

Nergakht and the Concept of Homeland

The Armenian Community in Beirut and the Repatriation Movement 1946-48

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Abstract This paper discusses the issue of Armenian repatriation in the years '46-'47, challenging the role played by the concept of Armenian homeland on the identities developed and propagated by various Armenian entities in Lebanon. The three main diasporic Armenian parties, Dashnak, Ramgavar, and Hunchak, as well as the three newspapers affiliated with them, *Aztag*, *Zartonk*, and *Ararad*, clash in the Armenian-Lebanese political arena over differing conceptions of homeland and what it means to be an Armenian patriot, developing increasingly two sets of ideological references to draw on from time to time during intra-Armenian confrontation.

Keywords Armenian repatriation. Diaspora. Homeland. Lebanon. Soviet Armenia.

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1 Introduction

The Council of People's Commissars of the USSR issued Decree No. 2947 on November 21, 1945, allowing the Council of People's Commissars of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia to coordinate the repatriation of Armenians residing abroad (Yousefian 2011, 1-3). The great enthusiasm and subsequent support for the initiative on the

part of the constituent bodies of the Armenian Apostolic Church¹ as well as the diaspora is also closely related to the international pressure applied by the Soviet government at the expense of Turkey for the return of two districts in Eastern Anatolia: Kars and Ardahan (Mouradian 1990, 325-7).²

Such a movement cannot be properly understood unless it is contextualised within the backdrop of the Second World War and on the eve of the Cold War, as well as within the broader framework of boundary redefinition, forced or voluntary population movements (Wolff 2011). In the Armenian instance, an example of voluntary population movement is commonly referred to with the word repatriation, *Nerkaght*, which is not unambiguous, as many of those targeted by the programme do not appear to be natives of the area to which they are supposed to return. The origins of these people may be tracked in the districts of eastern Anatolia that were once part of the Ottoman Empire.

Repatriation is thus applied to the Armenian case in a propagandistic manner, both to certify the link between the Armenian diaspora and the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia (Laycock 2009a), and to demonstrate that the Turkish territories claimed by Moscow during the 1940s were part of historical Armenia and, as such, should have been reunited with Soviet Armenia.

The repatriation initiative and territorial claim aroused great enthusiasm among Armenian communities throughout the world, prompting diaspora Armenian parties to become active participants in arranging what was dubbed the pivotal moment in Armenian history since the massacre of 1915.

The significance of Soviet Armenia's position as a legal homeland, then, lies at the heart of the repatriation question (Laycock 2009b).

The generalization of the concept of homeland in reference to Armenian-Soviet territory introduces an element that complicates the dialogue between Armenian diasporic political parties, as seen in the pages of newspapers affiliated with those, since 1946, especially since September of the same year. The Soviet power itself is a source of division, because it produces a definition that splits the diaspora as

1 In June 1945 the newly elected Kevork VI Catholicos of All Armenians delivered a plea to Stalin on behalf of the Armenian nation to intervene in resolving the Armenian national crisis during the first all-Armenian Church Council in years (Lehmann 2011, 486-7; Melkonyan 2010).

2 In March 1945 the Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov informed the Turkish ambassador in Moscow that the Treaty of Friendship and Non-Aggression signed in 1925 would have to be renegotiated. During the June 1945 discussions in Moscow, the USSR listed among its demands the return of the Armenian districts of Kars and Ardahan, which the 1921 agreement had handed to Turkey. In 1947 the Soviet Ambassador Vyshinskii demands the return of these two districts to Georgia. After the death of Stalin, Molotov withdraws claims (Sury 1997, 368).

a whole, which is then categorized into progressive entities allowed to have contact and collaborate with the Soviet-Armenian commissions, and reactionary and nationalist actors, who are barred from interacting with the Soviet Republic.

The social-democrat Hunchak with its organ *Ararad* and the liberal Ramgavar with its newspaper *Zartonk*, are thus part of the progressive panorama, as the Armenian Communist Party's branch in Lebanon and independent organizations such as Veratznunt are.³ Similar political players attempt to legitimize Soviet Armenia as a homeland. Despite the right-wing Dashnak's and its affiliate *Aztag* desire to cooperate, the party is considered a political enemy and fierce opponent of the Soviet Union and hence of the Armenian Soviet Republic itself, as a consequence, it is instantly selected as the focus of Ramgavar and Hunchak's criticism.⁴

Political competition within the Armenian community in Lebanon has fertile ground because of the political system of power sharing that characterizes the Lebanese nation. The inclusion of Armenians as a recognized community in the Lebanese confessional balance system provides a juridical and political recognition, inflaming the conflict between the parties (Migliorino 2008, 94-5; Attié 2004, 25-9).

