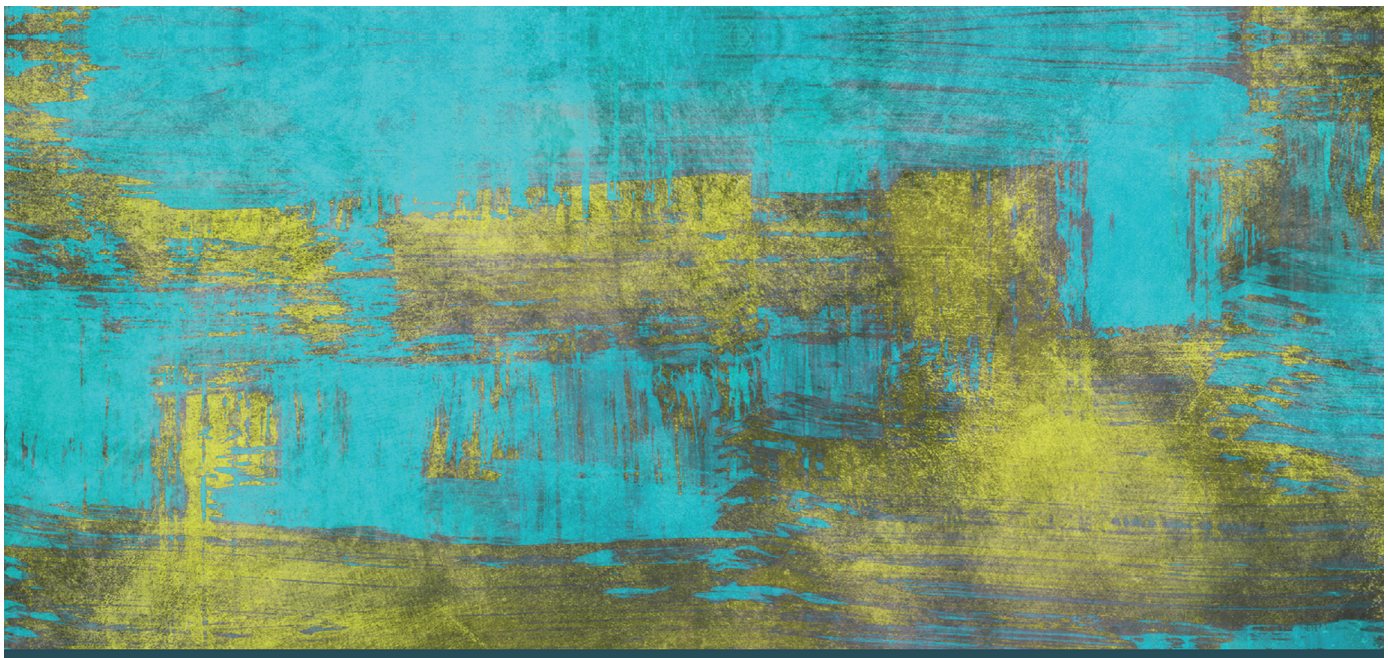
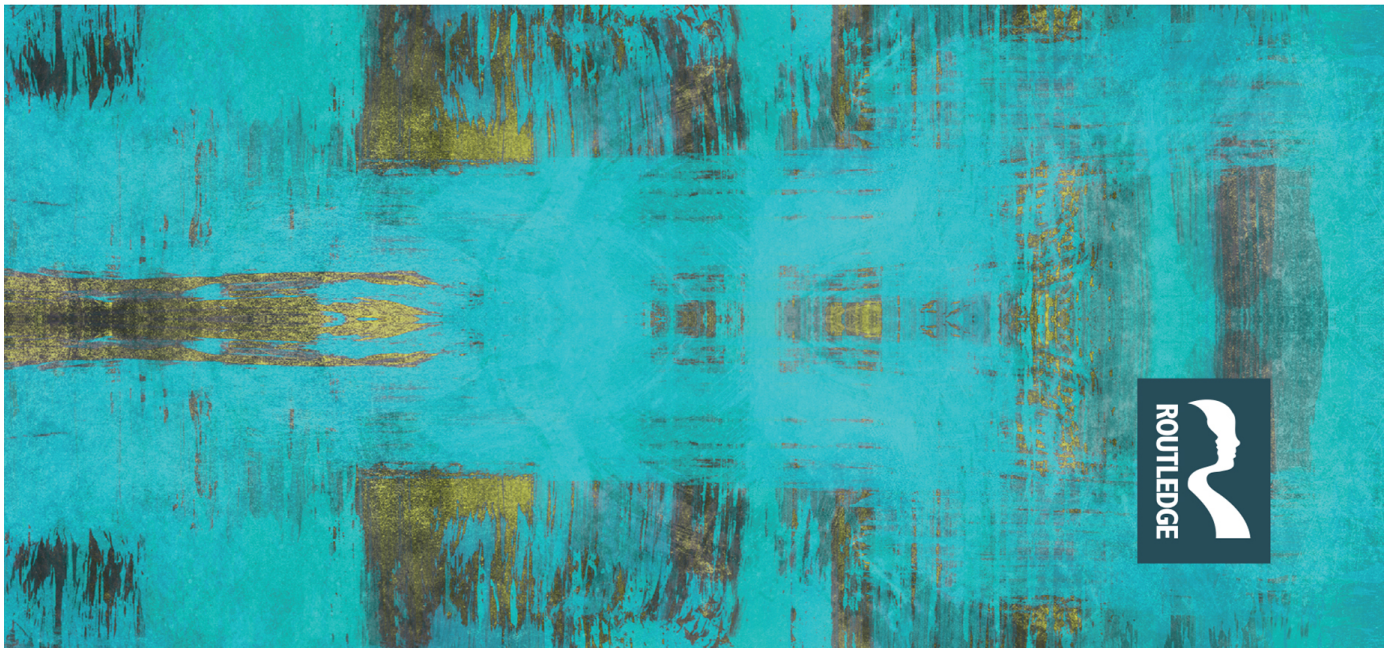


Mass Violence in Modern History

CRITICAL APPROACHES TO GENOCIDE

HISTORY, POLITICS AND AESTHETICS OF 1915

Edited by
Hülya Adak, Fatma Müge Göçek and
Ronald Grigor Suny



Part IV

Gender and Sexuality

13 Finding Place in Exile

Queer Armenian Voices Speak

Deanna Cachoian-Schanz

Prelude: The Construction of the Armenian Transnation's Others By Way of National Imagery

"How can I be without border?…" writes Julia Kristeva on abjection: "…That elsewhere that I imagine beyond the present, or that I so that I might, in a present time, speak to you, conceive of you—it is now here, jetted, abjected, into 'my' world."[1] The powers of horror.

When reflecting on Kristeva's question, I happened upon two images that aptly illustrate the quintessential "others" of the Armenian transnation: the first, the nonreproductive, non-heteronormative sexual subject, or, the queer; the second, the Turkish nation.[2]

Image One. Setting: Armenia, blue skies on a sunny day in spring. Imagine: the photographer places their back to a church and faces the tufa-stone arch that lines the perimeter of the church courtyard; the arch frames the lens, which then frames the image for the viewer. Captured for posterity: the profiles of a newlywed couple, man and woman, standing underneath the arch-frame. Stage right, the bride in a long, sleeveless white dress, her veil flowing behind her in the wind like the wing of a dove; one-meter stage left, the groom dons a navy blue suit. Smiling, they face each other, each with one arm outstretched. As they reach toward one another, their hands motion into the distance: just beyond the courtyard, across the haze of the arid plains of the Armenian highland, stands Mount Ararat, snowcapped, and center stage. His left hand seems to touch the base of *Sis,* or Little Ararat, and hers to *Masis*, or Greater Ararat. Ararat, which functions as one of the many (territorial) symbols of Armenian national (be)longing, looks here in the distance as a lopsided, breast-shaped mountain. The wedding photo depicts the quotidian championing of heteronormative reproductivity in Armenian nationalist discourse, demonstrating how that discourse is simultaneously sheathed in territorial land claims that interpellate Armenian identity. Ararat rests just over the Armenian border, which became Turkish territory shortly following the genocide.[3] In this photo, the mountain stands as the couple's witness, looming in the background to fortify their union both to each other and as Armenians to lands lost. The photo suggests hope: as the couple unites, and *through their union*, their Armenian subjectivities will also call upon the unification of the Armenian nation to lost historic territory. This union—of man, woman, and land—is also sanctified by the arch they stand underneath in the foreground—the

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divine halo of this national project (of reproduction and reparations). While the photo may also be read as a celebration of continuity and perseverance, the various layers of its national symbolism also reiterate and reinforce a heterosexual Armenian identity that is intrinsically tied to nationalist longings and land claims.

