

THE ARMENIAN Mirror-Spectator

Volume LXXXIV, NO. 17, Issue 4311

\$ 2.00

The First English Language Armenian Weekly in the United States Since 1932

Islamized Armenians: Coming to Grips With a New Reality

By Hrant Gadarigian

ISTANBUL (Hetq) – Over the centuries, untold numbers of Christian Armenians have converted to Islam. The vast majority have done so under various degrees of pressure and given the exigencies of the time.

While relatively subtle on occasion, the imperative to convert to a religion mostly regarded as the faith of the “enemy” was often clear-cut – convert or perish.

Over the past decade or so, a new sub-grouping of Armenians, either called

Three-Day Istanbul Conference Seen as First Step in Opening Dialogue

Islamized of Muslim Armenians, has come to the fore.

While the existence of such Armenians is not new per se, the issue of who they exactly are in terms of overall Armenian identity has been gaining greater exposure, both in Armenian circles and in Turkey.

One such attempt to grapple with this issue is the conference now taking place in Istanbul.

Titled, “Islamized (Islamicized) Armenians” and organized by the Hrant Dink Foundation, the conference began on November 2.

The scope of the conference is immense and has attracted a number of prominent scholars and heretofore unknown speakers commenting and analyzing the centuries-old conversion process of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, with a special focus on the 1915 Genocide and its aftermath.



Outside the Istanbul conference

Bogaziçi University’s Albert Long Hall was packed the other day when the conference kicked off. There were at least 700 peo-



Ruben Meliksetian, left, with Fr. Diradur Sardaryan

Music, Literature and Religion in German-Armenian Cultural Dialogue

BERLIN – The Armenian community had much to celebrate in Germany at the end of October: in Berlin it was the 90th anniversary of the founding of the community, commemorated with a formal ceremony on October 26 in the Charlottenburg Town Hall, co-sponsored by the Minister for the Diaspora of the Republic of Armenia Hranusch Hakobyan and the Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf Mayor Reinhard Naumann. To the south, in Stuttgart, it was the 30th anniversary of the Armenian Holy Cross Church (Surb Khatch) in nearby Göppingen, and the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Baden-Württemberg Armenian community. The double jubilee was commemorated within the context of the third annual “Armenian Cultural Days” organized by community leader and parish priest Father Diradur Sardaryan from October 24-27, in collaboration with several state institutions as well as the Embassy and the Cultural Ministry of the Republic of Armenia.

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

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ple in the hall to listen to what speakers like Taner Akçam, Ayse Gul Altinay, Hranush Kharatyan, Laurence Ritter, Anoush Suni, and Adnan Celik, amongst others, had to say on the subject.

Rakel Dink, representing the Hrant Dink Foundation, welcomed speakers and audience alike, stressing that the conference was merely an initial step in discussing both the history, and more importantly, the present reality of Islamized Armenians.

Religion, identity, memory, ethnicity, are just a few of the intertwined topics that the speakers touched in their presentations.

Naturally, I cannot delve into all the subjects that the 30 speakers will raise over the course of three days, but I can give readers a concise overview.

After an opening conversation amongst Fethiye Çetin, Nabahat Akkoc and Sibel see ISLAMIZED, page 3

Catholicos Karekin II Elected a World Council of Churches President

BUSAN, Korea – On November 4, at the World Council of Churches’ 10th Assembly, the delegates voted for Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, to serve as one of the president of the World Council of Churches (WCC) for the next eight years.

The WCC presidency consists of eight members whose mission is to foster inter-church and ecumenical relations, defend human rights, justice and peace.

The delegation of the Catholicosate of All Armenians attended a celebration of Divine Liturgy at the Coptic and Greek Orthodox Churches, at the end of which Karekn II’s 14th anniversary as catholicos was celebrated.



Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II

Garry Kasparov Seeking Latvian Citizenship



MOSCOW (Guardian) – The former world chess champion turned Kremlin critic, Garry Kasparov, has asked Latvian politicians to grant him citizenship to help him pursue his political activities in Russia.

In a letter seen by Reuters, Kasparov, 50, said Latvian citizenship would give him the security to work “in Russia and in other countries across the world where civil rights are denied and democratic norms are trampled on.”

NEWS IN BRIEF

President, Minsk Group Discuss NKR Conflict

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) – President Serge Sargisian discussed the Karabagh conflict settlement with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group co-chairs, Ambassadors James Warlick of the United States, Igor Popov of Russia, Jacques Faure of France and Andrzej Kasprzyk, the personal representative of the chairperson-in-office.

According to presidential press service, no details of the meeting were provided.

Earlier, the ambassadors met with Foreign Minister Eduard Nalbandian, with the parties focusing on possible routes to promote solution of the conflict. The co-chairs briefed the Armenian official on the results of meetings held in Baku.

Nalbandian further drew the co-chairs’ attention to Baku’s military rhetoric as well as frequent violations of ceasefire.

Air Armenia Obtains Second Plane

YEREVAN (Arminfo) – The second plane of the Air Armenia company arrived at Zvartnots Airport on Tuesday, November 5.

The A-320 liner can carry 150 passengers and is supposed to fly to Moscow on a daily basis.

Marketing Manager of Air Armenia Sirak Hambartsumyan said that on November 17 the company will redouble the number of its flights to Moscow.

Air Armenia’s Boeing 737-500 will now fly to Samara, Sochi, Krasnodar and Rostov-on-Don.

The first charter flight between Yerevan and Rostov-on-Don was carried out on October 23 and the first regular flight to Moscow on October 27. Air Armenia is also licensed to fly to St. Petersburg.

Ohanian Condemns Azeri Provocations

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – During a November 5 press conference, Defense Minister Seyran Ohanian stated that the provocations of the Azerbaijani armed forces in the sector of Voskepar-Baghanis of the Tavush province were conditioned by the recent staff changes in the country.

“In general such harassments and violations are taking place in the framework of the political events. I think that the incident was conditioned

by the recent staff changes or the commanders decided to open fire on [it],” said Ohanian, adding that the situation has been analyzed and corresponding action will be taken.

