' sovetskikh voennoplennykh ostarbeiterov na chuzhbine na rodine* (Moscow: Rosspenn, 2002) emphasizes its compulsory nature. On the complexities of motivations for resistance see Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism,* chapter three and on ambivalent responses to returnees Vanessa Voisin, 'Retribute or Reintegrate: The Ambiguity of Soviet Policies Towards Repatriates: The Case of Kalinin Province 1943-1950,' *Jahrbucher fur Geschicte Osteuropas* 55,1 (2007): 34-55.

[32] Donald Filtzer *Soviet Workers and Late Stalinism: Labor and the Restoration of the Stalinist System after World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 14.

[33] Bruce Adams, 'Re-emigration from Western China to the USSR 1954-1962,' in *Migration, Homeland and Belonging in Eurasia,* ed. Blair Ruble & Cynthia J. Buckley with Erin Trouth Hofmann (Washington D.C: Woodrow Wilson Centre Press, 2008), 187-88.

34 Tara Zahra, 'A Human Treasure: Europe's Displaced Children Between Nationalism and Internationalism' *Past and Present*, Supplement 6 (2011): 334.

Armenia had been spared wartime occupation. It did not however escape the war's social, economic and demographic consequences. Between 1941 and 1945 the population of the Republic declined by 170,000.[35] Armenia's economy was not damaged by the war to the same extent as other regions of the Soviet Union, but the country still emerged from the conflict 'poor and hungry'.[36] Thus although Soviet propaganda ostensibly celebrated repatriation as an opportunity to unite the whole Armenian nation, a closer reading reveals an emphasis on attracting those who were able to contribute to the reconstruction of society and economy.

It was always assumed that on arrival, repatriates would work and support themselves, even if diaspora organisations helped raised funds to pay for the passage of 'needy' repatriates to Armenia. Repatriation was framed as an altruistic or even humanitarian gesture towards long-suffering Armenians, but Soviet generosity had its limits, and 'self-sufficiency' was expected. Potential repatriates in the USA who asked about those who could not work were advised by local committees, 'Armenia is a country of workers. Those who do not work, do not eat.' Those unable to work, it was advised, should ensure that family members could afford to care for them.[37] One poem, 'Dig!', published in *Sovetakan Hayastan*, for example, celebrated the physical labor of repatriates building themselves new houses.[38]

The use of repatriation as a Soviet strategy for acquiring labor was not lost on international observers. One American report claimed that visas had been granted to Armenian repatriates, 'on a selective basis and thus by far the most of the immigrants have been young people of child-bearing age, largely from the skilled worker or professional groups which are able to contribute most to the Armenian economy.'[39]

The notion of repatriates as resources went beyond finding labor. Communications between the Yerevan committee, local organizing committees and potential

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35 K. Avakian*, Haygagan SSH Pnakchoutioune* (Erevan, 1975), 34-35.
36 Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 159. See also Mary Kilborne Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia* (Leiden: Brill, 1962) especially chapter 5.
37 HAA f.362 op.2 d.9, l. 13 (Correspondence with Armenian National Committee in America, advice from local committee about repatriation, May1946).
38 *Sovetakan Hayastan*, 10,16 (1946), 2. *Sovetakan Hayastan* was a monthly periodical produced by Soviet Armenia and circulated in the diaspora.
39 Bureau of Intelligence and Research: Office of Soviet and East European analysis: Soviet Sponsored Immigration of Armenians into Soviet Armenia, OIR Report No 4227, 12th June 1947, American National Archives, RG 59 General Records of the Department of State.

repatriates suggest that it also encompassed the material and financial resources of repatriates were also understood as potential tools for reconstruction and development. Repatriates were repeatedly advised to bring with them the equipment and machinery necessary for their working lives in Soviet Armenia as well as their personal effects. In part, this emphasis was a product of the kinds of questions the repatriates themselves asked about the fate of their belongings and the possibilities for future livelihoods. However, the waiving of customs duties coupled with repeated advice to repatriates to bring 'whatever property they could manage' was suggestive of the way repatriation was understood as a means of gathering resources rather than aiding the needy.[40]

Returning Armenians were not the only group whose possessions were identified as valuable assets by post-war Soviet authorities. Catherine Gousseff explains that those transferred from the borderlands of Poland to the Ukraine were expected to transfer their belongings in a similar way. 'The plan... considered carefully the transfer of people and their belongings, particularly their cattle, tools and equipment, personal possessions and even part of their grain... According to the Ukrainian leadership, the intention was not only to supply a workforce to particularly devastated areas, but also to implement a real economic transfer that would replenish the livestock of the Kolkhozy, which had been almost completely destroyed.'[41]

Though the repatriation campaign was publicly framed in national terms, it was not simply the development of Armenian that was at stake. Repatriation became connected in to visions of regional development, overlapping with the mass displacement of tens of thousands of Azerbaijanis from the Armenian Republic to the Azerbaijani Republic between 1948 and 1953.[42] Although these resettlements have been interpreted in some recent Azerbaijani historiography as an ethnic deportation orchestrated by Armenians, the resettlement may best be understood as a product of a complex interplay between nationalities policy and plans for the irrigation and development of the Kura-Araxes region.[43] The parallel evolution of

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[40] HAA f.362, op.2, d.6, l.12, Letter to Front National Armenien (FNA) 25 December 1945. HAA f.362, op.2, d.4, l.41-42, letter to the Syria and Lebanon Repatriation Committee 17th February 1946.

[41] Catherine Gousseff, 'Evacuation versus Repatriation: The Polish-Ukranian Population Exchange 1944-46' in Reinisch & White, *Disentanglement of Populations,* 97.

[42] Although initial plans were for the resettlement of around 100,000 Azerbaijanis from Armenia, far fewer actually resettled – perhaps around 50,000.

[43] This narrative emerged in the post-Soviet context of the Nagorno-Karabagh war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani resettlements have thus far been under-research but see new research by Krista Goff, 'Postwar Deportation: The Resettlement of Azerbaijanis in the South Caucasus' unpublished paper presented at Stalinism and War, Higher School of Economics, Moscow, 25th May 2016.

these schemes highlights the both extent to which the mobilization of national groups and mass resettlement for the purposes of economic development were entangled and had become accepted practice in the post-war Soviet Union.