Image Two. Setting: the Internet, April showers under cloudy skies as virtual storms pour. Below is a rendition of the digital sketch (Figure 13.1) re-posted with further commentary by "Araz B," a member of the closed Facebook group "Birthright Armenia Alumni,"[4] on April 29, 2016.

The commentary posted with the original image reads:

> Beautiful Map. Lets not forget what belongs to us. WE WILL have this land back, as long as we claim it, it is ours, and one day it will be a part of Armenia. Let continue teaching these precious lessons to the new generations. It's a struggle, it's a fight, but it is ours, it is our Birthright.[5]

The figure of the feminized Mother (or Sister) Armenia is a redrawing of a popular national imaginaire: the silhouette of the borders of modern-day Armenia, a woman facing west. A reminder for posterity: not only is the figure of the Armenian nation here feminized as Mother/Sister/Virgin Armenia, but her image drips with longing as a result of lands lost after genocide. As she looks toward "Western Armenia," otherwise known as Eastern Anatolia, Eastern Turkey, and most recently with the struggle for Kurdish self-determination, Kurdistan, her teardrops

Figure 13.1 Artist rendition of digital image posted by Araz B.

Image by Benedetta C. Vialli, 2022. Printed with permission of artist.

form (or feed) Lake Van—the historical site of the Armenian pantheon, popular Armenian folklore, and later the eight-centuries long location of an independent see of the Armenian Apostolic church. The image of contemporary Lady Armenia in tears along with the following angry comment that claims to re-possess land, bespeaks an unhealed wound denied closure, which as the comments suggest, are due to the deferred promise of longing's fulfillment: recognition and reparations after genocide. To reclaim land is couched in a strong line of nationalist discourse and militarism that transcends generations throughout the transnation as their birthright inherited through heterosexual reproduction. Armenians inherit the land through blood—blood ties that at once were cut off through murder and displacement but that also continue and are re-legitimated through procreation with other Armenians as an act of resistance to the genocidal will.

Dis-Locating Home: Framing the Transnation, Framing Diaspora

Writes Edward Said in "Reflections on Exile": "Exile is never the state of being satisfied, placid, or secure… Exile is life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew."[6]

As the images above already attest, it is perhaps by now a commonly accepted statement that the imagined community of the nation is a highly gendered construct, dependent upon patriarchal tropes that personify it as a woman. It may also be obvious to say that it is a *normative* construct. Nations do not only position women as national mothers or daughters—the bearers of tradition and the mother tongue—but also as authenticators and protectors of national culture and the home.[7] As it is the nation's task to both morally valorize and protect its longevity by claims to bodies and lands—and at times violently—only those who either protect its honor or *reproduce* it are among its legitimate members. Emptied of sexuality or impregnated with it, it is only a certain kind of woman, the chaste, honorable *asexual* woman or the *heterosexual* woman who guarantees the nation's futurity, who can embody this role. Ironically, then, while metaphorically conceptualized as female, the nation is a highly homosocial public sphere that reinforces male kinship, and in which women are participatory through their affiliations with male citizens: citizenship through marriage, mediated participation in the political sphere, the taking on of the male's family name, the reproduction of breadwinning sons or soldiers, etc.[8] Perhaps then it becomes less obvious to say that as effacements to normative (reproductive) sexuality, not only do homosexual and queer women deviate from the preservational codes of patriarchy and their roles as honorable virgin daughters or dutiful national mothers; as heterogeneous subjects, they challenge the idea that a nation has a "unified, coherent, and normative national identity."[9] As sexual dissidents and/or nonreproductive subjects, they instead become, in the words of Roland Barthes, the nation's naturalized Other, "a scandal which threatens"[10] the majority's existence; a threat to the security of the home. Thus, showing how national discourse frames heterosexuality as normative also illustrates how it is integral to the reinforcement and reproduction of the

nation-state. Not only then is the nation a gendered construct; it is also a highly heteronormative one.

Unsettling such nationalist logics, several anthropologists, literary critics and feminist scholars working on Turkey and Armenia have urged for a deeper engagement with the intersections of gender, sexuality, patriarchy, nationalism and constructions of ethnic identity.[11] Like most articulations of nationalist ideology, gendered tropes are employed in both contexts as justifications by those who call for the violent protection and preservation of the nation and its borders. As the work of Lerna Ekmekçioğlu (2016) has most recently argued, this is certainly the case for the Armenian "nation," and especially for Armenians in Turkey, who first suffered massacres, and then a genocide by the Ottoman Turks in 1915;[12] the event which heralded the modern Armenian diaspora.

How, then, might a physical distance from the nation or originary "homeland"—a type of (diasporic) exile—complicate national identity or belonging? Further, in what ways do normative constructions of gender and sexuality[13] help to reify and preserve the limits of belonging in a diaspora? As Kassabian and Kazanjian (1998) remind, nationalist discourses are often echoed even more acutely in their diasporic reverberations.[14] The Armenian nation-state and its diaspora—or what Khachig Tölölyan dubs the Armenian transnation—stabilizes itself through the imaginaire of a legitimate "homeland,"[15] which encompasses the territories of the modern-day Republic of Armenia *in addition to* the historic Armenian territories of Eastern Turkey that were transferred[16] to the Turkish Republic shortly following the genocide. Drawing attention to the particularity of genocidal trauma which, for Armenians, includes territorial loss, Arlene Avakian (2010) has urged us to explore the differential psychological effects of nationalism and genocide on subsequent generations of men and women, asking us consider how gendered logics and memories related to genocide and loss shape Armenian cultural institutions, especially in the diaspora. Importantly, Avakian underscores how the trauma of ethnic annihilation further incites and reinforces the *repeated*[17] normative performances of masculinity, femininity and sexuality in post-genocide generations of people who identify as Armenian.[18] It is within this framework that anthropologist Nelli Sargsyan-Pittman and I have argued that in order to promote an uncorrupted and legitimate home-centered identity at a distance, and in spite of traumatic loss, the Armenian heterosexual becomes the privileged subject who can both inherit belonging to the homeland through their Armenian parents and/or the "mother" tongue, as well as preserve its fixity through time and transnational space via heterosexual reproduction with other Armenians. As such, the heteronormative Armenian becomes the subject of the preservationist, nationalist ideology of the Armenian transnation or "homeland" *par excellence*.[19]

If home and belonging in the Armenian diasporic imaginaire are consolidated through heteronormative belonging to the Armenian nation, then, as Gayatri Gopinath puts it, the queer diasporic woman is doubly exiled and de-legitimated: first, because she lives outside the bounds of the homeland; and second, because she does not fit into the patriarchal, heterosexist national script. Yet, because Armenian diasporic subjectivity is itself predicated upon what was for most a forced-exile

following a catastrophe *still denied* by its perpetrators, the queer diasporic woman's non-normative identity, which casts her outside of legitimate claims to Armenianness, additionally forecloses her from the possibility of mourning her family's genocidal trauma. Just as much as she challenges those constructs, as a diasporic subject, she is cast out of the imagined contours of land; as a queer, of body and belonging. Yet, contrary to its various postulations as homogenous and fixed, as a transnational movement of migration, diaspora bespeaks its own ontological status as un-stable and plural. In this sense, diaspora shares more in common than not with queer[20] as a site of ongoing negotiation.[21]