Azerbaijani forces opened fire on October 30 in Voskepar-Baghanis. The shots were fired via small caliber weapons. No injuries were reported.

On October 12, Azerbaijani troops opened fire on civilians of Inner Karmiraghbyur in the same province. A Navur villager, Hayk Kosakyan, was wounded during this attack.

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ARMENIA

News From Armenia

Police Stop Opposition March, Arrest 20

YEREVAN (Reuters) – Armenian police detained 20 people in clashes on Tuesday with anti-government protesters armed with sticks and firecrackers who tried to march on the presidential palace, witnesses said.

President Serge Sargisian was re-elected to a second five-year term in February but independent monitors said the vote lacked real competition and some small street protests flared for a short time afterward.

Tuesday's protest march, led by Shant Arutyunian, a flamboyant opposition activist who ran in the 1999 parliamentary election, was blocked by police en route to the presidential palace.

Scuffles ensued as dozens of protesters wearing Guy Fawkes masks on the backs of their heads threw large firecrackers at policemen, injuring several, a police spokesman said.

Guy Fawkes, a 17th century English Catholic, was the best-known conspirator in a plot to blow up the English parliament.

Juice, Non-Alcohol Drink Production Increases

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – The volume production of juice in Armenia during the months of January-September increased by 20 percent compared with the same period of the previous year and made 12,392,100 liters.

According to the data provided by the National Statistical Service of Armenia, during those nine months of last year, 10, 323,100 liters of juice were produced in the country.

The volume production of non-alcohol drinks and mineral waters also increased in comparison with the same period of 2012 by 40 percent and 25 percent respectively. During this period, 41,607,700 liters of non-alcohol drinks and 26,269,300 liters of mineral water were produced in Armenia.

National Assembly Chair Promotes Dilijan International School

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – Chairman of the National Assembly of Armenia Hovik Abrahamyan stated during a recent press conference that the Dilijan International School of Armenia (DIS) “will contribute to the high-quality education of the future generations.” Abrahamyan later added, “I welcome this initiative, as a huge work is carried out for our country. Now we see the tremendous activities carried out at the course of just one year.”

The DIS has been marketed as a “vibrant and dynamic coeducational international boarding school, for boys and girls aged 13 to 19, located in Armenia, at the heart of the ever-shifting balance between the East and the West.”

Scholar Notes Changes In Turkey's Historiography

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – Turkey's historiography has undergone serious changes over the past few years. According to Correspondent Member of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia Ruben Safrastyan, Turkey's historians are actively engaged in discussions regarding the similarities of the Kemalist and fascist ideologies, which were not noticed years ago.

“Currently they reconsider Mustafa Kemal's role in the country's history. Modern Turkey is not what it used to be years ago,” Safrastyan noted during an international conference dedicated to the 90-year-old history of the Turkish state, its internal and foreign policy issues, Armenian-Turkish relations and current political developments held in Yerevan on November 5.

London Doctors Visit Armenian Lighthouse Charitable Foundation

PTGHUNK, Armenia – On October 6, a delegation of doctors from London, England provided medical examinations and treatment free of charge to 47 villagers at the outreach center of the Armenian Lighthouse Charitable Foundation (ALCF).

The team was organized by Dr. Susan Onanyan, a physician from Yerevan, who has been volunteering her time with the ALCF's Myradoon and Husi Jerag programs for more than two years. The London-based volunteers were Dr. Kevork Hopayian, Dr. Seda Boghossian, Dr. Lillian Johnston and psychologist Liza Kouyoumjian. Joining them were Sona Mouradian and Richard Surabian

ety of conditions. The people treated were among Armenia's poorest and socially neglected sector who have no access to healthcare. Patients came from all the regions of Armenia currently served by the ALCF's charitable programs and family sponsorships. After the one-day clinic, the team committed to return to Armenia every year. In the meantime, Onanyan will conduct follow-up



Doctors from England volunteer their services to 47 patients.



A visiting doctor consults with a patient.

from San Francisco, Calif., as well as Talar Stepanian and Sarmen Boghossian.

The physicians arrived with medication, inoculations and testing equipment to serve the local villagers for a wide vari-

ety of conditions. The people treated were among Armenia's poorest and socially neglected sector who have no access to healthcare. Patients came from all the regions of Armenia currently served by the ALCF's charitable programs and family sponsorships. After the one-day clinic, the team committed to return to Armenia every year. In the meantime, Onanyan will conduct follow-up

visits with all the patients who were treated.

Seta Ghazarian, founder of the Armenian Lighthouse Charitable Foundation, explained, “By far, our most vulnerable population are the elderly. They are unprotected, neglected and very lonely. There are also children and adults who need to see doctors and are in dire need of psychological counseling. The villagers were honored that doctors

from as far away as London were willing to come to our center and serve their needs; they felt loved, appreciated, and supported. This was an impressive and emotional day for our entire staff.”

A shipping container that originated from the ALCF's California-based warehouse was expected to arrive in Armenia by the end of October. The container holds medical supplies and equipment that was donated by Sherman Oaks Medical Supplies of Sherman Oaks, California. Sherman Oaks Medical Supplies gives the ALCF \$1,000 per month to heat Myradoon, the shelter for battered and abused women and their children. The supplies and equipment will help the ALCF continue to address the medical needs of the local and surrounding communities.

Myradoon is a shelter for battered and abused women and their babies. The ALCF houses and guides its residents for up to two years. The women are taught the basics of good parenting, child nurturing and hygiene for the entire family. All of their medical expenses are covered and they receive specialized vocational training in sewing, cooking, computers, beauty services and culinary arts.

Husi Jerag is an outreach program which offers needed services to local, underserved communities including computer classes, women's dental and health services, feeding the poor and elderly, supporting a local kindergarten, weekly Bible study, family sponsorships and donations of essential goods to the needy in Armenia and Artsakh.