Resettlement, Belonging and the Development of Soviet Armenia

Framing the repatriations as part of a particular moment of post-Second World War reconstruction, should not obscure how longer-term factors, in particular the aftermaths of the Armenian Genocide, also shaped the repatriations. On its creation in December 1920 the Soviet Republic of Armenia was immediately faced with a refugee problem on a massive scale.[44] Over the course of the war around 300,000 refugees had arrived in the region.[45] Caring for them placed a huge burden on a region struggling to recover from the ravages of war. Even so, Soviet Armenia soon became a sanctuary for displaced Armenians. By 1925 13,539 refugees had resettled in Armenia from Turkey, Mesopotamia, Persia and Greece.[46] By 1936 42,200 'repatriates' had resettled in Armenia.[47]

Gathering Armenians within the borders of the Soviet Armenian Republic in this way followed the logic of the territorialized vision of nationality which underpinned the Soviet Union. The consolidation of national groups within clearly defined territories through agricultural resettlement was, as Martin has demonstrated, underway in other regions.[48] Resettlement of Armenians from abroad went hand in hand with other elements of early Soviet nationalities policy, the development of local elites, the promotion of local languages and the development of national cultural institutions.[49] Suny suggests that the coming together of these immigrants

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44 The background to the Soviet Republic's creation is described in Richard Hovannisian 'The Republic of Armenia' in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times* ed. Richard Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin's Press,1997): 340-344.

45 For details of arrivals see Sargasyan, 'Arevmtahayeri Gaghta Arevelyan Hayastan'. A report prepared for Harold Buxton's commission of inquiry into famine conditions listed 300,000 refugees. NAA f. 114 d.2 op.89, 2, December 1921.

46 League of Nations, *Scheme for the Settlement of Armenian Refugees*, (Geneva, 1927), 70.

47 Sargasyan, 'Arevmtahayeri Gaghta Arevelyan Hayastan', 62. In the Armenian scholarship these earlier repatriations, although they occurred under rather different circumstances, are grouped together with the post-Second World War campaign and the later repatriation of around 30,000 Armenians from Greece and the Middle East in the early 1960s. This is the case in Sargasyan, and also Meliksetyan, *Hayrenik-Spiurk Arnchutiunnere* and Stepanyan, XX *Dari Hayrenadardzutyun.*

48 Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union 1923-39* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 35-44

49 Suny's *Looking Toward Ararat* remains the most significant analysis of nationalities policy in early Soviet Armenia. Recent work has focused on the delineation of borders and the Nagorno-Karabagh question. see for example Arsene Saparov, *From Conflict to Autonomy in the Caucasus: The Soviet Union and the making of*

with local Armenians to form the first Soviet Armenian generation represented 'the renationalization of Armenia.'[50]

Resettlement was accompanied by the building of links with Armenian diaspora communities and in September 1921 the *Hayastani Ognutian Komite* (HOK, Committee for Armenian Relief) was created.[51] These efforts were a variation on the 'piedmont principle' described by Martin, the process by which the Soviet Union tried to 'exploit cross-border ethnic ties in order to project political influence'.[52] In the Armenian case connections with the diaspora were cultivated not only for purposes of influence. Panossian, suggests that HOK had 'the explicit purpose of generating material support for Soviet Armenia from diaspora communities.'[53] This ranged from large scale projects undertaken by the liberal diaspora organization, the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) to the support of new settlements by Compatriotic Unions (groups of diaspora Armenians originating from particular towns or regions in the former Ottoman Empire).[54]

In the mid-1920s the threads of refugee resettlement and diaspora connections were drawn together with broader Soviet strategies of resettlement for agricultural development.[55] By 1924 the League of Nations High Commission For Refugees, the Armenian National Delegation and the AGBU were co-operating with the Soviet

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Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabagh (London: Routeledge, 2015), chapter 4. New research by Jeremy Johnson demonstrates the importance of language in constructing nationalities in Armenia and the South Caucasus, 'Orthographic Reform in the Early Soviet South Caucasus' paper presented at Ninth World Congress of the International Council for Central and East European Studies (ICCEES), Makuhari, Japan, August 6th 2015.

[50] Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 146.

[51] During the inter-war period diasporan attitudes to Soviet Armenia were deeply divided. The split broadly followed political lines. Supporters of the *Dashnak* party, the Armenian nationalists who had ruled Armenia during its brief period of independence but had been removed from power following Sovietisation were generally more hostile to the Soviet rule. See Razmik Panossian, *The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars* (London: Hurst, 2006), 365-371.

[52] Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 9.

[53] Panossian, *Kings and Priests,* 367. HOK was disbanded in 1937. On HOK see Mouradian, *L'Arménie*, 310-323.

[54] The AGBU was founded in Egypt in 1906. By this time it had branches worldwide. On the AGBU and Soviet Armenia see Raymond Kevorkian and Vahe Tachjian, *The AGBU: 100 Years of Histor*y (Vol. 1) (Paris: AGBU, 2006): 192-214. On compatriotic Unions, Taline Ter Minassian, *Erevan: La construction d'une capitale a l'époque soviétique* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007), 90.

[55] On resettlement as a strategy for developing the Soviet Union (and the Tsarist Empire) see Lewis Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch, *Broad is My Native Land: Regimes and Repertoires of Migration in Russia's Twentieth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), chapter 1. See also Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 87-92 On state-led Tsarist colonisation and resettlement in the South Caucasus, Peter Holquist, "'In Accord with State Interests and the People's Wishes": The Technocratic Ideology of Imperial Russia's Resettlement Administration' *Slavic Review* 69,1 (2010): 152-179.

Union on a new scheme for the agricultural resettlement of 50,000 refugees.[56] Although this scheme failed, diaspora sponsored repatriation on a smaller scale continued into the early 1930s and the AGBU continued to fund infrastructure projects such as the building of the village of Nubarashen[57] These developments shaped Soviet perceptions of the diaspora as a resource for social and economic development. They also embedded diaspora perceptions of the material and economic development of a Soviet Republic as part of the post-genocide reconstruction of the Armenian nation. By the 1930s these relationships had soured and both repatriation and the provision of material aid were interrupted.