This essay is both a literary and activist intervention, exploring the stakes of the oppositional constructs of queer sexuality and heteronormative, nationalist Armenian identity—and how genocide might play a key and disruptive role in their articulations. Arlene Avakian's *Lion Woman's Legacy: An Armenian American Memoir* (1992) and Nancy Agabian's *Me as her again: True stories of an Armenian daughter* (2008) are the only two bildungsroman memoirs[22] published by queer women in the Armenian transnation. Striving to find place in exile as "queers" who self-identify on the spectrum of LGBTQ identity, both authors explore the exclusionary effects of nationalist discourse and provide an optics for how subjects of marginalized gender and sexual identities might reorient their subject formations and belonging within and without the hegemonic nationalist frame. As Khachig Tölölyan argues, the nation-state reaffirms homogeneity by seeking to assimilate and destroy internal difference while strictly demarcating "the difference *between* itself and what lies over its frontiers."[23] Yet, locating queer identity *within* and *as a result* of their homespaces, Avakian's and Agabian's memoirs articulate internal difference in the home/nation *as a condition of* the (diasporic) home itself. As a result, these diasporic literary productions work against what Gayatri Gopinath describes as "the violent effacements that produce the fictions of purity that lie at the heart of dominant nationalist and diasporic ideologies."[24] It is for this reason that both memoirs are subversive contributions to transnational Armenian literary production. (Re)presenting feminist, queer identity and the diasporic Armenian-American experience as inextricably bound, they provide a grounds for Armenian identity to be "imaginatively contested and transformed."[25]

Avakian and Agabian depict exile in several narrative permutations, a "polarity of existence," Agabian explains, as typical to the "cross-cultural American experience… a feeling of never fully being yourself, in both the predominantly white world and in the traditional ethnic community of your family."[26] The authors describe their feelings of exile from both Armenian and American communities due to their perceived non-white/"ethnic" identities in the United States, and because of their feminist politics and lesbian/queer identities within the Armenian-American community. As each of the narratives' iterations of exile deserves a paper in itself, this intervention focuses on the interweaving themes of exile and belonging as the authors—both of whom bear witness to gendered memories of exile following the Armenian Genocide[27]—link their feminist/queer bildungsromane to their experience in their Armenian-American homespaces.

The following section, "Queer Exile" juxtaposes the memoirists' coming-of-age stories vis-à-vis their gender and sexual non-conformity in the Armenian-American diaspora, written in two Acts. In "Linking Stories: Writing Queer," I explore the function of the oral history transcripts—first-person survival accounts of the Armenian Genocide narrated by their grandmothers—which the memoirists weave into their first-person narrations toward the end of their stories. Ultimately, the authors utilize their grandmothers' survival stories to negotiate their own deviant feminist and sexual identity formations within the heteronormative frame of national identity. Addressing, then, the reasons to consider these works queer texts beyond their content, I suggest that the intergenerational mixing of first-person voices in the memoirs creates a structural, metaphysical dual-space of home/exile: a queer time and space in which the authors' queer subjectivities—once located outside and as antithetical to the diasporic Armenian home—are bound within it. Finally, in "When Others Collide: Nationalist Backlash Against Sexual Non-Conformity in the Armenian Transnation," I consider how the layering of such intergenerational narratives, and a queer/feminist disruption of the homespace, call for particular urgency to listen to these voices 100 years after the Armenian Genocide.

Queer Exile

Writes Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck in *Life/Lines*: "She understands that identity is dangerous when stabilized."[28] Enter Queer Exile, stage left.

Act One: Lion Woman's Legacy

Arlene Avakian's *Lion Woman's Legacy: An Armenian-American Memoir* (1992) explores the limits of a first-generation Armenian-American woman's belonging. Born to Armenian-Turkish and Armenian-Persian immigrants to New York City in the 1950s, Arlene is both the daughter and granddaughter of genocide survivors. To my knowledge, Avakian's memoir, published in 1992 by The Feminist Press in New York City in the spirit of second-wave feminist texts, is the first (diasporic) Armenian autobiography to breach the topic of lesbianism. Unsurprisingly, the book has received little attention within the Armenian-American community.

Avakian comes of age in the Armenian-speaking community of Washington Heights in the 1950s, where she describes the family life of her homespace and "outside" life as socially and linguistically separated: the former is Armenian, and the latter, American. Arlene admits, "I remember little of those early school years because I wasn't fluent in English and because of the separations between school and the rest of my life."[29] Yet, the homespace is equally as illusive:

> I was hard put to answer what an Armenian was… I knew that my mother came from Turkey and my father from Persia, but they were definitely not Turks or Persians. Where was Armenia on the map?… Though I knew that my father had lived in Russia and that Uncle Alex had fought in the Russian army, I knew that we were not Russians. Nothing about being Armenian was clear…[30]

Here, the geographic dislocations of diasporic movement both determine Arlene's transnational subjectivity yet also disorient her: without a fixed homeland, belonging is un-locatable.

Extending first from the homespace, gender becomes instrumental in regulating the limits of Arlene's belonging to both Armenian and American identities throughout the memoir. As what Ekmekçioğlu later describes as the particular gendered configuration of the Armenian homespace during the nation re-building project in post-genocide Turkey, the outside, political sphere that comingles with non-Armenians in Avakian's memoir belongs to the realm of men, while the home, the Armenian language, its reproduction and protection are the responsibility of women.[31] Avakian describes the measure of a legitimate Armenian man in her family as based primarily on his ancestral (heteroreproductive) inheritance of Armenianness, while his performance of Armenianness mattered little. Her younger brother Paul does not speak Armenian like his older sister, yet he inherits both the family business and the patrilineal legacy of his ethnic identity while his sister is foreclosed both; Americanization does not challenge Paul's identity as an Armenian. Instead, Avakian describes the measures of "true" Armenianness as qualitative and contingent for women in her household, including: their level of Armenian language fluency; the extent to which they kept silent (especially during political discussions); and the extent to which they remained "homebound," resisting the threatening tendencies of independence espoused by American women who would travel unattended from uptown to downtown Manhattan. As the memoir intimates, diversion from such normative ideas of womanhood questioned the very extent to which that woman was, or considered, Armenian.[32]

In such a context, Avakian's dissent from this patriarchal configuration of the homespace becomes the condition of exclusion from Armenian belonging. Her first pangs of feminist consciousness and exile are initially catalyzed by her mother and grandmother's reproduction of this structure in their gendered preference for her brother, who they called their little "pasha."[33] Arriving home from the hospital in the car after Paul is born, Arlene recalls, "[s]itting next to [my mother, grandmother and brother] I felt for the first time a circle of intimacy from which I was excluded."[34] She later paints a more vivid depiction of this exclusion:

> A few months later I saw my mother and grandmother in the dining room bending over my brother, totally absorbed. The closed circle I had sensed on the day we brought him home now included my mother. I stood apart watching them and saw the circle as double-edged. I couldn't get in, but it was also clear to me that he couldn't get out. I felt compassion for my brother who was, after all, only a baby. But the circle, closing me out and him in, was too powerful for me. The compassion faded, and I felt mostly hatred and jealousy.[35]

Yet, Arlene's (un)belonging to her homespace is not only predicated on a dissatisfaction with what she perceives as the "old-world" gender roles and patriarchal structures of Turkey and Persia. She is also resentful of the reasons for which those

gendered roles are performed *outside* of their cultural context (she reasons as a child) and reproduced in a diasporic space. When Arlene is 14, her grandmother Elmas tells her story of surviving the genocide in 1915—a story which in Avakian's family, like many families, was little discussed, and as such, was a trauma left to silently linger in the absence of recognition by its perpetrators, the international community, and sometimes its victims. Elmas' telling of her story marks an integral turning point in Arlene's (dis)orientation away from her Armenian homespace toward her self-imposed exile in an American context. One day, behind closed doors in their family apartment, Elmas takes Arlene aside to recount the disappearance of her husband, her deportation and exile along with her children from their home in Kastemoni, Turkey, and her conversion to Islam which secured her children's lives as atrocities unfolded. Yet, a young Arlene regrets having heard it:

> Why would I want to know about people who were unknown to most of the world, who were hated so much when they were recognized that they were forced to leave their homes and to give up their religion, who were even killed… It was bad enough to be unknown, strange, and different from everyone else, but it was unbearable to be despised. I would forget it.[36]

Recalling the horrors of rape, murder and displacement in Elmas' story "contributed to my drive to get as far away from being Armenian as possible. The family, with its adherence to old world traditions, *was* Armenia,"[37] writes Avakian. Here, the genocide narrative redoubles its function of exile in this re-telling. In the absence of any psychological support to cope with the effects of such a story, exile begins, again. Equating the national family with trauma and the land itself, 14-year-old Arlene not only stops speaking Armenian, but she vows to deny the memory of the genocide and to escape her Armenianness by adopting the normative gender codes of white American women that her Armenian family forbids.