The Armenian Lighthouse Charitable Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, public benefit corporation registered in the State of California and Republic of Armenia. To contribute to the ALCF or for more information, visit www.armenianlighthouse.org.

Building Continues at Disputed Site

By Siranuysh Gevorgyan

YEREVAN (ArmeniaNow) – Despite an administrative court ban, the controversial construction at 5 Komitas St. resumed this week.

Head foreman Rafik Khachatryan said that the construction has never stopped and that the company in charge has all the legal grounds to carry on.

Meanwhile, the administrative court of Yerevan has prohibited Liber company to implement construction at the address of 5 Komitas St., “until the legal act solving the issue comes into effect.” Since summer there have been repeated acts of protest by civil activists and the residents against construction at this address. Residents of neighboring buildings claim that the building would compromise the seismic resistance of their buildings and will block light.

The building is planned to be a seven-story building or larger while surrounding buildings are capped at four stories. In August and September, there were several incidents involving protestors and the police. The residents who received the administrative court notices turned to the police on Saturday demanding to make them stop the construction, however the head foreman made reference to the provision of the law by which the administrative court decision “is subject to immediate implementation in accordance with the order provided for by the law on Compulsory Enforcement of Judicial Acts” and insisted that only the Compulsory Enforcement Service of Judicial Acts (CESJA) has the power of stopping the construction. Police officers accepted this argumentation as

grounded and left the site.

Khachatryan said today that no one from CESJA visited the construction site to demand they stop construction. The ruling of the administrative court is unprecedented for densely-populated Yerevan, where residents of several more buildings (in Hrachya Kochar, Sayat-Nova and Amiryan streets) have now joined the protest against those in charge of the construction, claiming that construction continues involving violations of seismic resistance norms and by occupying neighboring courtyard areas.



Poet Charents' Monument Unveiled

CHARENTSAVAN, Armenia (ArmeniaNow) – Armenian President Serge Sargisian visited the town renamed in 1967 after poet Yeghishe Charents as part of his trip to the Kotayk province.

Sargisian attended the inauguration of a new monument dedicated to Charents. A celebration of the 115th anniversary of Charents was held from October 14 to 22.



INTERNATIONAL

Islamized Armenians: Coming to Grips With a New Reality

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Asna, the first day saw three separate panels exploring such topics as: "Burden of History," "Politics of Names," "The Recent and Distant History of the Islamization" and "Islamized in 1915."

Avedis Hadjian, an independent journalist based in New York, spoke about Constantinople Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian's "Four categories of Anatolian Armenians and Today's Muslim Armenians."

It was interesting to hear that some 40 years ago, Kaloustian had come up with different classifications of Armenians who had converted based on when the conversion had taken place, whether it was a conscious decision or not, and whether they had converted back to Christianity when conditions allowed them to do so.

Hadjian, who has been touring Western Armenia for the past two years, is writing a book titled *A Secret Nation*, which will present his findings regarding the Islamized Armenians he has met.

The author, a native of Aleppo who moved to Argentina at an early age, says his work is a journalistic investigation into the lives of these people and will serve as an introduction for a wider audience.

"My purpose is not to proselytize or to make judgmental declarations. We must first come to recognize one another without preconditions or preconceived notions. This conference is a step in the right direction," Hadjian says, adding that the book should be out in a few months. The first edition will be in Turkish and then translated into English.

Hadjian added that tragically, the Armenian Diaspora lacks the facilities to engage this new group of Armenians given that the church, as a religious organization, cannot by its nature initiate a dialogue with individuals who profess another religion.

Another speaker was Vahe Tachian, an historian and chief editor of the website Houshamadyan. Tachjian spoke at a panel titled "Islamized in 1915: History and Bearing Witness." His focus was on how many Armenian women during the Genocide entered into mixed marriages and prostitution as a means of survival. Tachjian talked about attempts to reintegrate these women into post-Ottoman Armenian communities and how many were ostracized and shunned by Armenian society and organizations.

Three-Day Istanbul Conference Seen as First Step in Opening Dialogue

"Many of these women could never return to the larger Armenian fold, especially if they had children with Muslim men," Tachjian noted, adding that the fact that so many "converted" Armenians were present at the conference underscored the need for a platform on this issue that has now taken on a greater sense of urgency.

"These individuals, naturally, are interested to hear what the wider world, especially Armenians, have to say on the subject. We must approach this issue on a human level and shy away from making snap judgments as to whether these people are Armenian or not," Tachjian stressed.

During the conversation, Raket Dink walked by and hearing the word "judgment," noted that identity is a concept that is not merely based on religion and that all of us have a duty to build bridges between these newly discovered Armenians and the traditional communities.

Hilmar Kaiser, a German historian, whose presentation dealt with the assimilation of Armenian deportees between 1915 and 1917, was also present at the seminar.

In his presentation, Kaiser noted that the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP), was split on the issue of converting Armenians to Islam. One grouping tolerated such conversions, which physically "saved" many Armenians from certain death, while others in the CUP saw it as presenting a future danger to the state.

Kaiser noted that this conference and an earlier one in Diyarbakir has returned the Armenian debate back to Turkey, where it naturally belongs.

"We are witnessing the reemergence of the Armenian community of Constantinople as the intellectual powerhouse that it once was. Armenian intellectualism is returning to the very place that it was cut down in 1915. And the Turkish colleagues are back. Thus the logic of the killers is denied," Kaiser argued.

He also pulled no punches in criticizing the academic work carried out in Armenia for the past 20 years, labeling it as not only academically inferior but also damaging, given its nationalist, even racist, overtones. Luckily, Kaiser noted, there is a new generation of academics coming of age in Armenia who are raising the bar when it comes to academic scholarship, pointing to the presence of two young scholars from Armenia as panelists.

Kaiser then turned his criticism to Armenian academics in the United States who, he argues, haven't produced anything new in the past 40 years.

"Tell me one publication on the extermination, as I call it since I don't like the term Genocide anymore, which has been published in the last 10 years in the US. What comes to mind? You really have to scratch your head," Kaiser said.