The return to repatriation in 1945 was made possible by the broader realignments in the politics of national belonging in the post-war Soviet Union which accelerated after the death of Stalin.[58] These realignments were context specific, but in the Armenian case Lehmann's work has clearly demonstrated how leaderships were able to engage in processes of reinterpreting and re-articulating central nationalities policy according to their own agendas in a process of 'bargaining'.[59] The repatriation scheme was a product of these processes, reflecting the ways in which, in the eyes of the leaders of Soviet Armenia, the national and the Soviet had come to coexist.[60] Reconstructing the Soviet Union and building a national homeland could be, for them, one and the same project, a reflection of the 'hybridisation' of Soviet and Armenian identities described by Lehman.[61]

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56 The previous year a plan for the agricultural resettlement of 200,000 Armenians in Transcaucasia, Central Asia and the RSFSR over a four year period had been drawn up by the Commissariats for Agriculture and Foreign affairs in Moscow. Central Archive of Contemporary History, Georgia, (sakartvelos uaxlesi istoriis c'entraluir ark'ivi, uic'a) f.617, op.1 d.69, l.41. Letter to George Montgomery l.42 Protocols of a meeting of the commission for Armenian Emigration, Commissariats of Agriculture and Foreign Affairs. The Armenian National Delegation had functioned as a kind of government in exile for the diaspora during the war and had sent a joint delegation to the peace conferences with the Armenian Republic.

57 The Nubarashen project did not live up to expectations. Ter Minassian suggests that the purpose of the whole scheme was to channel diaspora money into the Soviet Union. *Erevan*, 97-102.

58 Zbigniew Wojnowski, 'The Soviet people: national and supranational identities in the USSR after 1945,' *Nationalities Papers* 43,1 (2015): 1-7.

59 Maike Lehmann,'Bargaining Armenianess: National Politics of Identity in the Soviet Union after 1945' in Tsypylma Darieva, Wolfgang Kaschuba, eds, *Representations on the margins of Europe: Politics and Identities in the Baltic and South Caucasian States* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2007), 166-189.

60 Lehman has demonstrated the development of this 'hybrid' Soviet Armenian identity in her examination of Soviet Armenian protests in response to the 50th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. Maike Lehman, 'Apricot Socialism: The National Past, the Soviet Project and the imagining of Community in late Soviet Armenia' *Slavic Review* 74,1 (1975): 9-31.

61 There are parallels here with the Georgian campaign for the repatriation of the Fereydan Georgians from Iran. Like the diaspora Armenians, these 'Georgians' had never before set foot in their Soviet 'homeland'. This campaign was less successful and only 17 families were eventually repatriated in See Claire Pogue Kaiser, *Lived Nationality: Policy and Practice in Soviet Georgia 1945-1978* (Phd Dissertation University of Pennsylvania, 2015), 286.

If the launch of the repatriation campaign depended on transformations within the Soviet Union, its success depended on convincing the diaspora that they belonged in the Soviet Union. Liberal diaspora circles soon returned to their former positions of support, raising funds for the passages of poor repatriates and financed the building of houses, schools and infrastructure.[62] Even the *Dashnaksutiune* (Armenian Revolutionary Federation, ARF), traditionally hostile to Soviet rule in Armenia, were initially prepared to support the campaign. While some left-leaning 'progressive' diaspora organizations supported repatriation on ideological grounds, for the majority of the diaspora the framing of Armenia as a national homeland was most important, and repatriation propaganda reflected this.[63]

The possibility of viewing a Soviet state as a national home was also aided by the prestige accorded to the Soviet Union for its role in defeating Nazi Germany and by Soviet wartime concessions to the Armenian Church, including the election of a new Catholicos in 1945. Soviet claims to the Turkish provinces of Kars and Ardahan, regions which many Armenians understood to be integral to the Armenian homeland. Although they did not come to fruition and were in reality driven by the dynamics of early Cold War geopolitics, these claims helped 'sell' repatriation to the diaspora, some of whom them as evidence of Soviet commitment to the reconstruction of Armenia. [64]

Arrivals and Losses

A decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the Soviet Union announced the launch of the Armenian repatriation campaign in the Soviet press on December 2nd 1945. Recruitment began in earnest in diaspora communities early 1946. The principal work of recruitment and logistics was devolved to local committees in

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62 The AGBU in the USA launched the 'million dollar campaign'. HAA f.362, op.29, d. 21, Correspondence with AGBU, New York. The AGBU sent used and new clothes to Soviet Armenia. Compatriotic Unions also provided building materials – for example sheet metal and 'heavy vehicles' for Nor Zeitun. HAA f.362, op.2, d.5, l. 97, undated communication with Syria and Lebanon Committee c.1947.

63 Laycock, 'Homelands and Homecomings', 110.

64 See Claire Mouradian, *L'Armenie: De Staline a Gorbatchev, histoire d'une republique sovietique* (Paris, 1990), 325-327, Grigor Mamoulia 'Les premières fissures de l'URSS d'après guerre: Le cas de la Géorgie et du Caucase du Sud 1946-7, '*Cahiers du monde russe* 46, 3 (2005): 593-615, Jamil Hasanli, *Stalin and the Turkish Crisis of the Cold War 1945-1953* (Lanham, 2011) and the document collection Arman Kirakosyan (ed.) *Armeniia i Sovetsko-Turetskie otnosheniia v diplomaticheskikh dokumentakh 1945-1946* gg. (Erevan: Tigran Mets, 2010).

diaspora communities drawn from 'progressive' diaspora organizations such as the Front National Arménien (FNA) in France.[65] The response was enthusiastic. In Lebanon, by the end of February 1946 12,600 potential repatriates were reported to have signed up, with 800 more arriving every day.[66]

Between registering and embarking on their voyages to the homeland, most repatriates had time to plan. A process of sorting, packing and disposing of unwanted items thus began.[67] it was made clear that potential repatriates were not expected to leave behind their belongings and start afresh in the Soviet Union and regardless of their material circumstances repatriates had to make decisions about the fate of their 'belongings'. Wealthier repatriates who owned homes, machinery and vehicles faced particular dilemmas. Taxi drivers, for example, expressed their concern that if they were not allowed to bring their vehicles they would have no means of survival.[68] For others, the sale of possessions to raise funds for repatriation was a bigger problem. The negotiation of what it was permissible to bring and the logistics of transport tested the patience as well as the organizational abilities of local repatriation committees, Soviet Armenian authorities and repatriates in equal measure.