> My anger began to erupt—at my mother for her strict controls over me… at the Turks for having done what they did to my family, and at my grandmother for having lived through such horror and for telling it to me. I vowed to be like my friends. *I would tweeze my eyebrows. I would wear lipstick. I would go out with boys*. And, most of all, I would get away from my family as soon as I could.[38]

Arlene's attempt to escape one rigid identity marked by normative gendered codes (which have led to her grandmother's gendered traumas during the genocide) opens the pathway for Arlene to adopt what she describes as the gendered conventions of the United States—ones that first provide her the conditions to escape her Armenianness and integrate into the American world, yet end up creating serious conflict as she struggles to liberate herself from the patriarchal and heteronormative structures of both Armenian and American communities throughout the rest of the memoir.

Responding to her frustration of always being in the in-between and then denied space because of her gendered status as a girl, Arlene distances herself from her

Armenian homespace in her teens. After she leaves home in her 20s, the memoir describes Arlene's evolution as a college student and adult alongside the Civil Rights Movement, Gay Liberation Movement and the Women's Liberation Movement, all which help her to question normative gendered conventions in both Armenian and American worlds. Provoking her Armenian community's disapproval, she flirts with racial taboos as she dates Richard, an African American man. Later in life, she transgresses the codes of monogamy with her husband Tom in order to work out *her* "sexual problems" (209) (as per Tom's diagnosis), breaking their vows of monogamy before she decides to leave her marriage. After her divorce, Arlene becomes a single, and thus, "bad mother"—the decision to leave one's husband with children was still frowned upon in her socioeconomic and cultural circle in the 1970s (238). Later as she makes lesbian friends, Arlene's prejudices about the "sickness" of being gay or the conception of "lesbians to be sick man-haters" (237) are also challenged (202–203). In becoming a feminist, a proponent of intersectionality, an academic in a patriarchal institutional setting and a lesbian ally, Arlene finds herself a stranger first to her family, but then to most of her friends, her "maternal instincts," and the anti-feminist academic institution in which she studies History and Women's Studies, eventually earning her Ed.D.

But Arlene's "turning queer"[39] and putting her activist politics to the test in her personal life takes on another dimension when she finds herself falling in love with a woman named Martha. Avakian describes their relationship through the image of building a scattered, patchwork garden, "one that broke all the traditional rules for gardens."[40] It is through this garden, perhaps a queer Eden, that Arlene feels free from family and social conventions for the first time.

It is also due to Martha's encouragement that Arlene, after a long emotional separation, begins to take stock of her grandmother's story, and the effects it had on her own life. A few years into their relationship, Arlene and Martha find themselves having heated discussions about the connections between racial injustice and women's oppression. Arlene seems to become hyperbolically infuriated about the topic, and, as a nominally "white" woman, cannot quite understand the reasons for her strong affective connection to the history of black women's oppression. Yet, on the brink of tears, Arlene begins to articulate how the power dynamics of race, class and gender that mark the particular structural struggles of the black women around her have also marked, in ways of their own, her grandmother's story as well as her own gendered exclusion:

> I continued, now through my tears, to say that I understood the oppression of a people and that oppression had an impact on patriarchy. I was well aware that Armenian men were *male chauvinist pigs*, and it was impossible for me to live near my family because of the way women were treated, but there was something about our common pain that would always connect me in some profound way to Armenians, women and men.[41]

Through a relationship that sets Arlene outside the image of "a good Armenian woman,"[42] Martha challenges Arlene to reorient her narrative toward her Armenian

homsespace by articulating the particular weight Arlene's Armenianness has had on her subject formation; one that for years, Arlene rejected. "The distance I'd maintained for so long from my family and my ethnicity had seemed to be necessary for my own survival…" writes Arlene "[N]ow, at… thirty five, I wondered if I was threatening a relationship that had become fairly comfortable."[43] As a result, and after a long absence, Arlene decides to return home, with the imperative task to tape record her grandmother's genocide story. That story is featured at length, in Elmas' voice, in the final pages of the memoir.

Act Two: Me as her again

Nancy Agabian's *Me as her again: True stories of an Armenian daughter* was published in 2008, 16 years after Avakian's memoir, by Aunt Lute Books, a small multicultural feminist press based in San Francisco. While Agabian's memoir was nominated in 2009 for the LAMBDA Literary Awards, Armenian-Americans did not pay it significant attention. Agabian, a second-generation Armenian-American who grows up in Boston, portrays the conflicts between her sexual consciousness, and the dissonances she feels between her identities as an ethnic Armenian and as a gender-nonconforming woman in the United States. The psychosexual bildungsroman takes readers non-chronologically between Nancy's childhood, her family and university life in Massachusetts, her life as a performance artist in Los Angeles, and finally to New York City during her Creative Writing MFA program at Columbia University. Throughout, Nancy explores her fears and rejection of her deviant sexuality—a partial confirmation, as she describes, of her longstanding suspicion that she was queer—as she recounts her arduous coming to terms with what she writes as her typically unfeminine body and her bi-sexuality.

"Tired of pushing for words that might never be spoken,"[44] *Me as her again* is Agabian's reflection on her need for words and language, which either bring into actuality, reflect loss, or bridge incommensurabilities in the memoirist's dissident queer Armenian subjectivity. Disappointed for not being "able to speak the same language"[45] as her parents, her sister Valerie, or being chastised for not learning Armenian in Armenian school, language is one of the major thematic sites of exile in Agabian's memoir. "But I wanted words"[46] she repeatedly insists.[47]

Language is one of the first sites of conflict between sex and the Armenian language in what Agabian calls her "Armenian-challenged household."[48] Though her immediate family does not speak Armenian as first/second-generation, American-born diasporans, the language haunts young Nancy's consciousness in her failure to reproduce it. Instead, it functions as a language of euphemisms for topics "too embarrassing to say in English: *vardeek* for underpants, *vor* for butt, and *betkaran* for bathroom."[49] Thus, Agabian relates her Armenianness with her psychosexual bildungsroman as being centered around the question one of her later audience members asks after she performs her performance piece *The Crochet Penis*: "What is it about Armenians that make them so uptight about sex?"[50]

While Armenian might be a catalyst for the way intimate words enter into her "prude" family's discursive realm, as children, Nancy and her brother Leo

weaponize language against the queer and Armenian body. Echoing their own internalized homophobia, Nancy and Leo—who later identify as bisexual and gay—constantly use the term "gay" and "fag" to make fun of anyone acting outside of their socially expected gender roles. Further, to rebel against being tortured when assigned to re-learn declensions in Armenian school, Nancy secretly imagines her teachers "Diggin Arlene" and "Diggin Carol" in aracy lesbian romance.[51] The scene is doubly satiric. First, Nancy purposefully mispronounces *digin* (dee-*geen*)—a term of respect equivalent to *Madame*—as diggin' (as in, "'Dig that crazy sound,' and 'Can you dig it?'"[52]) corrupting the word's Armenian pronunciation with American cultural references. Second, the two subjects are *Armenian* women performing the romance—a situation that seems utterly and humorously absurd to her. In Armenian school, the Armenian language is instrumentalized as a tool of forceful reproduction among Armenian-American children: "There is little hope if you kids don't learn the language," the diggins explain to their class of youngsters—children of the nation. "Your ancestors are crying right now, I can tell you that. They're crying."[53] Thus, in a refusal of inheritance and a corruption of language purity and heterosexual desire, Nancy uses language to mock the "diggings" while simultaneously reorienting the reproductive power her Armenian school teachers wield over her. Through her transgressive queer fantasy as a child, Nancy produces the disruption of normative Armenianness she later comes to embody as a queer Armenian adult.

Agabian highlights her illegibility as a queer Armenian subject by using language as the very site upon which she re-inscribes queerness in an Armenian-American context. Creating an alternative language she re-appropriates from the very source of exclusionary power the Armenian language symbolizes in her life, Nancy subverts from within: *Me as her again*, the memoir's pithy title, is a clever syllabic and phonetic play on the Armenian *mi-a-ser-agan*, or "same-sex loving." Through queer identity, Agabian is created anew: *mi-a-ser-agan* becomes *mi-as-er-agan*; she is me-as-her-again, a circuitous return to and remaking of selfhood through a queering, and hybrid diasporic collation made *from* Armenian and English. As Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble*, in "turn[ing] the law against itself…[to] spawn unexpected permutations,"[54] Nancy unhinges herself from her culturally constructed body through the subversive act of language play. *Me as her again* is not a return to a "'natural' past… but to an open future of cultural possibilities."[55] Implicated through negation in that which one opposes, the power represented by language play or language refusal enables Agabian to formulate what Butler calls "alternative modalities of power" that resist the normative nationalist ideology that circumscribes her.