2 Nergakht and Imagined Homeland

On June 23, 1946, the first ship, the Transylvania, departs from Beirut for Batum, carrying the first caravan of 1806 Armenian immigrants (Eghiazaryan 2017, 131). The two progressive newspapers devote an entire issue to the event, including photographs of the ship docked in Qarantina with the repatriated immigrants on board, emphasizing throughout the articles how repatriation is a watershed moment for the Armenian that considers himself a true patriot, a hayrenaser.⁵

The approval of the repatriation decree together with the Soviet claims to the provinces of Kars and Ardahan becomes the subject of

³ *Ararad*, the Hunchak party's official organ, was originally published on November 7, 1937, by Amenak Eloyan, and was later edited by Onnig Djambouljian. The Ramgavar party's official organ, which first published on September 26, 1937, was heavily sponsored by Vahan Tekeyan, a well-known Armenian poet who was interested in the party becoming a prominent force within Lebanon's Armenian community. The journal was published under the supervision of Barakun Tovmassian (Vardjabedyan 1983, 71-3).

⁴ *Aztag*, a Dashnak-affiliated newspaper, is published for the first time on March 5, 1927. It is printed biweekly until 1930, then three times a week until 1932, when it becomes a daily newspaper. The journal is privately published by Haig Balian while enjoying the moral backing, authority, and supervision of the Revolutionary Armenian Federation; it will legally become the official organ of the Dashnak's central committee in Lebanon in June 1965 (Vardjabedyan 1983, 67-70).

⁵ *Zartonk*, 24 June 1946; *Ararad*, 24 June 1946.

a narration, whose main features can be summarised in a desire for legitimisation of the diaspora as part of a specific homeland and of the ASSR (Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic) as the political government leading the Armenian people.

In such a scenario, where political events appear to be moving in the direction of a solution to the Armenian Cause, those who are classified as progressive entities bring together the Armenian political circle in Lebanon. In such political ambience, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation does not take stances that contradict Moscow's directions via Yerevan. The Armenian representatives are mainly concerned about the community's socioeconomic problems. The threat of integration represents the politicians' main focus. The stakeholders are concerned about the fragile balance that is the result of internal community conflicts.

Repatriation answers all these questions, changing the political prospects of an entire people and putting an end to the centuries-long Armenian epic. The unfair conditions determined by the Treaty of Sèvres could finally be changed: Stalin at the helm of the victorious Soviet Union would lead the Armenian people towards the conquest of a homeland. The Armenian press in Lebanon played the same symphony, a new discourse built around the possibility of forming a united nation capable of overturning the condition of exile.

During the first months of this year, it becomes clear that the definition of an Armenian nation in the socio-political landscape is changing, as it overcomes diasporic transience by structuring itself around a geographically and politically recognised national entity capable of pursuing its upward path towards a united Armenia and welcoming all Armenians.

The Soviet Armenia government clearly expresses its desire to shape Armenian history in the years ahead, a self-representation that is not limited to the past but extends to the present and aims to realize an epic future. In the Armenian-Lebanese community, this process of representation is manifested by Armenian political elites claiming membership in that faraway country, but also recognising the need to identify and represent it to the Lebanese-Armenians. In order to achieve this goal, each Armenian newspaper creates a personal narrative discourse based on a set of reflections that are peculiar to a particular journalistic output. The progressive newspapers *Ararad* and *Zartok* communicate their messages in different ways, but they both attempt to re-semanticize the nation in order to develop a new sense of the national Armenian. The viewpoints of the two Armenian newspapers on the subject of repatriation reveal a complementarity that emerges from the structuring of an indivisible link between repatriation, the nation, and Soviet Armenia in the columns of the newspapers

the homeland of a nation is the home, just as a family can rest in its home, so the individuals of a nation can rest in their homeland. (“Հայրենիքը” [Homeland]. *Ararad*, 12 February 1946)

What emerges is an Armenia celebrated in his role of defender of the Armenian people, guarantor for the safeness of all its children, now

no longer exiled and without a homeland, subject to all the dangers that might occur, transforming its members into joyful citizens of their own state. (“Կամաց բայց հաստատուն” [Slow but Steady]. *Ararad*, 23 January 1946)

That homeland, now Soviet Armenia, never ceased to worry about its kinsmen in the diaspora; it fought for them, made efforts, and “finally obtained the opportunity to reunite its flock”.⁶

To make Soviet Armenia a true homeland, it is necessary to immerse the whole Armenian people in a state-building project, an activity, in *Zartok*'s words, necessary for the Armenian diaspora that experienced the most heinous episodes of Armenia's bloody past, but the history eventually rewards the Armenian by giving him back life and hope, reminding him that there is a part of that homeland that has been rescued and is ready to host him.⁷

Territory has a mystical meaning in this process, and it is not a mere symbol of Armenian patriotism: it is a physical reality that has to be inhabited; the long-awaited oneness of the Armenian people may be reached with the actual presence on that specific land.⁸ Thanks to the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia's vision, diasporic Armenians have the opportunity to emancipate themselves as a nation. This can only be done through Armenia, with which they have a spiritual, cultural, and historical bonds. In this sense, the diaspora can only be viewed as a land of passage through which the construction of an Armenian state has come to reality, implying a renewed sense of national belonging and the necessity of emigration, and thus admitting the Republic's primacy as the solution to the Armenian problem.