While Armenian repatriates did not pass through the 'filtration' points which screened repatriates from the DP camps of Europe, their arrival was not without anxieties.[69] Most arrived in Batumi on ships from Mediterranean ports including Marseille and Salonica. The atmosphere in the port itself was described in one memoir as "oppressive": 'Portraits of Stalin were everywhere. Loud speakers distributed propaganda.' [70] Passengers did not always arrive with their possessions intact. When the *Chukotka* arrived from Salonica in August 1947, numerous passengers reported losses of possessions due to damaged suitcases, accidents unloading and what are termed 'unexplained' losses.[71]

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[65]Other diaspora organisations regarded by the Soviets as 'progressive' included the Armenian National Council of America, the Bulgarian Armenian Progressive Union and the National Armenian Council in Iran. HAA f.362 op.2 d.32, l. 21, List of foreign Armenian progressive organisations.

[66] HAA f.362, op.2 d.4, l.12, Report from Syria-Lebanon Committee, 26th February 1946.

[67] Sarkissian *Les Pommes Rouges,* 31-21

[68] HAA f.362, op.2, d.4, l.19, Letter from Syria-Lebanon Committee to Yerevan Committee. 16th February 1946.

[69] On filtration, Baron, 'Remaking Soviet Society': 89-116.

[70] *Les Pommes Rouges,* 39

[71] HAA f.362, op.2, d.34, l. 20-21,

In repatriate memoirs the loss of possessions en-route are remembered as some of the first sources of disappointment and anxiety regarding the 'homeland. The indifferent responses of officials to these losses bluntly revealed to new arrivals their lack of knowledge of the Soviet system. In *Jeff et Rebecca*, the French repatriate Rebecca Batrikian explains how her family discovered that one of their cases - filled with shoes, cloth for dressmaking and upholstery and new clothes - was empty. The local chief of police simply declared that it was not his, or anybody else's responsibility, 'what is lost is lost.'[72] Inventories and enquiries regarding lost possessions suggest that the Batrikian's experience was by no means unusual. The archival records demonstrate little was done to resolve repatriate losses, beyond their documentation. This was not a matter of callousness towards repatriates. Rather, the inability to address loss reflected the wider inadequacies in planning for repatriate arrivals, whatever the intention of authorities.

According to Orvar Lofgren, 'In narrating life histories people often use the acquisition of certain consumer goods or memories of cherished possessions to organize their trajectory through time.'[73] In the case of Armenian repatriations, I suggest, loss was a more important reference point and structuring principle. The heightened significance of loss in these narratives may be related to the previous experiences of repatriate families during the Armenian Genocide. Narratives of the Genocide frequently feature images of Armenian refugees struggling to gather personal treasures or hiding money in an attempt to survive deportation marches.[74] The loss of possessions play a prominent role these narratives, and even mundane, domestic items which survived the genocidal process still play an important role in mediating personal and family memories in many diaspora communities.[75]

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72 Batrikian, *Jeff et Rebecca,* 171.

73 O. Lofgren 'My Life as a Consumer: Narratives from the World of Goods' in *Narrative and Genre,* ed. M. Chamberlain and P. Thompson (London: Routledge, 1998): 114-125, 114. Similarly, in her work on the oral histories of post-WWII Polish migrants to Britain Burrell highlights the 'centrality of material goods and consumption to their [the interviewees'] narrative content'. Kathy Burrell, 'Managing, Learning and Sending: The Material Lives and Journeys of Polish Women in Britain,' *Journal of Material Culture*13, 1 (2008): 76.

74 'one survivor said that her family had rented five donkeys to carry their possessions, but her father hid their money in his clothes and shoes and wore ragged clothes to conceal their wealth' Donald E. Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller, *Survivors: An oral history of the Armenian Genocide* (London, University of California Press, 1999), 80. Peter Balakian recounts the missionary Leslie Davis' reports of Armenians hiding money and possessions with consuls and missionaries in Harput. *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide* (London, William Heinemann, 2004) On dispossession as a facet of genocide see Ugor Umit Ungor and Mehmet Polatel, *Confiscation and Destruction: The Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Property* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011).

75 For examples of these objects see Susan Pattie, Vazken Khatchig Davidian & Gagik Stepan-Sarkissian, ed., *Treasured Objects: Armenian Life in the Ottoman Empire 100 Years Ago* (London: Armenian Institute, 2012).

Local inhabitants of Soviet Armenia who had lived with shortage and hardship for many years were understandably somewhat indifferent to the losses of repatriates who seemed to arrive laden with goods.[76] However, the impression of wealth created by the luggage of repatriates was often misleading.[77] Many had invested their savings or sold their homes in order to build new lives in Soviet Armenia. For them, loss of belongings had serious consequences. No compensation was provided and there was often no way to replace imported items in a society where shortages of consumer goods was endemic. Loss of a single case could jeopardize carefully laid plans for employment, the support of families, and maintaining or improving standards of living. Thus one repatriate who lost his shoemaking blocks had therefore not only lost the tools of his trade, he had also lost a link with his past work and life and his means of creating a new one in the Soviet Union.[78]

The anxieties generated amongst repatriates by discoveries of loss on arrival were augmented by their first encounters with Soviet scrutiny of personal possessions. Despite Soviet encouragement to bring 'as much as they could manage', their possessions would no longer be strictly private. Searches of luggage occurred at the Batumi reception center. Imported books stand out as a particular concern, in *Search for a Homeland*, Hagop Touryantz, a repatriate from Lebanon, describes the confiscation of his reading material. Through the scrutiny of such belongings that were once thought ordinary, some repatriates came to comprehend the extent to which they might lose taken-for-granted privacies.[79] On the other hand some also began to discover 'survival strategies', from bribery to concealment.[80]

At Home in Soviet Armenia?