Raymond Kevorkian, the prominent Genocide scholar based in Paris, moderated the "Islamized in 1915" panel.

"This is an issue that will only grow in significance in the future. And it is an issue that blows away the Turkish state's decades old argument of a homogenous populace. As such, the issue of Islamized Armenians should be seen as an integral part of the overall internal Turkish process now going on in various ethnic communities regarding a search for identity, and that there are actually several Turkish identities," Kevorkian said.

He stressed that the entire issue demands greater research on a social level and that the anecdotal studies carried out to date aren't sufficient.

"The diaspora must come to grips with the fact that the bulk of these converted Armenians will remain as they are. So how do we relate to them and, in particular, how shall we relate to those who display a willingness to come into contact with traditional Armenian communities and structures," Kevorkian added.

Summing up the challenge that these converted Armenians now pose to the greater Armenian community, Kevorkian said, "We face a new reality today. A significant segment of us had disappeared and are now resurfacing, but in a new form."

"We have to come up with an answer, better yet, a set of answers. This conference is a preliminary step in the search for answers, and I have no doubt that the search will continue."

London Tekeyan Trust Announces New Komitas Choir

LONDON – The London Tekeyan Trust (LTT) announced that, for the first time ever in the UK, it has initiated a professional Armenian choir named "Komitas," after one of the founders of Armenian classical music.

The LTT, a registered charity since 1979 and the backbone of the Tekeyan Cultural Association (London) as well as the Tekeyan Center Fund (Yerevan), is dedicated to the preservation and promotion of Armenian cultural identity, and since its creation, it has organized a number of concerts, exhibitions, public debates, workshops and other cultural events and community life activities that further links between the Armenian Diaspora

and Armenia.

According to its supporters, the existence of a professional Armenian choir will enhance Armenian culture through the international media in the UK and help the recognition of Armenian cultural values, historical background as well as the forthcoming Armenian Genocide Centenary.

In cooperation with the TCA London, the Tekeyan Trust has planned the activities of the Komitas Choir which will include concerts in London and in other Armenian community centers in the UK & Ireland such as Manchester, Birmingham, Cardiff and Dublin. The choir also intends to visit European Armenian communities

as well as Armenia and to participate in international concerts and festivals. The choir repertory consists of a wide variety of songs: Armenian folk, classical, spiritual and international, etc.

The choir conductor Sipan Hagopyan, an expert from Armenia, as well as the volunteer artists hope to lead the choir to success, and by doing so, enhance Armenian musical heritage all over the world.

The LTT invites all who love choral music to become Komitas Choir benefactors by donating funding for its activities for the forthcoming years.

For further information, contact V.Ouzounian at vouzounian@tekeyantrust.com.

International News

Energy Minister Confirms Russia Will Subsidize Gas

MOSCOW (ArmeniaNow) – The Russian government will subsidize the natural gas price hike for Armenia, Armenian Energy Minister Armen Movsisyan said during the debate over the 2014 draft budget at the National Assembly on Monday.

The official reaffirmed that the 2014 state budget does not envisage any subsidy of the price of natural gas supplied to Armenia that was increased for consumers in July. According to Movsisyan, at present the talks over the natural gas price between Armenia and Russia continue in the context of Armenia's entry into the Customs Union. "An agreement will be signed by the end of the year," the minister said in response to a query.

Vatican Embassy in Damascus Hit by Mortar

DAMASCUS (Reuters) – The Vatican embassy in Damascus was hit by mortar fire on Tuesday, November 5, but there were no casualties, a Vatican spokesman said.

It was not clear if the embassy was deliberately targeted. It is located in the wealthy Maliki area of the Syrian capital, where there are several embassies as well as the residences of government and security officials.

There was damage but no one was injured. The mortar hit a wing of the embassy that is currently not being used, Father Ciro Benedettini said from Vatican City.

An official at the embassy said the mortar had damaged part of the roof and left broken glass inside the building.

"It was very strong and noisy. We stayed inside and we were very afraid," Monsignor Giorgio Chazza told Reuters in Beirut.

The embassy, which is still operating in the embattled city, had been hit by eight to ten times by mortar bombs since July, he said.

Rebels fighting to topple the government of President Bashar al-Assad regularly launch mortar fire at government-held areas inside Damascus.

Damascus, Rebels Coordinate to Let 1,800 Civilians Flee Siege

DAMASCUS (Reuters) – A rare moment of coordination between the Syrian government and rebels enabled 1,800 civilians to flee a besieged town on the edge of Damascus on Tuesday, but thousands remain trapped with little food, water or medicine.

A source in the Ministry for Social Affairs said the evacuation from Mouadamiya had gone ahead with the help of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and some civil groups.

"I was living in terror and now I am free and safe with the army, thank God," a resident of Mouadamiya told a Reuters reporter on condition of anonymity. "There is no food or water. We got out with a new spirit now."

Forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad have used sieges to root out rebels from residential areas during the civil war that has cost more than 100,000 lives and displaced millions.

The government says the residents of Mouadamiya are being "held hostage" by terrorists.

This is the third such evacuation from Mouadamiya and the United Nations says 3,000 women and children have already left.

The opposition says 12,000 people face starvation and death in the town, which they describe as 90-percent destroyed.

International pressure has mounted on Syrian authorities to open humanitarian corridors to deliver aid to besieged civilians but relief agencies say they have not been granted access.

Mother Fadia Lahham, a nun who helped organize Tuesday's evacuation, said she was working to rescue all the civilians.

"The minister of social affairs ... volunteers, our team, the people of Mouadamiya, outside and inside, the opposition and even the security services ... have contributed," she said.



Community News

Richard Hovannisian To Speak at UC Berkeley

BERKELEY, Calif. — Prof. Richard Hovannisian will speak at the University of California, Berkeley, on Tuesday, November 19, on contested interpretations of the burning of the city of Smyrna/Izmir in 1922.