Ararad is one of the first publications to describe the event of repatriation as a good occurrence, together with the Soviet Republic's policies and practices in general. On January 23 1946, *Ararad* publishes the closing conclusions of the Hunchak Party's 8th World Con-

⁶ “Ներգաղթի համար: Արձանագրությունները սկսան” (For Repatriation: The Procedures Began). *Zartok*, 3 February 1946.

⁷ *Zartok*, 24 January 1946; “Ներգաղթի համար: Արձանագրությունները սկսան” (For Repatriation: The Procedures Began). *Zartok*, 3 February 1946.

⁸ “Հայրենիքը” (Homeland). *Ararad*, 12 February 1946.

gress, held in 1925 as a confirmation of the Hunchak Party's and its newspaper's unwavering support.⁹ Once the political line has been reaffirmed, the focus can be shifted back to the primary subject i.e. Armenia, which will be presented as a state recognized by the entire community. At the same time the international struggle to reclaim the Armenian lands occupied by the current Turkish state is not to be set aside, so that the community can return to live in the places of its ancient homeland.¹⁰

The relationship between repatriation, Armenian territorial claim, and the development of a united homeland with no defined borders appears to be inextricably linked. A similar relationship appears in *Zartonk's* columns, where the newspaper declines the topic in a romantic key, concentrating less on the political aspect, since in principle its ideology in principle opposes communism. In order to legitimize its support for a Soviet administration, the Ramgavar party publication devotes greater space to defining a 'romantic landscape', which would allow the diaspora to be familiar with that unknown and never inhabited region. The incorporation of lyrical images allows *Zartonk's* journalists to characterize repatriation as a natural phenomenon, the only way a correction of national history could have been accomplished.¹¹

The building of the nation-object takes place through the depiction of a duality between the real state - ASSR - and the imagined one - a great Armenia restored to its splendour through the merging of Soviet territory and Turkish Armenia's geographical area. The rhetoric of the myth of return is expressed in its dual form, attracting the reader's attention with an artificial poetics, where the fiction of a geographical space alternates with modulation of geopolitical reality, aiming to reinforce the picture of a utopic nation where the hierarchy of history is minimized. Both progressive newspapers invite the reader to rediscover a shared feeling of belonging, addressing emigration to ASSR as a phenomenon to be explored in connection to 'the other Armenian national area', Turkish Armenia.¹²

9 “Հայաստան և Հնչակյան կուսակցություն” (Armenia and the Hunchak Party). *Ararad*, 23 January 1946.

10 “Ընկեր Գրիգոր Հարությունյան պատմական հոյակապ ճառը: ‘Արդարացի պահանջ է որ Թուրքիոյ կողմէ վտարուած արասահմանի հայութիւնը վերադառնայ Հայրենիք եւ տիրանայ իր պատմական իրաւունքներին’” (A Fantastic Historical Speech of Comrade Krikor Haruthunian: ‘armenians Exiled by Turkey and Living in Diaspora Have a Right to Return to their Homeland and Reclaim their Historical Rights’). *Ararad*, 5 February 1946.

11 “Արարատ” (Ararad). *Zartonk*, 7 May 1946.

12 “Հայաստան ինչպէս որ է” (Armenia as It is). *Ararad*, 10 March 1946; Baboian, K. (1946). “Խորհ. Հայաստանի մէջ” (In Soviet Armenia). *Ararad*, 3 April 1946; “Հայաստան այսպէս ինչպէս որ է” (Armenia as It is). *Ararad*, 23 April 1946; Ghilian,

Mount Ararat, which is not geographically part of the Armenian-Soviet territory, is widely invoked as a symbol of the entire homeland.¹³ It appears to be an attempt to create a reality by fusing the two parts, rather than two antithetical realms that are distinct and remote. The land bridges the gap between the past and the future.

The organizing principle of reality can be disrupted in a lyrical dimensions, in the portrait on an Armenia crossing geographical boundary.

Such a process entails a constant symbolic re-signification of a shared mythical-historical substratum that feeds a subtext of numerous identities, that embodies various levels of identities and tends to standardize the moment of the identity production through the process of simplifying diverse kinds of impulses.