Paul Betts and David Crowley have described how 'after 1945 … the power of the emotion-laden home took on heightened significance amid the impoverished conditions in which many Europeans found themselves'.[81] In Armenia as elsewhere,

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[76] Matossian, visiting Armenia in 1957 stated that the repatriates also worsened housing conditions for the 'indigenous' population causing more crowding. Some of the locals muttered 'we didn't ask you to come here'. Matossian, *Impact of Soviet Policies*, 175.

[77] The Batumi reception point stated 10% of the luggage arriving on of the trips of the Chukotka was in poor condition. HAA f.362, op.2, d.34, l.7, 16th August 1947.

[78] HAA f.362, op.2, d.34, l.21, report on luggage damaged during unloading, 26th August 1947.

[79] Besides luggage checks repatriates were subject to health checks and inspections of documents.

[80] Sarkissian, *Les Pommes Rouges*, 41. See also Meghreblian, *An Armenian Odyssey*, 78.

[81] Paul Betts and David Crowley, 'Domestic Dreamworlds: Notions of Home in Post-1945 Europe,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, 2 (2005):123-236, 214. On domestic ideals in post-war Soviet literature

'a clean, warm and comfortable domicile was practically synonymous with the desire to start afresh and to put the war in the past once and for all.'[82] In July 1946 Houcharar, an AGBU publication, noted that 'In Erevan and its environs alone, some 500 houses are being built for the repatriates' whilst plans were being made for 'suburban settlements'.[83] The Soviet authorities had promised to construct individual homes for repatriates and offered state credit for those who wished to build their own.[84] Many diaspora Armenians, especially in the Middle East and Greece, had been without a proper home since the First World War, residing in makeshift camps or barracks that had been assigned as temporary shelters during the 1920s. Regardless of whether they accepted Soviet Armenia as a 'national' home, for many repatriates this resolved the more practical and immediate problem of permanent shelter.

The importance of domesticity in is particularly evident in correspondence between the Armenian-American repatriation committee and the Yerevan committee. The American committee made a number of enquiries relating to domestic life in Soviet Armenia; how were houses heated? What electrical voltages were required to run appliances? They were informed that it would be possible to bring fridges, ovens, irons and other domestic appliances in order to 'maintain an American standard of living.'[85] These concerns regarding Soviet Armenian domestic conditions intersected with the emergence of the Cold War and tempered dreams of life in the homeland.

Ultimately only around 311 individuals from the United States repatriated in two convoys in 1947 and in 1949. For those American-Armenians who did, dreams of domestic comfort and convenience rarely came to fruition. Although inventories demonstrate that domestic appliances and cars were among the items imported by American-Armenians their efforts were thwarted by the lack of infrastructure. [86] Tom Mooradian, a repatriate from Detroit explained in his memoir *The Repatriate:* that, 'Most families in the caravan had brought electrical appliances, including

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see Anna Krylova '"Healers of Wounded Souls": The Crisis of Private Life in Soviet Literature' *Journal of Modern History* 73 (2001): 307-331.

82 Betts and Crowley, 'Domestic Dreamworlds,' 216.

83 *Houcharar* 33, 7 (July 1946), 203.

84 HAA f.362, d.2, op.6, l.14, Instructions to FNA 25th December 1945.

85 HAA f.362 op.2, d.9, l.13, clarifications about repatriation. On domesticity and Cold War identities see Susan Reid 'Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Krushchev' *Slavic Review* 61, 2 (2002): 211-252.

86One American repatriate imported American washing machines, a water boiler and a four-gallon oil burner. HAA f.362, op.2, d.52, List of Armenian repatriates from New York, January 1949.

refrigerators and stoves, but unfortunately there was no gas or electricity to operate them.'[87]

Repatriate narratives, most of which were written by those who had enjoyed relatively secure lives prior to repatriation, convey a strong sense of shock at housing conditions felt by repatriates who had been seduced by repatriation propaganda. Rebecca Batrikian reported that her family had been accommodated in 'two rooms and a corridor'; there was no bathroom and water had to be fetched from 100 meters away.[88] Whilst for repatriates from France these living conditions appeared exceptionally poor, they were probably not out of line with union-wide standards. On victory day, for example, two million people were still said to be living in 'dug-outs'.[89]

The records of the Yerevan committee do not suggest that the Soviet Armenian authorities deliberately targeted the repatriates.[90] Extensive plans had in fact been made for the provision of housing but they either did not come to fruition or were severely delayed. In Kirovakan in 1947 50 out of 66 apartments for repatriates had no window glass or even frames.[91] Repatriates who planned to build their own homes meanwhile found this was slow and difficult, state loans proved inadequate and families often had to make do with living in unfinished homes.[92] Again, the difficult material circumstances in which the repatriates found themselves was not unique to the Armenian case but a common feature of Soviet mass resettlements. According to Siegelbaum and Moch, demobilized soldiers and farmers resettled in the Kuban in winter 1933-34 also found themselves in homes without window glass.[93]

Housing conditions became the subject of multiple complaints, petitions and investigations as the repatriates discovered ways to seek redress from the authorities.

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87 They were sold to people who lived in the center where power supply was more reliable. Mooradian, *The Repatriate*, 129.
88 Batrikian, *Jeff et Rebecca*, 172.
89 Mark Edele, *The Epic of Return,*
90 Platz explains that the inequalities and difficulties of finding housing which suited the needs of Armenian family structures stretched from the early Soviet period into the 1980s. Platz, 'The Shape of National Time,' in *Altering States: Ethnographies of Transition in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, eds. Daphne Berdahl et. al (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 119.
91 HAA f.362, op.2, d.24, l.13, Report into living conditions for repatriates in Armenia 1948.
92 A 1948 report claimed that in Yerevan, Leninakan (Gyumri), Stepanavan, Etchmiadzin, Hoketember, Artik, Allaverdi and Beria 4572 families had started to build their own homes but only 729 families had completed and lived in them. HAA f.362, op.2, d.24, l.16.
93 Siegelbaum and Moch, *Broad is my Native Land*, 45.