Smyrna was the second largest city of the Ottoman Empire and a major port for international trade. Its Christian majority was decimated and expelled in September 1922. Hovannisian will discuss with a power point presentation the city's important Armenian community, its cultural, educational, religious, and athletic organizations, and the fate of the community in the final phases of the Armenian elimination in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey.

The lecture is sponsored by the Armenian Studies Program directed by Prof. Stephan Astourian and the Institute of Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies at UC Berkeley. The program will take place in 155 Kroeber Hall on the Berkeley campus beginning at 7 p.m. It is open to the public without charge.

During the month of October, Hovannisian was one of the co-presenters, with Father Levon Zekian, in a two-day seminar on Armenian history and culture in Winterthur, Switzerland, with participants coming from Switzerland, France, Belgium, Italy and Turkey. He also was invited to Vienna to speak on modern Armenian issues in the auditorium of St. Hripsime Armenian Church, held under the auspices of Armenia's ambassador to Austria, Arman Kirakossian.

During the first weekend of November, Hovannisian was in Connecticut to make presentations on Armenian history at the West Hartford Campus of the University of Connecticut, sponsored by the School of Social Work and the Norian Program of UConn. Next, he was the guest speaker at the Holy Ascension (Hampardzum) Church in Trumbull in the Bridgeport area, under the auspices of Father Untzag Nalbandian and the Men's Society. Before returning to California, Drs. Richard and Vartiter Hovannisian also had the opportunity to visit Southern Connecticut State University and to be given a tour of the campus by recently-installed President Mary Arshagouni Papazian and her husband, Dr. Dennis Papazian.

Attorney Vartkes Yeghiayan Awarded Papal Medal

LOS ANGELES — Glendale attorney Vartkes Yeghiayan was recently awarded a papal medal (cavaleri) by Archbishop Raphael Minassian at the Armenian Diocese. The medal had been awarded by the retired and venerable Pope Benedict XVI in recognition for Yeghiayan's work and endeavors to secure compensation for Armenian Genocide heirs.

Yeghiayan is an Armenian-American attorney specializing in international law. Yeghiayan is known for launching several lawsuits against insurance companies for insurance policies issued to Armenians in the early twentieth century during the time of the Armenian Genocide.

After gathering evidence and finding several descendants of the victims of the Genocide, in 1999 he filed a class action lawsuit against New York Life in a case which lasted for four years. In January 2004, New York Life agreed to settle by paying \$20 million to the plaintiffs. Since then Yeghiayan, along with colleagues Mark Geragos and Brian Kabateck, have filed suits against other insurance companies, including AXA, which agreed to settle in 2005 by paying \$17.5 million.



Authentic Armenian food was served at the event.

TCA Arshag Dickranian School Celebrates Armenian Cultural Month

LOS ANGELES — In observance of the Armenian Cultural Month in October, the Tekeyan Cultural Association's (TCA) Arshag Dickranian School (ADS) held an all-day special event on Monday, October 28, at the Walter and Laurel Karabian Hall. The event was organized by the school administration, Armenian department teachers and music teacher. Honorary guests of the event included Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese, along with Rev. Manoug Markarian of St. John Church and School Board Chairman George K. Mandossian.

Principal Dr. Manoug Seraydarian, students, parents, guests, teachers and school staff gathered at the school courtyard in the morning, to enjoy a day of performances, Armenian food and games.

Prior to the commencement of the celebratory functions at the Walter and Laurel Karabian Hall, Kindergarten teacher Aline Bezdigian conducted an amusing puppet show for students ranging from Prekindergarten to third grade. At 11 a.m., senior student Nerses Bogosyan delivered the opening remarks of the event in which he greeted and welcomed the attendants and guests, stressing upon the significance of the event as a reminder of the Armenian culture and identity. Next, elementary Armenian teacher Arevik Nazaryan presented the fourth and fifth grade students, who played a short skit written by Bezdigian. Dressed in traditional Armenian costumes, the children read letters to the great Armenian King Tigran the Great in an emotional performance.



Pop singer Ani Christy performs her hit songs.

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Armenian folk dancing by ADS students

St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Church Celebrates 50 Years In Wynnewood

WYNNEWOOD, Penn. — In a gala anniversary weekend, the St. Sahag and St. Mesrob parish celebrated 50 years in its current church building. Through half a century of growth and activity, the castle-like church has been the focal point of community life for the West Philadelphia Armenian community and a well-known and highly regarded presence in the surrounding society.

The commemorative events began in suitably spiritual style on Saturday, October 19, when two young men of the parish were ordained as altar servers of the church. In a solemn ceremony, Loutfig Arabatlian was ordained as an acolyte, and Steven Keytanjian was ordained as a sub-deacon, by the hand of Diocesan Primate Archbishop Khajag Barsamian.



Archbishop Barsamian presents parishioner John Eskandarian with the St. Nerses Shnorhali Medal.

A reception in honor of the occasion followed, where the newly-ordained altar servers were congratulated by family and friends in the parish.

"Steve and Lou are two young Armenians who have been deeply inspired by their service to the church, and have made a spiritual home here," said St. Sahag and St. Mesrob's pastor the Very Rev. Oshagan Gulgolian. "Our church is very proud of their achievement."

Later that evening, a dance in the renovated church hall brought together several generations of parishioners — some of whom had traveled from out of town especially for the weekend.

The feeling of an anniversary reunion of families and friends continued into Sunday, as the community gathered in the church's sun-lit sanctuary for the Divine Liturgy.

Archbishop Khajag Barsamian was the celebrant and delivered a homily on the season of the Holy Cross, and on the way the cross of Christ has inspired more than four generations of worshippers at St. Sahag and St. Mesrob.

"This parish started out in West Philadelphia, in a neighborhood where the immigrant Armenian families lived and worked close to one another," the Primate observed. "But 50 years ago, the people of this church were faced with a choice. They had built a vital Armenian community — and were proud of that fact. A whole new generation had grown up together, and formed a tight-knit group — an extended family."