While appealing to several components, this simplifying operation is what leads the aim of the *Ararad* journalistic team in the cultural, social, and political metamorphosis of the diasporic Armenian into an Armenian-Soviet citizen.

Ararad entrusts some articles to popularize the Soviet system; through them, it educates the future repatriate by providing him with information on every aspect of the Armenian-Soviet reality, emphasizing the possibility of finally receiving a true Armenian education, that gives him the opportunity of completely immersing himself in the Armenian world.¹⁴

The decision to leave would result in a resurgence of cultural consciousness, particularly in a linguistic, cultural, and historical awareness.¹⁵ The language issue is crucial to the political debate and an integral component of Armenian identity. The progressive press does its utmost to bridge the two language realities, overcoming regional linguistic distinctions and therefore emphasizing an image of oneness.

Despite emphasizing how little linguistic uniformity existed within the same community in the 1940s, *Ararad* advocates for a greater emphasis on recognizing oneself as an Armenian and, above all, recognizing the ASSR as the official Armenian nation. The diaspora Armenian

K. (1946). "Ներգաղթի նշանակութեան շուրջ" (About the Repatriation's Meaning). *Zartongk*, 22 May 1946.

13 "Արարատ" (Ararad). *Zartongk*, 7 May 1946.

14 Krikorian, M. (1946). "Սովետ. Հայաստանի մայրաքաղաքը" (The Capital of Soviet Armenia). *Ararad*, 27 April 1946. Many articles about the Soviet world focus on Yerevan, which has an iconic function that, as Ter Minassian notes, makes it an Armenian Jerusalem (Ter Minassian 2007a, 89-93; 2007b, 261).

15 Nazar, N. (1946). "Սովիետ Միութեան որոշումը հայկական ներգաղթի համար" (The Soviet Union's Decision to Repatriate Armenians). *Zartongk*, 27 January 1946.

whether Turkish-speaking or Armenian-speaking, is an Armenian. Only in Armenia, the immortal homeland of our grandparents, can we guarantee our national physical existence, only in our homeland are our language, tradition, culture, progress and civilisation guaranteed. (“Բաց խօսք Լիբանանի եւ Սուրիոյ հայ ունեւորներուն” (Open speech to the rich Armenians of Lebanon and Syria. *Ararad*, 22 June 1946)

Thus, another barrier to the manifestation of the Armenian identity is so removed, because only in the homeland the Armenian subject will be able to recover its full dimension as a nation, only in ASSR Armenian will be the language of national reality. This perspective emphasizes Armenian history, territoriality, customs, and shared cultural values (Payaslyan 2010, 107). The desire to create a uniform and united community goes beyond the reality of the Armenian people’s conditions, an obstacle that will reveal itself insuperable when diasporic Armenians are actually transferred to ASSR: as a matter of fact the language will be one of the many hindrances that make communication and integration difficult between the two communities (Laycock 2015, 113; Lehmann 2012, 198-200).

By addressing such issues, the newspaper becomes a sounding board for Soviet propaganda themes, taking up the official version point by point, with the actual Armenia at the core. Within the column of the newspaper, these descriptions are components of a coherent narrative that depicts the socialist world. In this scenario, the decision of returning removes a slew of impediments and issues that life in the diaspora had not been able to overcome.

Parallel to similar themes, particularly in the years 1946-47 *Ararad* and with less emphasis *Zartonk* develop another topic that gives a new impetus to the idea of national unity: the progressive side united in propagating that sense of betrayal, of injustice perpetrated not only by the Ottoman Empire and then the Turkish Republic, but also by the Great Powers as a whole, appears in stark contrast to the Soviet Union’s positive image. Thanks to the Soviet people’s support and protection, thanks to his leader, Stalin, the Armenian people have survived and are undergoing a process of rebirth.¹⁶ The di-

16 Gharib, A. (1946). “1946-ի սեմէն յետադարձ ակնարկմը 1945-ին վրայ” (A Retrospective Overview of 1945 from the Threshold of 1946). *Ararad*, 5 January; Eldjianian, A. (1946). “ներգաղթի Առաջին կարաւանը դէպի Աւետեաց երկիր” (The First Repatriation Caravan to the Promised Land). *Ararad*, 4 June; Gharib, A. (1946). “ներգաղթը և Հնչակյան կուսակցութիւնը” (Repatriation and the Hunchak Party). *Ararad*, 18 September; Temirdjian, T. (1946). “Հայութեան ներգաղթը: նրանք հայրենիք են վերադարձում” (Armenian Repatriation. They Return to their Homeland). *Zartonk*, 24 January; A.B. (1946). “Չայն մը եւս Հայրենիքէն” (Another Voice from Homeland). *Zartonk*, 6 February; “ներգաղթը և հայ դատը” (Repatriation and the Armenian Cause). *Zartonk*, 7 February; “Ստեղծում պետականութեան” (Creating Statehood). *Zartonk*,