Queer, same-sex desire as transgression is also expressed through the added lens of desiring the ethnic other of Nancy's Armenian family. Though queer-bashing was a game as a child, as Nancy approaches adolescence, she becomes terrified by what may be the signs of her own queer sexuality, which coincide with her attraction to her only friend in middle school, a Turkish girl named Emine. Nancy bonds with Emine because of their families' shared cultural predilections and their similar physical appearances. Yet Nancy's increasing sexual attraction to Emine threatens

to doubly transgress her Armenian identity. When Nancy's uncle learns about the girls' friendship, he asks, "You know what the Turks did to us, right?" Reminding Nancy of the "Romeo and Juliet situation [they] were in,"[56] she later recalls this doubly queer desire:

> Emine lay on her side, facing me, and I noticed the curve of her hip… I thought about how messed up and gay I would be if I wanted to kiss her. Then I tried really hard… to wipe it out of my mind.[57]

Textually and thematically, the memoir equates queer desire as an anti-reproductive discourse parallel to the threat of ethnic extermination: to be sexually interested in Emine would be a queer act of ethnic suicide; or, by queering the "digging"s and refusing to properly reproduce the Armenian language, the children's ancestor's will cry, the inheritance of their legacy refused.

Deciding as a young girl to orient herself toward the American community where her teachers and parents applaud her success in school, Nancy is marked by difference in the American space because of her ethnic, masculine physique. Unlike Arlene who can "pass" as a proper American girl with her pale skin and tall, lean figure, Nancy describes herself as an olive-skinned mustachioed girl. She "was not dirty blond nor suntanned"[58] and possessed an obscure last name that often became the butt of her classmates Orientalizing jokes: "Hey Arabian, your camel's double-parked!"[59] But Nancy also fails to adhere to the normative codes of libidinal desire and gendered codes of socialization in an Armenian context. As a teenager, her mother drags her to Armenian dances—"thinly veiled excuses to indoctrinate teenagers to marry Armenian"[60]—and she feels estranged: "I sat at a table while Mumma told me not to wear such a 'sad sack face,' so I went to the bathroom and sobbed in a stall."[61]

Emine's embrace of femininity as she goes through puberty coincides with the first moment that Nancy rejects her own: "Ever since I had parted ways with Emine… for embracing her femininity—and her sexuality—at the age of 14, I had been shunning mine,"[62] Agabian writes. On the one hand, Agabian does not perform the gendered codes of femininity in an Armenian context: she cannot dance, she does not want to be the subject of her mother's matchmaking escapades, and she fails at linguistically engendering Armenianness. On the other, she is not a fair-haired American girl with an American last name, doesn't feel comfortable in her "feminizing" adolescent body and neither does she belong to a "typical" nuclear family that can definitively trace, and therefore legitimate, its lineage. All aspects of this gendered anxiety are wrapped up, then, with the greater anxiety of being illegible both as an Armenian in America, and as a gender non-conforming girl with non-heterosexual desires:

> Clearly, I was a complete failure at being Armenian. Though I could reject my identity by making fun of it and by refusing to learn the language, and I could embrace the white world by following all rules and excelling at American school, I would still look different to everyone in Walpole, I would

> still have the label of my last name, and I would still come to learn that my grandmother's stories were never acknowledged.[63]

As a distortion which conflicts with her image of "a nice Armenian girl,"[64] Nancy confesses that her "insides just never felt feminine; they felt neutral, without gender. My body lived in the real world, and I lived in my head,"[65] she writes. This discomfort is also associated with another danger and fear which she shares with her grandmother:

> my feminine appearance dwelled outside the realm of my mind's control, and it could lead to something dangerous, like a scary man wandering around, just waiting to strike. This guy had been with me almost as long as I could remember, lurking at the edge of my consciousness. He shook Grammy and haunted her from the walls…He was not just a regular guy to whom you gave over your tender insides, but a monster to protect yourself from with dear life.[66]

The image of the looming man-monster haunts both Nancy and her grandmother, a fear which she also writes about in a poem entitled "Reality." The opening lines read: "Are you a lesbian? he asked/ No, I said, I'm bisexual but I'm afraid of men/ What exactly do you fear? He asked/Their penises, I said."[67]

In a compelling turn toward the end of the memoir, Agabian writes about her experience listening to an interview recording with her grandmother—a tape that was part of an oral history initiative in which genocide survivors testified to their experiences of 1915. While throughout the memoir, Agabian's sexual paranoias and queer desires are framed as incommensurable with her Armenian diasporic identity, the inclusion of her grandmother's first-person testimony in the memoir widens the scope of intergenerational trauma's effects. As Nancy presents Grammy's genocide testimony and the sexual violence she experienced as an Armenian woman in Turkey during genocide, the narrative interweaving between grandmother and granddaughter juxtaposes the effects of the inherited trauma of sexual violence.

Prior to listening to the recordings of grammy's oral history tapes with an English translator, Nancy's memoir constantly highlights her fears of sexuality and sex. She reasons at one point that it was the reason for her chronic panic attacks. She writes, tongue-and-cheek: "I had always thought they were the result of stress, a psychosomatic symptom, an intensity of being Armenian."[68] Yet, on her way to a pilgrimage trip to Turkey, she begins to piece together the "crazy and controlling" behavior of Armenians, and to understand how the categories of exclusion—through the policing of gender, sexuality and reproduction—function as a survival mechanism to preserve the nation as well as form her historic subjectivity:

> If we didn't cling together as a group, we would get clobbered individually until extinction. It would explain why I still needed by mother's approval to embark on anything risky… it would also explain the tendency I sensed in the Armenian community towards conformity; since it seemed there were so

> few of us, any divergence from the traditions of family and church (such as marrying a non-Armenian or being gay) was seen as disunity threatening the survival of the entire culture.[69]

Yet, to what resources do these authors turn when it is they who threaten that disunity?

Linking Stories: Writing Queer

Writes Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in the opening of *Tendencies*: "Queer is a continuing moment, movement, motive—recurrent, eddying, *troublant*… Keenly, it is relational, and strange."[70]

In her essay "Writing," Barbara Johnson recalls Barthes' challenge to look beyond the content of *what* is written, to *how* it is written to read a text's embedded message. How does the intersection between content and form in the memoirs drive these narratives' need to tell a story? What are the consequences of the authors' merging their own gender/sexual identity negotiations with their grandmothers' stories, and how might this amalgamation favor a queer reading?

Jack Halberstam defines queer space as a postmodern geography, one in which "the notion of a body-centered identity gives way to a model that locates sexual subjectivities within and between embodiment, place, and practice."[71] Queer space and time also work in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality and reproduction, providing alternative methods of alliance and subcultural practices which might complicate the roles of family and inheritance.[72] Toward the end of their works, both memoirists interweave their own stories with their grandmothers' genocide testimonies and thus have an important function in the memoirs: in both, the telling of their grandmothers' stories renegotiates the (in)commensurability of the authors' feminist and queer sexual identities with their Armenian ones. Operating as a meta-discursive dialogue between grandmother and granddaughter in the moments in which their grandmothers' narratives are directly quoted and take center stage, the memoirs themselves come to represent the queer, in-between space of two first-person narratives. Interweaving transgenerational narratives, the memoirists write queerness into the home as well as reorient the home and their grandmothers' stories as their sources of strength to live queer and feminist lives.[73] As Nancy Agabian describes, this space is one blended between "fiction and non-fiction," memory and interpretation; a queer space, not dissimilar to the ever-changing and in-between status of diaspora—where both authors find place in exile.