They suggest that concern for poor housing was not only the province of repatriates who had arrived from relatively more comfortable conditions in France. In March 1948 a report into the case of a repatriate from Palestine who was living in a 'shed' concluded that the regional Soviet must allocate him a private room and find him work as soon as possible.[94] Plans developed for 1948 suggest that the Yerevan committee were well aware of the problems that had been encountered by the 1946-1947 'caravans' but, perhaps unsurprisingly, lacked the resources to resolve them.

Materializing Difference

Repatriation propaganda had been premised on the idea of a shared Armenian identity and a shared Armenian homeland. The reality of return fractured this image of unity in multiple ways. Maike Lehman has explored some of the ways that demarcation lines between locals and repatriates were drawn, from differences of language (many repatriates spoke Western Armenian as opposed to the Eastern Armenian and Russian spoken in Soviet Armenia) and cultural tradition to differing notions and expectations of civility and education. The material, was also important in drawing these lines. These 'foreign' belongings not only acted as visible identifiers of repatriates, they were also both sought after by and a source of resentment for local Armenians.[95]

The personal possessions of repatriates not only helped construct the demarcation lines between repatriates and the 'local' population, they also proved to be a source of anxiety for the Soviet authorities. This was made clear to some repatriates during the deportations of 1949. In stark contrast to the careful preparation for repatriation deportees were abruptly taken from their homes at dawn and afforded no opportunity to gather their belongings for the journey to special settlements in Central Asia.[96] As news of the deportations spread and fears grew some repatriates vetted their own possessions. Hagop Touryantz and his family, for example, destroyed all of the books which they feared may have provoked suspicion.[97]

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94 HAA f.362, op.2, d.24, l.7. Enquires into living conditions of individual repatriates 6 March 1948.

95 Maike Lehmann, 'Brothers of a Different Kind: Exclusion and Partial Integration after Repatriation to a Soviet Homeland,' *Ab Imperio* 3 (2012).

96 Andonian briefly describes the overnight disappearances of two families in his village. *A chacun son destin*, p.63. The experience of Armenian deportees in the special settlements is beyond the scope of this article but deserving of further investigation. On 'special settlements' see, Viktor N. Zemskov, *Spetsposelentsy v SSSR 1930-1960* (Moscow: Nauka, 2003).

97 Touryantz, *Search for a Homeland*,

Suspect books did not simply mean texts expressing anti-Soviet political or national opinions. It seems that some were simply part of a wider group of 'western' belongings of repatriates which did not conform to Soviet standards for living and perhaps potentially corrupting of 'native' Soviet Armenians. According to Touryantz: 'Particularly mind disturbing were, according to their pathological reasoning, the fashion journals which were meant to distract the tastes and wearing habits of the Soviet female population with bourgeois, decadent and immoral styles.' Even the seemingly innocuous magazine, *American Home Journal,* was burned.[98] Soviet anxieties about these objects were perhaps heightened because the repatriates were seen as failing to conform to Soviet values in other ways. Reports from the regions expressed concerns about the repatriates' knowledge of and commitment to the Soviet system. In Artashat it was reported that the repatriates didn't know the constitution or the law, whilst in Dilijan and Ghapan there were concerns that no propaganda work was carried out among the repatriates.[99]

Clothing, as Lehmann has demonstrated, sometimes functioned as a clear and visible dividing line between the 'native' and repatriate population.[100] Yet the division was not always so straightforward. Not all repatriates were weathly. Soviet reports testify to a great deal of material deprivation among repatriates, especially in the regions. In one episode in 1948, the repatriation committee reported that 50 men's coats, 358 women's coats, 165 children's coats, 2000 pairs of men's trousers, 97 pairs of children's trousers, 496 women's skirts and 120 children's skirts had been distributed as 'aid' to needy repatriates.[101] However, neither archives nor repatriate memoirs (which hardly shy away from criticism of the Soviet system) testify to such a systematic campaign to 'equalize' repatriate and native through divesting repatriates of their belongings.

In 1948 the *Armenian Review*, a journal published in the diaspora under the auspices of a Dashnak party by now firmly opposed to repatriation, turned to the fate of repatriate belongings in order to illustrate the shortcomings of the repatriation scheme, and of the Soviet Union more generally. One of a series of highly critical articles homed-in on the 'problem' of repatriate possessions, suggesting that the Soviet authorities made a deliberate attempt to erase material distinctions between

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98 Touryantz, *Search for a Homeland*, 94.
99 HAA f.362, op.2, d.24, l.26 (Report on accommodation, employment and material conditions of repatriates 1948).
100 Lehmann, 'Different Kind of Brothers',191-192.
101 HAA f.362 op.2 d.25 l. 2, distribution of clothing from reports on the organisation of repatriation from 1946-48.

the repatriates and the 'native' Armenians. 'There is an organized effort to reduce all new-comers who are well clad and well-heeled to the status of the poverty stricken natives in order to remove the shocking contrast between them and the natives.'[102]

Neither archives nor repatriate memoirs (which hardly shy away from criticism of the Soviet system) testify to such a systematic campaign to 'equalize' repatriate and native through divesting repatriates of their belongings. Nonetheless the focus on the material world in this article is not perhaps surprising, given the role that the material came to play in representing the difference between the Soviet and western worlds. As Kristina Fehervary has observed '…waning faith in the state's ability to materialize an alternative modernity was intensified by increased exposure to images and material evidence of the consumer transformations occurring in the post-war West. In this context, the opposition between state-socialist and democratic market systems became embodied in their respective products.'[103] Thus belongings, and their loss, came to be imbued with an ideological significance that the repatriates never anticipated.

But differences between the material worlds of repatriates and locals did not simply reflect the binary between 'East' and 'West' anticipated by the diaspora critics described above. For example, differences of dress among the repatriates themselves exposed the ways in which Armenian experiences had diverged in diaspora communities. Many repatriates from France were shocked by the appearance of repatriates from the Armenian communities of the Middle East. Lazare Indjeyan described 'men, the majority with beards dressed in baggy pants and women wearing the veil and long black dresses which reached to the floor.'[104] Similarly, Rebecca Batrikian's remarked that whilst Armenians from Syria and Beirut were 'very elegant, in French fashions' the Armenians from 'Jordan' were dressed as 'Touaregs, as if they had come from the desert!' [105] These materializations of difference further disrupted the assumptions of Armenian national unity which had underpinned repatriation propaganda, prompting many to question whether or not they really belonged in the 'homeland.'