aspora has a specific responsibility to assist “our homeland and its flock”,¹⁷ inhabiting the Soviet territory. The organizations of the diasporic system, thanks to their characteristic nature, are entrusted with the function of mediator between the motherland and the Armenian communities. The support provided to the ASSR throughout the last 25 years has enabled the Armenian state to become stronger. At the same time, the diaspora was empowered by forging an unbreakable tie with their homeland.¹⁸ *Ararad* points out how only ASSR provides a safe haven, and offers a political, social, economic, and geographical solution to the Armenian Cause.

As Nalbantian wrote (Nalbantian 2019, 96-7) “Newspapers [...] evoked Armenian suffering and loss and Armenian bravery”. Commenting on the Communist Party of Armenia’s repatriation initiative, *Zartonk* celebrates the political choice of Eastern Armenians by recalling their participation in the World War II and emphasizing the Armenian people’s military capabilities, qualities that have distinguished them over the centuries and are now reinvigorated by their love to their homeland.¹⁹ The integration of the Armenian national community into the winners’ camp by diasporic progressive entities enables a more favorable reading of Armenian historical events.²⁰

As American Armenian historian Ara Sanjian noted in his lecture, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation tempered the tone of the political confrontation that juxtaposed the USSR and the Dashnak before the outbreak of World War II and in the immediate aftermath (Sanjian 2018, unpublished).

Dashnak and *Aztag* assert that the repatriation decision would renew the Armenian feeling of belonging and globally accelerate all the processes that had previously obstructed the realization of a unified Armenia. At the same time, *Aztag* questions if repatriation is a sufficient requirement for the restitution of Turkish provinces to the Armenian republic.

It seems to be two issues on which the newspaper is not willing to renounce: the idea of a free, independent, and unified Armenia, and the Party’s political autonomy, which at this moment does not entail dismissing partnership with progressive forces. The publication promotes the Armenian repatriation program while supporting

14 April; Ghilian, K. (1946). “Շնորհավոր Ներգաղթը” (Happy Repatriation). *Zartonk*, 24 June.

17 Dahyian (1946). “Մեր ուղին” (Our Path). *Ararad*, 8 June 1946.

18 Dahyian (1946). “Մեր ուղին” (Our Path). *Ararad*, 8 June 1946.

19 “Սովիեթ վարչաչափը” (Soviet Administration). *Zartonk*, 3 February 1946.

20 Baykar (1946). “Ներգաղթը կը սկսի” (Repatriation Begins). *Zartonk*, 25 January; prof. Bashindjan (1946). “Գաշնակները Հիթլերեան ծառայութեան մէջ” (ARF at Hitler’s Disposal). *Zartonk*, 11 January 1946.

membership in the federation's political agenda, that includes territorial claims beyond the provinces of Kars and Ardahan to Bitlis, Erzeroum, and Van.²¹ This goal is embedded in the Party's and its allied publications' fundamentalist view of the Armenian Cause.²² The paper's fervour on the Armenian question indicates the prominence it maintains in the notion of an Armenian homeland.

In contrast to Ramgavar, the acknowledgment of Soviet Armenia as a homeland and legitimate country to whom the responsibilities of the Armenian Cause are eventually delegated is not discussed. At this point the necessity to theorize a legal foundation and an institutional form for historical Armenian rights, in line with party policy, at this juncture damaged the Revolutionary Federation's cohesiveness while also weakened *Aztag's* journalists' dialogical firmness to weaken.

The new international structures that emerged in the years after the end of World War II convinced the Dashnak protagonists that an intervention in favour of repatriation was both essential and vital in order to reinforce and sanction the Federation's position within the Armenian nation. *Aztag* opens the year 1946 with an editorial devoted to the new determination to face the issue of the Turkish government's seizure and control of Armenian territories. *Aztag's* point of view is marked above all by its steadfastness in claiming Turkish Armenia, not competing with USSR for the monopoly over the Armenian Cause and recognizing in some way the Soviet government as protector of the oppressed, while attaching its reliance to the resolution of the Armenian problem. This is also reflected in the way repatriation news are reported. In fact, they are often limited to official information about the progress of the organization's repatriation programme. This newspaper's dispassionate account of repatriation action distinguishes it from the progressive press, that sometimes favours an elegiac intensity, sometimes a description characterized by ideological rhetoric. According to *Ararad* and *Zartonk*, this contradiction is the evidence of the Armenian Federation's and the *Aztag* newspaper's poor reliability and antagonism to the Nerkaght phenomenon.