Always a space in revision, the homespace is constructed in Avakian and Agabian's memoirs as a space to which they must return to in order to situate their stories, mourn a collective trauma and connect, albeit liminally and in new ways, to an Armenian identity vis-à-vis their queer subjectivities. To cite Alex Brostoff, a rising scholar queer of kin, in order to orient themselves "within and between" these stories, the authors "map identity onto the very spaces they (dis)inhabit."[74] By interweaving their stories to create a queer space of the third meta-memoir, the authors inscribe queerness into the diasporic home and transgress a nationalist

discourse that positions "gay" as oppositional to "Armenian." However, Jasbir Puar and Gayatri Gopinath are careful to remind that in their espousal of masculinist tendencies, queer and diaspora *do not* "sustain a more perfect union."[75] Heeding such a warning, perhaps it can be said then that Avakian and Agabian's works articulate queer feminist women's subjectivity in the Armenian diaspora and work against their own impossibility by breaking through the patriarchal frameworks of both to imagine alternative configurations of belonging that challenge conventional nationalist ideologies.[76]

It is as Arlene transcribes her grandmother's oral history that, for the first time, she "felt connected to her [grandmother's] pain, to the pain of [her] mother, aunt, and uncle, and, by extension, the Armenian people."[77] Not only does this process, catalyzed by her lesbian relationship, rekindle a sense of connection with the Armenian people and her own history, but through her grandmother's resistance, Arlene realizes that "even within a strict patriarchy, women were not rendered helpless."[78] This story helps Arlene to realize her affinity with the Women's Liberation movement and her dissatisfactions with it as a liminally white subject, along with the irony that the

> same woman who taught me to defer to men, whom I had grown to dislike after the birth of my brother because she so obviously favored him, was also the woman who taught me, through her story, that women were strong.[79]

In effect, the re-narration of the story and the subsequent process of the creative writing of the memoirs it inspires is cathartic for both writers.

Understanding "some of the origins of [her] politics"[80] after her grandmother's story, Avakian admits, "[m]y grandmother would never know what her story had meant for me."[81] Avakian understands that this story stands as a lesson for the next generation of women to fight for identity and survival—as anti-racists, as feminists, as queers—in the face of hegemonic power structures that seek to silence these marginal voices that originate or are enacted in the homespace. While her grandmother's story exemplifies that fight for her granddaughter, Avakian's narrative exemplifies her own fight, perhaps, against limiting nationalist frameworks. This may be the most powerful aspect of Avakian's memoir: the paradox that the very legacy of resistance and anti-victimization she inherits from her grandmother is what catalyzes her rejection of the limiting terms of participation in the Armenian community. Even after her newfound connection to it, she writes, "I could never live in an Armenian community where my politics, values, and lifestyle would not be accepted… being an Armenian was important to me, but I had no intention of giving up any other part of my life." [82] As a result, the legacy of the lion woman's resistance is what might urge Arlene, as she implies happened later in her life, to reject the limiting categories of identity that seek to deny her existence as a feminist Armenian lesbian.

For Nancy Agabian, it is not as much the legacy of resistance but a story of the intergenerational psychological legacy of gendered violence which leads her to the acceptance of her difference and healing. The most powerful scene in Agabian's

narrative that demonstrates this interweaving narrative is when she recollects one of her first sexual experiences with a man. When she tries to relax during intercourse, her partner suddenly stops: "You squeezed me out," he says.[83] Terrified of what this experience might mean about her sexual identity, she immediately parallels her grandmother's fear of being touched by a man to her own psycho-sexual identity crisis:

> Wasn't it pretty obvious I was a big lesbian in denial if I was going around repelling penises from my vagina? It was like I was wearing some kind of an invisible girdle, an iron chastity belt inherited from my grandmother.[84]

Throughout the memoir, Agabian pieces together her grandmother Zanik's resistance to men and, as a result of her socially constructed role as a respectable Armenian woman, the decorum she possessed over her own body, even in the most extreme circumstances.[85] To Agabian's surprise, she learns from "the aunts" that her grandmother wore a girdle all her life: "She said that because of men, even she, an old lady, had to wear one, all the time." Curious about why her grandmother might want to "look good for men," her sister Valerie clarifies: "No, she wore it to protect herself from them."[86] Later, as she writes about her death, Nancy explains that Zanik's end became immanent to the aunts the moment that "grammy took off her pantyhose."[87] Hours later, she took her last breaths. Thus, Agabian paints a strong metaphorical image of her grandmother's self-liberation, or the death and final disavowal of her gender victimization, though able to occur only in the hours before death. In *The Crochet Penis*, the performance piece she shares in the memoir about this topic—written to "exorcise [her] feelings about sex… and to quell [her] alienation"[88]—Agabian directly addresses her grandmother's experience of genocide and her own sexual psychosis:

> My grandmother was different. She saw her mother die, she saw her sister die, she saw her brother and father get dragged away to die and after a long death walk through the desert in circles she survived disease, death camps, orphanage and rape. After all that and a family she created to replace the real brothers and sisters she was more like a sibling than a mother to them my grandfather said, and she didn't wanna be touched. My father saw this and he wed a woman, my mother and she didn't wanna be touched, and I saw this and I didn't wanna be touched. I am different now.[89]

Nancy is different with the merging of these stories, inviting her readers, perhaps, to think differently too about inherited trauma and exclusionary categories of identity.

When Others Collide: Nationalist Backlash Against Sexual Non-Conformity in the Armenian Transnation

Over the past decade, the heteronormative discourse that in large part frames Armenian national identity has manifested in heightened violence against the LGBTQ community in Armenia and in the Diaspora. On May 7, 2012, the queer-friendly bar

DIY, owned by the queer feminist, anarchist punk rocker Tsomak, was firebombed in Armenia's capital, leading to Tsomak and her sister's fleeing the country to seek political asylum in Sweden. The young perpetrators of the attack were bailed out soon after the incident by two of the ARF (Armenian Revolutionary Federation)[90] nationalist party's parliamentarians in Armenia, Artsvik Minasyan and Hrayr Karapetyan. As Gayane Abrahamyan of ArmeniaNow.com reported, in remarks to reporters, Minasyan asserted that the young men

> acted in accordance with our society's values and national ideology, and in an appropriate manner… I have repeatedly said that Tsomak and her ilk are destructive for our society… At the very least, all of us should keep our children and those around us away from her. This is really an issue of safety for our society.[91]

Shortly following, Republican Party MP Eduard Sharmazanov supported the ARF MPs, calling the attack "completely right and justified," and that LGBTQ-supporters in Armenia "are perverting our society [and] are defaming the Armenian national identity."[92]

As social media flamed public commentary surrounding the DIY incident in Armenia, Facebook users turned the three arsonists into heroes, calling their actions "the only true way of fighting against homosexuals," some posting photos of Tsomak along with their comments. In addition, following a 2011 survey by PINK Armenia, the Public Information and Need for Knowledge organization that has been fighting for LGBT rights in Armenia, the organization reported that 72 percent of their 1,189 respondents agreed that the state "should take measures to 'fight against homosexuals'."[93]

However, the attack was not solely motivated by homophobia: Tsomak's participation in Istanbul's Gay Pride Parade in neighboring Turkey was also cited, by Tsomak herself and others, as one of the strong motivations for the "nationalist" response.[94] Incidentally, the homosexual who enters into the nation's enemy territory becomes the highest risk for threatening Armenian national ideology.

With homophobic and anti-Turkish motivations at its core, the DIY firebombing is just one example of homophobic discourse in Armenia and the Diaspora that makes sliding associations between the Armenian nation's chief others: the homosexual and the Turk. In the Diversity March held by the Women's Resource Center on May 21 shortly following the DIY attack, demonstrators were met with protestors holding posters that read "Send Gays to Baku." Similarly, after a media leak in Armenia of photographs of the Armenian Gay and Lesbian Association of New York's (AGLA-NY) participation in the 2013 New York City Gay Pride Parade, several comments read: "There are no gay Armenians. They might as well be Turks!… they are disgusting; how dare they call themselves Armenians and hold the Armenian flag…"[95] Years earlier, Nancy Agabian recounts in her memoir that when a feature article appeared in the New York City based *AIM: Armenian International Magazine* about AGLA, the hate mail that appeared on AGLA's website, posted by Diasporan Armenians, read similar lines: "'Gay Armenians don't

exist, 'You're nothing but a bunch of Turks,' and 'Death to all Armenian fags, bisexuals and lezzies'."[96] Thus, in the national discourse that seeks to maintain its legitimacy, the Armenian homosexual and the Turk have become synonymous Others that complicate those borders.