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102 A. Sahaklian, 'The Case of the Disillusioned Returnees to Soviet Armenia' *Armenian Review*, 1(1948): 122.
103 K. Fehevary, 'Goods and States,' The Political Logic of State-Socialist Material Culture' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, 2 (2009): 426-459, 429.
104 Indjeyan, *Les annees volees*, 124.
105 Andonian, *A chacun son destin,* 22, Batrikian, *Jeff et Rebecca*,155.

Repatriate Resourcefulness: Surviving the Soviet World

The repatriates had moved into a world with different approaches to production and ownership, norms and patterns of consumption and standards of living. Hopes of continuity in domestic, social and working lives that had been evoked in repatriation propaganda were dispelled as the repatriates encountered the economic and social realities of post-war Armenia. Under these circumstances the belongings that the repatriates had brought with them came to play unforeseen roles and ordinary possessions were imbued with new significance and worth in the 'survival strategies' of these new arrivals in the Soviet Union.

Many repatriates had taken the tools of their trade with them to Armenia. In July 1946 the Front National Arménien (FNA) reported that they had overseen the formation of potential repatriates into 'artels' of shoemakers and dressmakers, construction workers and transport workers in preparation for their new lives in Armenia.[106] The combination of importing materials to set up in various trades and industries and the promise of plentiful work meant that some repatriates anticipated earning their living much as they had in the 'host' countries. Others, arriving from difficult conditions in Greece and the Middle East had the promise of education, employment and a brighter future.

Reports produced by the Yerevan repatriation committee suggested that these hopes indeed became a reality. A summary of the progress of the 1947 repatriates claimed that all repatriates capable of working were able to find jobs in the first few days in industries, 'artels', producers co-operatives, agriculture and the cultural and educational arenas.[107] These reports contrast with the more negative image presented in repatriate memoirs and with the high levels of poverty evident in the investigations and reports of the repatriation committee. The French repatriate Albert Andonian explained the difficulties of economic survival in the early years of repatriation: 'None of the repatriates worked, or nearly none', instead 'everybody sold their belongings'. His claim that a couple from Lyon lived for ten years that way highlights

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106 HAA f.362, op.2, d.6, l.40, letter from FNA to repatriation committee, July 1946.

107 HAA f.362, op.50, d.2 Report on repatriation, 1949 prepared in Soviet Armenia. The purpose of this report is unclear but it presents an overwhelmingly positive impression of repatriation. A report into 1947 arrivals claimed that of 25,284 repatriates 10,422 were able to work and of these by 1 November 1948 9,194 were placed in jobs and 1,228 did not work. HAA f.362, op.2, d.24, l.20.

the way is presumably exaggerated but is indicative of the importance attached to the fate of repatriate possessions in diasporic social memory.[108]

The problems faced by repatriates in coming to terms with a new economic system were heightened by the context of post-war shortage. This became apparent the repatriates soon after they began their voyage. Rebecca Batrikian's account describes Georgians collecting the stale bread they threw from the ship at Batumi, 'Don't do that! Bread is rare here. We are hungry! Expect the worst!'.[109] Although the food situation gradually improved, as Filtzer explains, 'even by the end of the Stalin period, production and consumption of underwear, hosiery, shoes and cloth was extremely limited, and while the availability of food now surpassed that of the war years and the 1947 famine, the diet was still poor in quality, this was not a society even remotely approaching a comfortable standard of living.'[110] Thus the Armenian repatriates faced years of hardship.[111]

Regardless of their financial situation, repatriates found that the economy of the Soviet Union simply made no sense to them. Tom Mooradian observed that 'the law of supply and demand was meaningless in a planned society that did not provide enough food for its population', whilst Sona Meghreblian's family were astounded by the cost of living: 'It was too early yet for us to comprehend the reality of Soviet life: that the cost of essentials - food, clothing - was outrageously high … How people managed to exist with their low salaries was a mystery which would slowly be revealed to us by our daily experiences.' [112]

Repatriates had to learn the rules of the Soviet material world and the norms of consumption and provisioning. In order to purchase from the shops it was necessary

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108 Andonian*, A Chacun son Destin*, 26. Although there was an additional value to some repatriate possessions associated with the West the Armenians were not the only group of Soviet resettlers forced to survive by selling possessions. Rebecca Manley describes how evacuees to Tashkent during the war employed similar strategies. Manley, *To the Tashkent Station*, 168-9.

109 Batrikian, *Jeff et Rebecca*, 157. Maike Lehmann argues that food cultures marked an important difference between repatriate and 'native' Armenians. Lehmann, 'Different Kind of Brothers',187 - 190. Food is still invoked as a boundary. It is not uncommon for diaspora Armenians to note that cuisine in the Armenian Republic is less authentic or 'too Russian'.

110 Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Late Stalinism*, 99. By 1945 consumer goods production in the Soviet Union was only 59% of its pre-war level. David Crowley and Susan Reid 'Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post War Eastern Europe,' in *Style and Socialism,* ed. Crowley and Reid (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 12.

111 For example, in Leninakan in 1948 725 families were reported to be in need of clothes, 1200 were in need of fuel and 710 needed stoves HAA f.362 op.2 d.24, l.21. From reports and correspondence to the Central committee of the Communist Party of Armenia advising of results of checks on the working and living conditions of repatriates.

112 Mooradian, *The Repatriate* Meghreblian, *Armenian Odyssey,* 79-81.

to be 'in the know', to have contacts to warn you about the timing of deliveries and other essential information.[113] Such personal networks were central to the functioning of the USSR's informal economy or 'blat'.[114] As Alena Ledeneva has explained, 'Blat exchange was often mediated and covered by the rhetoric of friendship or acquaintance: 'sharing', 'helping out', 'friendly support', 'mutual care' etc. Intertwined with personal networks, blat provides access to public resources through personal channels.'[115] Most repatriates, in the early days, lacked these contacts and networks but many were, over subsequent years, able to develop them.