According to *Aztag's* inclusive vision, following the demands of patriotism, the Armenian, should depart for the motherland, Armenia, which is not simply defined as ASSR. In articles replying to allegations made by the Armenian Communist newspaper, *Joghvourti Tzain*, *Aztag* emphasizes the need of seeing the unity of Armenian

21 *Aztag*, 1 January 1946; “Տօքթ. Հ. Զաղլասեան տեղեկութիւններ կուսայ Սուրիոյ եւ Լիբանանի հայերու մասին” (Dr. Çallasean Provides Information About Armenians of Syria and Lebanon). *Aztag*, 19 January 1946; “Ռուսերը Էրզրումն ալ կուզեն” (Russians Also Want Erzeroum). *Aztag*, 20 March 1946; “Ռուսիս պահանջեց Կարս ու Արասիանը” (Armenia Demands Kars and Ardahan). *Aztag*, 10 April 1946.

22 “Հաիկ. Դատը” (Armenian Cause). *Aztag*, 4 July 1946.

ancestral territories come to fruition, because only at that point the Armenian dream can be achieved, for which heroes have fought and noble sons have died.²³

The newspaper's stance changes in July, when *Aztag* begins to express its dissatisfaction with the ASSR's national identifications. *Aztag's* team thinks that Moscow had no intention of reclaiming the provinces of Kars and Ardahan, just as it had no intention of resolving the Armenian Cause. Simultaneously, rumours of the program's shortcomings circulated, and criticism against the newspaper and the party persisted, prompting the Dashnak to change its former stance on repatriation. On September 1, 1946 the journalist Sassun writes an important editorial devoted to the Dardanelles question, which would mark the beginning of a break from the previously sought political equilibrium, an opportunity to discuss Soviet political action as well as that of the Armenian-Lebanese parties.²⁴

The publication appeals for a reinterpretation of the Armenian-Soviet state's policy, proving the viability of other pathways more suitable to reaching the same goal. *Aztag* invites the reader to take note of the insufficient political action that has been so far undertaken in international circles thus far, and to concretize a unity of purpose for which the Dashnak is the flag bearer. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation's call for political superiority, whose primary goal at this point appears to be the resolution of the Armenian Cause, highlights the superficiality of Armenian-Soviet organisations and government officials' political actions.

Repatriation, as well as the controversy it provokes, increases prejudice and divisiveness. National unity around the Armenian cause, the motherland, has been subordinated to political objectives, blocking action and legitimizing Dashnak's skepticism by those political groups who claimed to be champions of the Armenian question but turned out to be political vassals of the USSR.

3 Contrasting Narratives

The first Lebanese parliamentary election after the independence, held in 1947, takes place in a burning electoral climate. Bishara el-Khoury, the first President of independent Lebanon, and the politically dominant coalition the Constitutional Bloc intend to maintain their power by winning these elections, in order to secure a majority

23 “Հայաստան եւ ոչ թէ Մատակարար” (Armenia and not Madagascar). *Aztag*, 12 May 1946.

24 Sassun (1946). “Տարսանէլի խնդիրը եւ հայկական հարցը” (The Dardanelles Problem and the Armenian Question). *Aztag*, 1 September 1946s.

that would ensure el-Khoury' re-election as president (Chaitani 2007; Traboulsi 2012; Migliorino 2008, 94-5; Attié 2004, 25-9).

In the Armenian community, the battle for the appointment of two Armenian political representatives rekindles the never-ending fight between the parties and widens the community's schism.

At the same time it determinates a re-focus on the needs of the community on Lebanese space. In a way, repatriation and the so discussed Homeland become the frame of reference within which Armenian-Lebanese issues are discussed, but with a language that has been altered by the Cold War dynamics and, as a consequence has produced two conflicting narratives i.e. communist/fascist, patriot/homeland's enemy (Sahakyan 2015).²⁵ Discrediting the counterpart as homeland's enemy, a carrier of corruption and immorality becomes functional in the electoral context to the assumption of the power in Parliament. The relationship with Lebanese political groups is increasingly being emphasized in order to demonstrate their commitment to the Lebanese population, which has embraced the displaced Armenians since the 1920s. In this case, election preference for one list or another is also a demonstration of friendship and loyalty to the Lebanese people. Voting proves how the Armenian community has been integrated into the Lebanese world, accepted, and walks alongside its Lebanese brothers. Since the Armenian parties belong to two opposing camps in the Lebanese political spectrum, *Aztag's* criticism of repatriation and the ASSR, *Ararad* and *Zartonk's* references to the ARF's past and present alliances, including contacts with the Young Turks, Turkey's US ally, reinforce an ideological reference framework that is functional to the definition of the Lebanese camp to which the Armenian parties belong. The ARF supports an alliance with Lebanese pro-government and pro-Western forces, while the Ramgavar and Hunchaks announce the foundation of the Armenian Democratic Front, which will be a component of the Lebanese Democratic List (Messerlian 2014, 89-91).