The community was growing and changing, he said; and that momentum inspired the see

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Dickranian School Celebrates Armenian Cultural Month

DICKRANIAN, from page 4

Next, the first special guest of the event, Seda Hayrian, a known teacher and former TV host, addressed the students about Armenia and its history. Hayrian talked about Armenian historical figures who played a significant role in shaping and sustaining the Armenian culture, such as Mesrob Mashdoots and Komitas, and Armenian painters from the Medieval period who have left a rich heritage for Armenians to admire and be proud of. Hayrian also talked



Singer Hovhannes Shahbazyan sings popular Armenian songs.

about non-Armenian poets such as Lord Byron who had learned the Armenian language and culture and praised them.

After Hayrian's talk, Armenian Department Chairperson Anahit Nasoyan invited Derderian to deliver his message to the students. Derderian spoke about the importance of maintaining the Christian identity of Armenia and concluded his remarks by conducting a pledge in which students vowed to safeguard their Armenian heritage and strive to serve their community and motherland. Next, popular Armenian singer Hovhannes Shahbazyan took the Karabian stage and sang several Armenian popular songs ending his series with Komitas's *Horovell* to which students and parents clapped and cheered, igniting an air of celebration in the hall.

After Shahbazyan's performance, attendants were invited to enjoy the authentic Armenian dishes and drinks that were served in the courtyard of the school by students. Attendants and guests mingled together, savoring the food and music, after which they gathered around the basketball court to cheer for the 10th and 11th graders in their spirited basketball match.

Following the basketball game, everyone reconvened at the Karabian Hall for the second part of the program which included recitation of Armenian poetry arranged by junior high Armenian teacher Nazelie Kojayan, Armenian folk dances presented by the junior high and high school students and songs performed by the school choir, which was conducted by music teacher, Keshishian. High school student Armine Gulyan as usual delighted the guests with her beautiful operatic voice singing the classic Armenian song *Garmeer Vart* and junior high students recited Armenian poetry.

Following the various cultural performances, Seraydarian thanked the teachers, performing students and supportive parents for their effort and devotion in organizing this event. He also invited parents to participate in future events and work hand-in-hand in order to achieve the school's noble goals.

The last act of the event was delivered by



Archbishop Hovnan Derderian conducts a pledge with the students to safeguard the Armenian identity and culture.



The school choir sings.

singer Ani Christy, one of Armenia's most famous pop stars, who performed her hit songs, to which parents and students started a circle dance. She ended her appearance as students joined her on the stage and danced with her during her last song. The cheerful performance



High school student Armine Gulyan sings *Garmeer Vart*.

lit the hall with joy and brought the celebration to a lively end.

Located at 1200 N. Cahuenga Blvd., Los Angeles, the TCA Arshag Dickranian Armenian School is a federally tax exempt, Pre-K to 12th grade private educational institution. For more information visit the school's website www.dickranianschool.org.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Soorp Haroutiun Church Celebrates Dedication of Cultural Hall

ORLANDO, Fla. — Soorp Haroutiun Church marked its third anniversary on Sunday, October 27, and celebrated the dedication of its cultural hall — a step that the community hopes will help inject new energy into parish life.

Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern), celebrated the Divine Liturgy. He was assisted by the Very Rev. Anania Tsaturyan, a visiting priest from Holy Echmiadzin, and Deacon Vahe Bagdasarian, a student at St. Nersess Armenian Seminary. Khoren Mekanejian, the Diocese's Music Ministry coordinator, directed the choir.

During *badarak*, Archbishop Barsamian ordained three young men — John Vatian, Robert Vatian, and Narek Nersisyan — to the rank of acolyte. The three had worked with the

ordination service is the first of many to be performed in this young parish.”

At the conclusion of services, Archbishop Barsamian led a veneration prayer for the “Relic of St. Vartan the Brave” — a gift to the Eastern Diocese from His Holiness Karekin II, the Catholicos of All Armenians — which the Primate had brought with him from St. Vartan Cathedral in New York.

Parishioners then gathered in the church narthex, where Archbishop Barsamian blessed a plaque in honor of the late Haroutiun and Siranoush Toufayan, the parents of church benefactor Hratch Toufayan. Hratch Toufayan and his wife, Suzanne, served as the grand godfathers of Soorp Haroutiun Church when it was consecrated in 2010. The plaque was hung above the doors leading into the sanctuary.

Archbishop Barsamian also blessed the church's cultural hall, which was dedicated in honor of longtime parishioners Drs. Aram and Aida Khatchadourian Tchobanian. The couple led a ribbon-cutting ceremony; they had served as cornerstone godfathers at the church's consecration, and recently made a generous contribution to the parish.

“We want to see this cultural hall used by the Armenian community,” Dr. Aida Khatchadourian Tchobanian said, adding that she hoped it would serve the old and young alike. “It's a great place for Armenians to get together after church. For the children, especially, it's perfect for meeting each other, playing together, and keeping the Armenian spirit alive.”

In the afternoon, a banquet was held in the new hall. Dr. Albert Eckian served as the master of ceremonies. Young flautist Sara Nazarian performed several selections.



Archbishop Khajag Barsamian ordains young men to the rank of acolyte.



Hratch and Suzanne Toufayan look on as Archbishop Khajag Barsamian blesses a plaque in honor of the late Haroutiun and Siranoush Toufayan, which has been hung in the church narthex.

parish's former visiting pastor, the Rev. Abraham Malkhasyan, as well as other parishioners to prepare for their new responsibilities.

“It is such a joy to see these young men step forward and serve their church,” Archbishop Barsamian said. “I am confident that today's

Parish Council member Lucine Mardirosian-Harvey spoke about fundraising for the church's planned Armenian Genocide memorial — a *khatchkar* monument that will be installed on church grounds. Drs. Aram and Aida Khatchadourian Tchobanian have agreed to

arguments in favor of such a view have already been proposed by noted linguists. Baronian brings the arguments together for the first time, along with a series of new findings from a careful study of dialect material. As will be made clear, this new take on Armenian dialects is more consistent with a prehistoric spread of the Armenian language from the West of the Plateau to its East, rather than the opposite.