Taking part in the Soviet consumer system involved the recognition of the new values attached to the 'everyday' belongings that they had brought with them. Igor Kopytoff's observations: '…in any society the individual is often caught between the cultural structure of commoditization and his own personal attempts to bring a value order to the universe of things.'[116] In the case of the repatriates this meant a realization that ordinary belongings – clothes, shoes, appliances or tools – had become 'special' due to their rarity or the prestige associated with their western origins. In memoirs repatriates seem to have been caught between the new values attached to their possessions in the Soviet Union and their attachment to them as reminders of their lives before repatriation. Rebecca Batrikian was forced to sell her bicycle in order to help her family to survive. The bicycle had been given to her as a gift upon leaving school in France and meant much more than a means of transport. Its sale was symbolic of the break with her life in France and the educational achievements which seemed meaningless in Soviet Armenian society. [117]

On the other hand, the sale of belongings sometimes had happier endings, or could help to integrate the repatriates into local social networks. Lucie Der Sarkissian had little option but to sell the sewing machine she had brought from France. Sewing machines, she explains, were 'rare' in Soviet Armenia at the time and could be sold for the equivalent of one and half month's salary, allowing the whole family to survive for a little longer. This sale had unexpected consequences, providing here with a way in to Soviet Armenian society. The wife of the person she sold the sewing

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113 Mooradian, *The Repatriate*, 126. See also Sheila Fitzpatrick *Everyday Stalinism, Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 62-65.

114 'Papakh' in Armenian

115 'blat' was 'a series of practices which enabled the Soviet system to function and made it tolerable but also subverted it'. Alena Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3 & 37.

116 I Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process,' in *The Social Life of Things,* ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

117 Batrikian, *Jeff et Rebecca,* 196-198.

machine to took an interest in her and helped her to prepare for the exam for the teaching college. This allowed her to start a new career and build a more secure future in Armenia.[118] Despite these steps, a sense of belonging in Soviet Armenia still evaded Lucie and her husband Jean, they left Armenia and returned to a diasporan existence in France.

Conclusions

While their voluntary nature was at odds with Cold War narratives emphasizing flight from the USSR, the Armenian repatriations were far from unique, part of a post-war global landscape of displacements and resettlements. These movements of population were connected, in various ways, to the definition and reconstruction of states and to post-war reconstruction. The claim that diaspora Armenians 'belonged' in the Soviet Republic made perfect sense in the contexts of these global processes but also according to the particularities of Soviet nationalities policy and in the context of longer term Soviet projects and techniques to transform society. In other words, they were a product of the emergence of the kind of state in which re-defining who belonged and viewing populations as moveable and malleable had become normalized.

The launch of the repatriation campaign was driven by the economic and political imperatives of the post-war moment. However, that the Soviet Union was able to convince Armenians who had never before set foot in Soviet Armenia that they belonged within its borders was a result of the legacies of the Armenian Genocide and of connections between resettlement and development forged during the inter-war period. Precedents of diaspora aid were essential in shaping perceptions in the Armenian Republic and in Moscow of diaspora Armenians as a resource.

The success of the repatriation scheme relied on the kind of 'hybridization' of national and Soviet identities described by Maike Lehman.[119] Although Lehman focuses on the post-war era, that the idea of a Soviet Armenian homeland already had such a powerful appeal in 1945 is suggestive of the need to examine more closely the roots of this 'hybridisation' in the period before the Second World War. Repatriation should not then be understood as either a Soviet economic project or an Armenian national project. Rather, in 1945, for both the diaspora and the

[118] Sarkissian, *Les pommes rouges,* 90.
[119] Lehman, 'Apricot Socialism'.

Republic, these two elements were understood as being closely entwined. The Armenian population (and their belongings) were thus 'claimed' by the Soviet Union not only as a convenient economic remedy but also as part of the broader project of making a utopian vision of both Soviet society and the Armenian nation a reality. The reality of repatriation however caused both 'sides' to change their mind.

Whilst the repatriation schemes are indicative of the nature and ambition of post-war Soviet population politics they are also a reminder that such grand schemes frequently had unintended consequences. Considering repatriate belongings reveals the reality of the hardships that repatriates endured, exposing the inadequacies of Soviet planning and helping to explain why so many chose to leave the Soviet Union. It also however reveals a rather different side of the repatriation story, demonstrating how, in the face of hardship, repatriates proved to be resourceful. They used their belongings in creative ways in order to survive and sometimes to thrive in Soviet Armenia, to forge new relationships and identifications. Material possessions mediated repatriate relationships with the Soviet authorities and 'locals', accentuating or bridging difference according to particular contexts. They provided means of connecting with, subverting and in some cases escaping, the Soviet system.

Loss of belongings and endurance of material hardships acted as one of many indicators to repatriates that the Soviet Union represented an inauthentic 'national home'. In a cold war context domestic material culture and consumer goods had a particular resonance, powerfully articulating the difference between old lives in 'the west' and new lives behind the iron curtain. Stories of material hardship or the loss of personal belongings continue to play an important role in expressing this sense of disappointment or resentment with the Soviet system. Although the Armenian experience of repatriation was relatively unusual, the turn to material goods to express these feelings was not. Fehervary argues that across the socialist world: 'Emblematic goods of state-socialist production as well as their settings came to be seen as evidence of the failure of a state-socialist-generated modernity, but importantly, of the regime's negligent and even 'inhumane' treatment of its subjects.'[120]

Since the fall of the Soviet Union the relationship between the independent Republic of Armenia and the diaspora has been in a process of flux. The question of whether independent Armenia can represent an authentic 'homeland' for all Armenians remains a contested issue, but the Armenian government has nonetheless

[120] Fehervary, 'Goods and States,' 429.

encouraged diasporan investment and resettlement, and some sectors of the diaspora have promoted the notion of diasporan responsibility for improving the social, political and economic state of the homeland. More recently the arrival in the Republic of Armenians fleeing conflict in Syria has prompted arguments that these new arrivals should be welcomed not only as a matter of responsibility towards fellow Armenians, but because their perceived skills in business and commerce, if not their material possessions, could be a valuable asset to the Republic. Thus, even in this radically different social and political landscape the discourses of homeland as a sanctuary for the diaspora, and diaspora as resource for the homeland have remained entwined, holding a powerful, if contested, appeal for homeland and diaspora alike.

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