The Armenian political ideologies mirror those of the Lebanese coalition to which the party participates. By alluding to matters concerning the Armenian world, the newspapers define who is a real Armenian patriot and a loyal Lebanese.

Aztag's editors employ the rhetorical appeal to people's cohesion as a means of demonstrating to the reader the treachery perpetrated by their adversaries. Through repatriation, Soviet Armenia operated as a separating factor, igniting a dispute centered mostly on the notion of what being an Armenian means, what values must be adopt, and what region must be recognized as one's own homeland.²⁶

²⁵ *Aztag*, 25 May 1947.

²⁶ “Պոլշեիկեան: դաւերն ու ճիւղները” (Bolsheviks. Conspiracies and Crimes). *Aztag*, 18 June 1947; “Տարբերութիւնը մեր եւ անոնց միջեւ” (The Difference Between Us

Through its media the Dashnak, denounces Hunchak and Ramgavar camouflaged's Bolshevism, depicting itself as a real Armenian, while the opponents are branded as traitors, conspirators, and communist operatives without principles, a danger to the Armenian diaspora and its host nation.

The label of enemy of the Armenian homeland here also serves as a warning to Armenians living in Lebanon, since it undermines the body of the Lebanese nation itself.

The display of what a newspaper deems to be homeland is also a chance to offer an identity-political reflection. What and where the homeland is differs depending on which political movement we are speaking of. It positions itself as the sole source of Armenianness, having developed a set of moral and political norms over time.

Aztag discusses how the Armenian people have always been exposed to mass movements, whether bloody or not; yet, at this moment, repatriation, as decreed by the Soviet Union, is hard to endorse precisely because it tacitly contradicts the Armenian cause in its current conditions. Acknowledging the way repatriation occurred would imply to accept Armenia's geographical immutability. Simultaneously, siding with Ramgavar and Hunchak would mean to support a political party that permitted the Bolsheviks, Stalin, to enter the diaspora, exploiting and eroding its spiritual harmony.²⁷

The Armenian Federation portrayed itself as the sole organization capable of caring for the Armenian people, while the ASSR proved to be Stalin's puppet. No promise was fulfilled.

Repatriation did take place to some extent, but it was only one step in a wider process that should have been concluded in the settlement of the Armenian Cause.

According to *Zartok*, the Federation's national ambition for a free, independent, and unified Armenia, conditioned by the anti-communist world's triumph, displays its irrationality by being out of context with the worldwide situation.²⁸ According to *Zartok*, blind faith in an inevitable victory, which was based on the moralistic myth of the final triumph of justice leads to the ARF's dissociation from the historical context, and reveals how its representation focuses more on a project of diasporic identity construction more than on homeland, a self-perception susceptible to multiple readjustments in the last thirty years.

Ararad responds to the Armenian Revolutionary Federation's claims with in-depth essays about the party's history. Articles ex-

and Them). *Aztag*, 19 June 1947.

²⁷ Housaper (1947). "Ի՞նչ ընենք" (What Should We Do?). *Aztag*, 23 January 1947.

²⁸ "Եւ սննոց պատուի. ժողովը" (And their Parliamentary Assembly). *Zartok*, 10 September 1947.

amining the link between Hunchak and the Armenian revolution,²⁹ the Armenian cause yesterday and today,³⁰ together with the successes obtained in the years serve only to demonstrate Hunchak's historical continuity to the reader.³¹ The desire to establish not only a political but also an ethical model originates primarily from the need, first and foremost, to challenge representations of reality that were considered bearers of falsehood and moral corruption;³² secondarily, from the determination to transform every Armenian into a 'vigilant observer' of reality, aware of his rights as a citizen and as a member of a nation.

The strong identifications that defined the two camps' split institutionalized the factions. There is a rising number of publications that investigate the ARF's journey as a political institution, founded at the end of the nineteenth century, and its potential to become the unchallenged leader of the Armenian political sphere. In the past, the goals of the repatriation phenomenon and how it was organized were criticized; now, its social and, above all, symbolic value is being called into doubt.

If the first point has been called into question since May 1947, when the newspaper took an increasingly contradictory stance in defining what cannot be Armenia according to a logic that equates the regime's and the ARF's political actions, and inserted in the discussion a different image of the party as the bearer of harmony and Armenianness into the discussion, the second appears more complex.

4 Conclusion

The new year highlights the novelty of repatriation as the subject of polemical literature, the most important element that gave origin to the conditions of the Armenian debate and political crisis.