Holder of a PhD in Linguistics from Stanford University, Baronian is an associate professor of Linguistics at the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi (UQAC). He is the principal investigator on a three-year Quebec governmental grant on Lexical Diffusion in the Linguistics Atlases of French Canada. He has published on Louisiana French, Quebec French and Western Armenian in the areas of phonology, morphology and historical linguistics.

For more information on this program, email hq@naasr.org.

NAASR Hosts Armenian Dialects Lecture

BELMONT, Mass. — Linguist Luc Vartan Baronian will present a lecture titled “On the Classification, Antiquity and Spread of the Armenian Dialects” on Thursday, November 21 at 7:30 p.m. at the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) Center, 395 Concord Ave.

In this talk, Baronian will propose a new definition of the East/West border dividing traditional Armenian dialects. The original definition, due to Adjarian's (1909) foundational work, is based on the present tense formation and reflects the pre-1915 Russian/Ottoman border. Baronian will argue that a methodologically sounder division should rest on consonant systems, which then places the border roughly between Greater Armenia and the minor kingdoms of the West.

By pushing back in time the Western consonant system, it becomes much more likely that it was inherited from a spoken dialect contemporary with Classical Armenian. Some



Drs. Aram and Aida Khatchadourian Tchobanian cut the ribbon to the church's cultural hall.

help with the project, but other support will be needed as plans move forward.

Barsamian thanked the Toufayan and Khatchadourian Tchobanian families for their generosity, and extended his appreciation to the parish council members, Sunday School superintendent and staff, and the entire community for

their support of and participation in parish life.

“It was only three years ago that I consecrated this beautiful church in central Florida, but already there are signs of growth and vibrancy here,” Barsamian said. “I am so proud of what has been accomplished here, and I look forward to celebrating new milestones with you in the future.”

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COMMUNITY NEWS

St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Church Celebrates 50 Years In Wynnewood

WYNNEWOOD, from page ?

founders of the parish to locate a new sanctuary which would serve the future needs of the parish.

"It was a difficult choice, and it took great courage and foresight to make the decision," said the Primate. "But in the end, your founders realized that in our mission as the Armenian Church in America, we must always look forward, and pursue growth. Your new church became the anchor for a whole new community – as Armenian families began to move into the surrounding towns, into the orbit of the St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Church in Wynnewood. And as you moved to this area, you brought the Armenian Christian spirit with you."

To conclude the service, Archbishop Barsamian led a veneration prayer for the "Relic of St. Vartan the Brave" – a gift to the Eastern Diocese from Karekin II, the Catholicos of All Armenians – which the Primate had brought with him from the Diocesan Center in New York.

Following services, the crowd adjourned to the church hall for a beautiful anniversary banquet, over which the Primate presided. Also present for the occasion was Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, the Diocesan Legate.

In the banquet program, Steven Barsamian served as master of ceremonies, offering a toast for the occasion before Marie Azadian officially welcomed the crowd on behalf of the parish's 50th anniversary committee.

Parish pastor Fr. Oshagan Gulgulian offered remarks, as did Parish Council Chairman Robert Zakian. Aykazian also



Parishioners at the anniversary banquet at St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Church

anniversary year were Helen Amirian, Deacon Minas Mihranian and Laura Zakian – each of whom received heartfelt applause from the

humble, self-effacing manner so characteristic of his long service to the Wynnewood parish.

The Primate concluded the afternoon with his warm congratulations and blessings.

As a special gift to each attendee, the organizing committee produced a beautiful commemorative book, some 90 pages in length, filled with historical information and photos of the people and events of the parish over

the past half-century and more.

The splendid two-day anniversary event was co-chaired by Migirdich and Marie Azadian and Robert and Nanette Zakian. Organizing committee members included Alma Alabiliikian, Laraine Ballard, Elizabeth Barsamian, Steve Barsamian, Julyet Degirmenci, Nadine Hoplamazian, Jovia Keytanjian, Lisa Manookian and Robin Williams.



"Stewardship Award" recipient Helen Amirian with Fr. Oshagan Gulgulian and Archbishop Khajag Barsamian

spoke.

The St. Sahag and St. Mesrob Junior Choir, under the direction of Khoren Mekanejian, the Diocesan music ministry director, delighted the crowd with a performance of two classic Armenian selections.

A photo montage prepared by Gulgulian transported attendees back through 50 years of activity at the church: from the purchase of the property through parish events. Viewers were especially touched to see the faces of many departed members, as well as living parishioners in their earlier days.

The parish also presented its 2013 "Stewardship Award" to three outstanding parishioners who have been exemplary and inspirational figures throughout these past 50 years. The honorees in this special

audience as they came forward to be recognized.

As a capstone to the banquet, longtime parish leader John Eskandarian received the "St. Nersess Shnorhali Medal," conferred by Catholicos Karekin II. Archbishop Barsamian presented the award to Eskandarian on behalf of the Catholicos, and commended the honoree's devotion to the youth of the parish.

John Eskandarian's work in the parish, and the important role he has played in the life of its youth for several decades, were the subject of personal reflections delivered by Gulgulian, Steve Barsamian and Alex Topakbashian. Finally, Eskandarian himself approached the podium with his wife, Opy, beside him, to express his gratitude in the



"Stewardship Award" recipient Deacon Minas Mihranian with Fr. Oshagan Gulgulian and Archbishop Khajag Barsamian



"Stewardship Award" recipient Laura Zakian with Fr. Oshagan Gulgulian and Archbishop Khajag Barsamian

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Randy Sapah-Gulian Sets Sights on Improving Lot of Youth in Armenia

By Florence Avakian

NEW YORK – For Randy Sapah-Gulian, the future of Armenia depends on assisting young people. “The plan of our foundation is to build a broad yet inter-locking range of programs directly focused on the Armenian youth. We believe that the youth in all societies are the foundation from which you can develop something of substance that endures,” said Sapah-Gulian in a recent interview.