One year shy of the centennial of the Armenian Genocide, and the year before I first drafted this essay, Armenians found themselves yet again in a moment of exclusionary, nationalist discourse based on identity politics that was a matter of life and death. The all-too familiar Blacklist of April 24, 1915, marking the roundup and deportation of Armenian intellectuals in Istanbul—the symbolic beginning of the Armenian Genocide—has morphed over the border in 2014 into the Blacklist of "The Country's and Nation's Enemies," published by the Armenia-based newspaper *Iravunk* (as in "right, justice, or law"). Providing the names and links to the Facebook pages of the 60 individuals listed, the article calls for the public and professional shunning of those who support the LGBTQ cause in Armenia, being called not only the nation's enemies, but also paralleled to the enemy of the state *par excellence*: "The Turk."

Thus, that Avakian's and Agabian's memoirs create a queer space via reorienting home, belonging and queer identity in the Armenian transnation is a political endeavor with high stakes. Their very existence destabilizes the exclusionary myth of queer and Armenian identities as incommensurable;[97] what's more, they destabilize Armenian identity and experience as fixed or monolithic. They also illustrate that, as the first LGBTQ organization in Turkey KAOS GL proclaimed in their 2015 speech for their acceptance of the Hrant Dink Award for social justice: "Just as the Armenian community asks for 'justice, and not mercy' the LGBT community has resisted… by chanting, 'we are here, we're not going anywhere, better get used to us!'"[98] If literature empowers and invokes both identification and empathy, we must make direct links to these texts and the political urgency to the cause of LGBTQ Armenians and their supporters who face social ostracization, job loss and state and self-imposed geographic exile. Avakian and Agabian's memoirs demonstrate that the past can and should be returned to, again and again, to reframe the stakes of reproducing hegemonic history and identity discourse in the present. In this way, a queer analysis might offer new openings for the future of Diaspora studies, Armenian literary studies and related fields—one that challenge normative, nationalist ideologies and offer new space and grammars of belonging that link the legacies of the past to the urgencies of the present.

1 Kirkor Zohrab	1 Mamikon Hovsepyan
2 Komitas Vartabed	2 Nvard Margaryan
3 Adom Yerdjanian (Siamanto)	3 [redacted]
4 Daniel Varoujan	4 [redacted]
5 Zabel Yessayan	5 [redacted][99]
… and 253 others	… and 55 others

List One: From the blacklist of Armenian Intellectuals. April 24, 1915. Ottoman Empire.

List Two: From the blacklist of Homosexuals and their Allies. May 17, 2014. Armenia[100]

When will it stop?

Notes

* A critical essay, especially the first one to be published, takes a village. I'm grateful to Hülya Adak for inviting me to participate in the WATS conference—my first conference—where the ideas for this paper first took form, and led to my MA thesis under her tutelage. I also appreciate the important contributions of Sibel Irzık and David Kazanjian, members of my thesis jury who challenged me to think about queer space, subjectivity and form, and to imagine this work beyond a recuperative project. Nelli Sargsyan-Pittman has been encouraging and generous. Her work, and our eventual collaboration, have laid a foundation for my thinking through various narrative modes through which queer Armenian diasporic women re-frame and narrate the (in)commensurability of their ethnosexual subjectivities. I am indebted to Alex Brostoff, whose patience, provocations and encouragement when this essay was still a thought allowed it to materialize. A heartfelt thanks to Ayşe Gül Altınay, a bridge to many lion women; and to Arlene Avakian, the late Martha Ayres, and Nancy Agabian, for inviting me into their lives, encouraging my inquiries as I poked, prodded and analyzed their texts. Also to Tsomak, for sharing hers. Your stories inspire. The organizers of the 14th Istanbul LGBTI+ Pride Week gave this work a platform among a community of activists on the panel *Diaspora'da LGBTI+ Olmak ve* Öregütlenme Alanları (Being LGBTI+ in Diaspora) to elaborate on the relevance of Armenian queer diasporic subcultural production to LGBTI+ activism in Turkey. I'd like to thank Ania Loomba and Davy Knittle for reading through this essay with a fine-toothed comb in its last stages, providing insights for the further precision of its arguments and structure. Finally, a thanks to artist Benedetta C. Vialli for her expeditious rendering of the image for this essay (see https://www.benedettacvialli.com/).

1 Kristeva, "On Abjection."

2 See Lorne Shirinian (2000) in which he writes about the location of diasporic memory sites, which have "meaningful and significant, real or imagined units that have become symbolic elements of the Armenian community and form the basis of its symbolic repertoire," (2000: 12).

3 Mount Ararat formally became a part of Turkey in 1921 under the Treaty of Moscow and the Treaty of Kars. The mountain has been a representation of Armenian belonging since ancient times: as a volcano, it is home to the Armenian pagan fire-god Vahagn. It is also the Biblical site where Noah's voyage ended, and important to Armenians who, as the first Christian nation, in part trace ancestry to the descendants of Noah.

4 In the interest of full-disclosure, this writer is a member of the group, having participated in the program, working as a K-12 teacher, between 2009 and 2010.

5 Posted by Facebook user "Araz B" April 29, 2016. https://www.facebook.com/groups/151873631523126/. Accessed 15 May 2016. The image seems to have first appeared on the Twitter page Armenian Genocide @Genocideof1915, 8 May 2014. See: https://twitter.com/Genocideof1915/status/464474146156843008. The commentary is reproduced here as was originally posted.

6 Said, "Reflections on Exile," 186.

7 See Parker et al., *Nationalisms and Sexualities* for further discussion of the gendered tropes of nation and nationalist ideology.

8 See Mann (1997), cited in Sargsyan-Pittman (2013), 182.
9 Kassabian and Kazanjian, "You Have to Want to Be Armenian," 21.
10 Barthes, "Myth Today" in *Mythologies*. Annette Lavers (Transl).
11 For further reading, see the formative works of Sirman (2000), Koğacıoğlu (2004), Kandiyoti (1987, 2002), Altınay (2004, 2013), Adak and Altınay (2010), Parla (2001), Avakian (1989, 1998, 2010), Kassabian and Kazanjian (1998, 2005) Sargsyan-Pittman (2013), Ekmekçioğlu (2016) and Shirinian (2016, 2017, 2018), which have led us to consider how patriarchy works in tandem with the nationalist ideologies of Turkey and the Armenian transnation.
12 In *Rebuilding Armenia: The Limits of Belonging in Post-Genocide Turkey*, Ekmekçioğlu argues that Armenian feminism was ultimately stagnated in its subordination to the more immediately urgent project of national revival and preservation in post-genocide Turkey, which relied on gendered tropes to re-imagine and rebuild the nation in the context of national crisis. While the work outlines the specificity and historical context for what the author describes as a certain brand of Armenian feminism in post-genocide Turkey (and as such, a foundational historical work), a more robust feminist critique of Armenian nationalism and its foreclosures is still needed to imagine, *open up* the limits of, and put pressure on the very discourse of belonging to "Armenianness." This paper, written prior to my reading of *Rebuilding Armenia*, is one small step in that direction.
13 We can also add the normative, binary constructs of nation-state v. diaspora.
14 Kassabian and Kazanjian, "You Have to Want to Be Armenian," 21.
15 As literary critic Myrna Douzjian (2009) and anthropologist Nelli Sargsyan-Pittman (2013) have argued in their respective works, the Armenian nation-state as the symbolic 'homeland' itself is also a fraught term as it "lack[s] geographical and historical fixity" (Douzjian 2009). Consequently, its symbolic status as 'homeland,' even for citizens of the country, must also be considered as an inseparable part of the Armenian (diasporic) transnation. Such a notion further particularizes the case of Armenian nationalist ideology. In this study, I refer to the Armenian diaspora as a space that includes various transnational spaces that are home to diasporic communities in which Armenians did not historically live. I do not consider the territory of modern-day Turkey as the diaspora, or Armenia, though I would consider both as a part of the Armenian transnation. I concede that this logic might reinforce a logic of 'homeland' discourse and this discussion here does not amply attend to the communities in territories like Iran or Georgia. I read this as a further testament to the utter inadequacy of this binarism. Douzjian's aforementioned essay "Perennially Armenian" addresses this insufficiency, which is a promising site of critical inquiry into land claims discourse.
16 It should be noted that this transference is narrated as "loss" in the Armenian transnation.
17 In addition to repeated, I would also include "paranoid," thinking in the spirit of Sedgwick's famous essay "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You" in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy and Performativity* (2003).
18 Avakian, "A Different Future? Armenian Identity through the Prism of Trauma," 207.
19 For a comprehensive discussion on this subject, see: Sargsyan-Pittman, "Negotiating Ethnosexual Difference in the Armenian Transnation," PhD Dissertation (2013).
20 My overarching definition of queer adopted in this work aligns with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's seemingly contradictory yet refined definitions of "queer" which both "pluralize and specify" the possibility to queer and be queer to all subjects, while simultaneously *not* divesting it from its 'original' context as LGBT-oriented: "For anyone to disavow those meanings," she warns, "or to displace them from the terms' definitional center, would be to dematerialize any possibility of queerness itself" (1993: 8–9). In this way, queer, analogous in many ways to the concepts of Diaspora and *décalage* (see: Brent Edwards, "The Uses of Diaspora," 2001), is "the open mesh of **possibilities**, **gaps**, overlaps, **dissonances** and resonances, **lapses** and excesses of meaning when the constituent

elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality, aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically" (Sedgwick 8, boldface mine). Thus, using Sedgwick's leverage of 'queer' as "*other* identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourse… do[es] a new kind of justice to the fractal intricacies of language, skin, migration, state" which both deepens and shifts "the gravity of the term 'queer' itself" (9). My own usage of queer rises from this formulation, along with the understanding that 'queer' constitutes normative-defying identities *based primarily* on non-normative (both heteronormative and homonormative) gender or sexual identifications.

21 Diaspora is described as a site of "ongoing negotiation" by Lorne Shirinian in *Writing Memory*, 5. I approach the concept of diaspora for the purposes of this argument with Dina Georgis, who suggests in "Cultures of Expulsion" that "the space of diaspora is not the space of home but the space of loss of home… from which our 'illness of love' and the terror of belonging and not belonging are re-imagined." ("Cultures of Expulsion," 6).

22 To my knowledge, no other *memoirs* or *autobiographies* have been published by queer Armenian-American women. This does not include any poetry, experimental literary work that includes autobiographical reflection/vignettes, etc. It also does not include queer Armenian men's autobiography, though also to my knowledge nothing exists either in Armenian or the Diaspora. Works in other literary genres *directly related* to LGBTQ issues in the Armenian transnation are the productions by members of the Queering Yerevan collective, HyePhen Magazine, and most recently, Մայրեվիլ. Դրոշ (*Mommyland: Flag*), printed by Yavruhrat Publishing in Armenia in 2015. Written by Armen Hayastantsi (pen-name), the 139-page novel focuses on the topic of statehood in Armenia, and is based on the life of a transgender Armenian man in Yerevan. Thanks to Sargis Khandayan for bringing it to my attention.

23 Tölölyan, "The Nation-State and Its Others," 6.

24 Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*, 4.

25 Ibid., 4.

26 Agabian, 27.

27 I have elsewhere written extensively about each of the narratives' iterations of exile. See my Master's thesis "(Dis)Orienting Exile: Home and Belonging in Queer Armenian-American Women's Exile" (2016), written for the completion of my MA in Cultural Studies from Sabancı University. The thesis developed out of a shorter version of this current essay, presented at the 2015 WATS Conference in Istanbul.

28 Brodzki and Schenck, *Life/Lines*, 4.

29 Avakian, 19.

30 Ibid., 21.

31 Ekmekcioglu, *Recovering Armenia: The Limits of Belonging in Post-Genocide Turkey*, 8.

32 A special thanks to Davy Knittle for pointing out that there are competing normativities at play here in the Armenian and American contexts, which deserve further parsing out.

33 Pasha (*paşa*) is used in Turkish to denote high ranking officials in the Ottoman government. The root stems from Pahlavi (Middle Persian), meaning "lord" or "shah."

34 Avakian, *Lion Woman's Legacy,* 16.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., 32.

37 Ibid., 34.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid., 205.

40 Ibid., 261.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., 284.

43 Ibid., 266.

44 Agabian, 142.
45 Ibid., 132.
46 Ibid.
47 Nelli Sargsyan-Pittman and I have elaborated on the theme of finding voice to express incommensurable ethnosexual subjectivity both separately (see her 2013 PhD dissertation and my 2016 MA thesis) and in our joint paper "Home and Belonging for Queer Armenian-American Women in Everyday Life and Memoir" (2017) presented on the panel "Queer Time-Spaces: Invaginating Temporality Through Transnational Crossings," organized by Tamar Shirinian at the "Queer Places, Practices and Lives III" Conference held at Ohio State University, May 12–13, 2017.
48 Agabian, 25.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid., 141.
51 Ibid., 55.
52 Ibid., 29.
53 Ibid., 30–31.
54 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 127.
55 Ibid.
56 Agabian, 58.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., 33.
59 Ibid., 56.
60 Ibid., 94
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., 124. Here, it might be interesting to consider, or at least note, the layered and constitutive senses of ethnosexual and gendered betrayal Nancy constructs towards Emine.
63 Ibid., 31.
64 Ibid., 73.
65 Ibid., 124.
66 Ibid.
67 Agabian, "The Experiment," in *In the (Un)Space*, 16.
68 Agabian, *Me as her again*, 179.
69 Ibid., 148.
70 Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, viii.
71 Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*.
72 Ibid., 6.
73 In my thesis "(Dis)Orienting Exile: Home and Belonging in Queer Armenian-American Women's Memoir," I also discuss heteronormative motherhood as a nationalist patriarchal institution that the memoirs challenge.
74 Brostoff. Unpublished paper. UC Berkeley. Brostoff is a rising scholar of the emerging genre of auto-theory. I also owe her much gratitude as the editor of the first version of this paper presented at the WATS conference.
75 Jasbir Puar and Gayatri Gopinath in, Alice Y. Hom and David L. Eng (eds), "Transnational Sexualities: South Asian (Trans)national(alism)s and Queer Diasporas," in *Q & A Queer in Asian America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 409. See also: Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*.
76 I do not mean to claim here that Agabian and Avakian's works fully dismantle nationalist tendencies. In fact, they reinscribe them in certain ways by eventually reaffirming a belonging to Armenian identity. I address this in more detail in my Master's thesis. Suffice to say here that notwithstanding their avowal of Armenianness, what I find as particular and subversive about both works is their inscription of queerness and non-normativity into the experience of Armenianness which very specifically writes queerness as incommensurable to it.
77 Avakian, *Lion Woman's Legacy*, 281.

78 Ibid., 282.
79 Ibid., 282
80 Ibid., 283
81 Ibid., 281
82 Ibid., 287
83 Agabian, *Me as her again*, 123
84 Ibid., 123.
85 Ibid., 119.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 127.
89 Ibid., 128–129.
90 The Armenian Revolutionary Federation, or ARF, is an Armenian nationalist and socialist political party founded in Tbilisi, Georgia in 1890.
91 Abrahamyan, "Armenia: Blurry Line in Yerevan Between Hate Crime and Defense of 'National Interests'." 21 May, 2012.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
94 Personal correspondence with Tsomak, June 2012.
95 Agabian, personal correspondence, March 2016.
96 Agabian, *Me as her again*, 196.
97 I am not adjudicating here whether or not such identities *should be* commensurable, but point out that the memoirs structure them as such.
98 KAOS GL (2015) KAOS GL's speech at Hrant Dink Award Ceremony. Available at: http://www.kaosgl.com/page.php?id=20192 (accessed 19 September 2015). I do, however, tend to want to challenge the homonationalism of such Queer Nation discourse, although I do not believe this is what Kaos GL is engaging in.
99 The rest of the names are censored here to protect the privacy of the individuals. The first two individuals listed are vocal activists of Armenian LGBTQ rights in the country, and have given permission to use their names.
100 *Iravunk* (2014). ՆՐԱՆՔ ՍՊԱՍԱՐԿՈՒՄ ԵՆ ՄԻՋԱԶԳԱՅԻՆ ՀԱՄԱՍԵՌԱՄՈԼ ԼՈԲԲԻՆԳԻ ՇԱՀԵՐԸ. ԱՋԳԻ ԵՎ ՊԵՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԹՇՆԱՄԻՆԵՐԻ ՍԵՎ ՑՈՒՑԱԿԸ **(**"They serve the interests of the international homosexual lobbying: The Blacklist of the Country's and Nation's Enemies.") **Available at:** http://www.iravunk.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16435%3A2014-05-17-16-18-23&catid=123%3Atop%D5%BE (Retrieved 15 September 2015).

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