It's no surprise that *Aztag* burst into the scene more aggressively than the previous year. As the peculiarities of the Lebanese system allow local chapters of Armenian parties to engage in the political

29 Gidour (1947). "Հայ յեղափոխութեան ծագումն ու զարգացումը եւ Հնչակեան կուսակցութիւնը" (The Origin and Development of the Armenian Revolution and the Hunchak Party). *Ararad*, 3-4 April 1947.

30 Gidour (1947). "Հայ Հարցի, երեկ և այսօր" (Armenian Cause, Yesterday and Today). *Ararad*, 10 May 1947.

31 "Հաղթանակներ" (Victories). *Ararad*, 15 May 1947.

32 Nayiri, J. (1947). "Բարոյականության և սիրո ըմբռնումը խորհրդահայ գրականության մեջ" (The Understanding of Morality and Love in Soviet Armenian Literature). *Ararad*, 16 December 1947. The presentation of Armenian-Soviet literature provides an opportunity to show how morality, friendship, brotherhood, fundamental traits of the Armenian people, are free to express themselves on Soviet soil.

process and place themselves within the parliamentary spectrum, no effort is spared in inundating the population with political propaganda. In order to achieve the goal, i.e. the two Armenian-Orthodox seats in the Lebanese parliament, a sharpening of words is generated, which in the long run is useful to 'undermine' the opponent's ideological roots. Moments of disagreement appear to precipitate the conflict that will eventually devolve into an 'Armenian war'. Attempts to capture power throughout this decade result in a radicalization of the identification process, allowing the recovery of leitmotifs linked to certain parties and forcing a reinterpretation of them in the present.

Too frequently, the newspaper does not succeed to give voice to the popular sentiment; this is no longer possible, now that the party claims to be the leader of the next generation, leading by thought, example, and action. The journalistic team understands the current fears and passions. The necessary confrontation with repatriation, which the newspaper considers critical at this time, will serve as the foundation for a broader formulation in the coming years: the vision of Armenia as a homeland illegitimately occupied by a hostile force, and the Armenian identity structured around the struggle for its liberation.

Propaganda work in the diaspora for the salvation of the Armenian people is the means that confers importance to knowledge and mobilisation, which are as worthy as the return of the homeland, since it aims to restore a common sense of national belonging, whose aspiration is the recognition of the right of Armenians to have an autonomous national centre. It is proposed to live in diaspora as citizens of their host societies, while recovering its self-awareness as a nation, without giving up the consciousness of being members of a homeland.

To defeat the progressive camp, Armenians must first consider themselves as people seeking freedom and independence, first and foremost from a cultural and political perspective. Opponents would come to understand that repatriation is not viewed as a migratory movement of a population deprived of their country, but rather as an identity path that must lead Armenians to their motherland.

At the end of 1948, the possibility of an agreement between the various Armenian political entities was still a long way off. The language of confrontation, used retroactively at every opportunity, complicates the Armenian political landscape by targeting the Soviet Armenia, repatriation, Stalin, and the USSR on the one hand, and the Dashnaktsutsun, its ruling allies, its history of dubious morality, and US foreign policies on the other. Divided viewpoints based on national ethos exhibit a proclivity for diverse interpretations in subjects of Armenian interest. The initial excitement produced by the authorization to a return for the Armenians living in the diaspora has been eclipsed by considerations primarily related to the Lebanese Armenian society.

The journalistic developments in 1946-47 follow two tracks: the first one, about the ASSR, repatriation, and the many definitions of the Armenian people, is incorporated into the second, about the political action of Armenian parties inside the framework of the Lebanese system. The issue of the Armenian homeland and the resolution of the Armenian cause are introduced and debated in direct relation to the changes and transformations affecting Lebanese society. Let us consider the May 1947 legislative elections: the notion of the Armenian homeland is utilized to counter the opposing national building in Lebanon.

The battle between Armenian publications in Lebanon, which are expression of the political parties, is mostly about the authority to represent Armenians in Lebanese power structures. As a consequence, the national question becomes the framework where multiple discussions of issues closely related to community life are articulated, and, borrowing language from the Cold War context, introduces the question of self-determination in relation to the definition of what being a nation means. Between 1946 and 1947, the building of the image of a specific homeland of reference is carried to extremes, favouring polarization of political stances through a process of juxtaposition of the single vision with the one created by the opposing faction. Armenia as a nation is represented through a process of idealisation and abstraction. The attributes of the authentic Armenian, the patriot, as represented by *Zartonk*, *Ararad*, and *Aztag*, are proposed in a polemical debate with the Other, defining and synthesising the characteristic features of the anti-Armenian, and favouring an exclusive identifying paradigm.

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