Sapah-Gulian founded the Sapah-Gulian Foundation in 2012, which works through the Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR). He explained that programs supported by the foundation would emphasize several youth-oriented initiatives, such as the Pediatric Critical Care Program, promoted by his brother-in-law, Dr. Edward Seferian of Cedar Sinai Hospital. “This Medical Training Program – Pediatric Critical Care, which is an international program in scope, will emphasize the healthy growth of children so they may become productive members of society,” he said.



Randy Sapah-Gulian and Dr. Ed Seferian with Ambassador John Heffern, right

stressed Sapah-Gulian. “Further, the challenge, of course, with developing these types of programs is to maintain a high level of quality and to not lose focus. Better to do three or four things really well rather than

agree.”

A benefactor who has been to Armenia more than 40 times, Sapah-Gulian is chairman of FAR, which since the 1988 earthquake has been deeply committed to assisting, rebuilding and providing educational and training programs for Armenia’s population. His expertise as a CEO and president in the world of providing human capital solutions to large corporations around the world makes him a seasoned team player for FAR’s ambitious programs in Armenia.

“In the world outside of what I do for Armenia, through my company we now have large-scale Human Capital Programs running in 62 countries for our clients. We should be able to use those learnings to benefit the people of Armenia,” he explained.

On his last visit to Armenia in July, Sapah-Gulian met with Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II, and US Ambassador to Armenia John Heffern to explain and promote the goals of his foundation. With him were his wife Corinne (nee Seferian), his two younger daughters and his niece.

His daughters, Alexa, 20, Olivia, 16, and Gabrielle, 15, have all been to Armenia and volunteered at the FAR Children’s Center in Yerevan – one of FAR’s most important projects. “Our three daughters will one day be the trustees of our foundation,” he emphasized, “and they know they have a large responsibility.” He then quoted Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate of the Armenian Diocese (eastern), and President of FAR who

has often said, “one of the greatest gifts that a parent can give a child is to teach them how to give.”

Seferian and the team of medical doctors from around the world that are part of the Pediatric Critical Care Association were also in Armenia in July. This group meets once a year for training and education. During last year’s meeting they decided to make this training available to doctors and nurses in Armenia. Five doctors from the US, Seferian and four non-Armenians from different hospitals made this trip to Armenia. Seferian headed the team. A pediatric critical care specialist, Seferian worked at the Mayo Clinic for eight years, and has been with at Cedar Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles for the last four.

US Ambassador John Heffern visited the Muratsan hospital where the team’s program was housed to observe the training and make a presentation to the doctors. The 30 local doctors and nurses who took part will be involved in the follow-up training that will take place every year with the help of a grant from the Sapah-Gulian Foundation. While in Armenia these five “very eager” doctors visited other hospitals, demonstrating the commitment and energy with which they pursued their work, commented Sapah-Gulian.

The July trip was Seferian’s first visit to Armenia. “We were all engaged to provide better care and train the trainers, especially outside of Yerevan which was the center of the training,” he explained. “We taught didactically, using hands-on simulation equipment to mimic real life situations.” In Yerevan, the five-person team worked with 20 local doctors and four nurses, including two medical translators. Their plan is to continue this project in Armenia so they can educate local physicians and others who provide help to critically ill children.

For Seferian, it was also “breathtaking to stand on the soil of our homeland and to see the snow-capped mountains, especially Mt. Ararat, the strong symbol of Armenia. This trip is the beginning of an ongoing and long-term relationship. It was very rewarding to give back to Armenia, and it will definitely continue.”

And for Sapah-Gulian and his family establishing this crucial program in Armenia through his foundation accentuates his lifelong belief that “everyone has to have something that speaks to them. For our family, it is children, Armenia, and Armenians.” he said.



Randy Sapah-Gulian with children at the FAR Children’s Center in Yerevan

The Sapah-Gulian Foundation focuses on children from an “early age on having the right kinds of care, such as what the pediatric care program provides all the way through the educational process, ultimately leading to job training and employment. It is the life cycle from birth through to their early 20s,”

10-20 things adequately. The Pediatric Care program is an international program with the highest training and certification standards run by leading pediatric doctors from around the world. To be perfectly frank, when Ed suggested bringing it to Armenia to my wife, Corinne, it probably took me 30 seconds to

A Royal Evening With HMADS Mothers

By Diana Tavitian-Kojoian

BAYSIDE, N.Y. – It was a royal affair on the eve of Thursday, October 24, when the Class Mothers at the Holy Martyrs Armenian Day School (HMADS) gathered together to prepare



A festive tea table

an evening of tranquility, smiles, treats and surprises.

It was an event fit for the Queen herself.

Those in attendance were asked to wear a hat on this special Mother’s Tea. Ladies of all ages, from young moms, grandmothers, and ladies within the Armenian community joined in the excitement of singing, participating in a creative activity and joyfully conversing with one another.

Kalustyan Hall was decorated in an autumn motif and a lavish table was set in the middle of the room, heaped with hors d’oeuvres. There was an array of delicacies representing the culinary art from the Armenian cuisine to contemporary international, including the famous cucumber teapot shape sandwiches.

Fruit platters were abundant with oranges shaped like blossoming flowers. A watermelon full of various fruits which was carved in the shape of a tea kettle, sat in the middle of the table. And of course, a tea party wouldn’t be complete without tea and cake.

Ladies were able to enjoy various flavored tea (including decaf and herbal) As the evening progressed ladies sipped on their tea, they were entertained by the beautiful voices of Yeretsgin Karine Malkhasyan and Hasmig Rakoubian, who also played the



A proper tea party with HMADS mothers

piano. The crowd was so pleased with the musical selections, they requested more songs. Copies of popular Armenian songs placed on each table encouraged all to participate in singing, led by Rakoubian.

Finally, before the winning ticket was picked for the raffle prize (a Michael Aram bowl), each table of guests participated in a hat-decorating

contest.

As the hats were given out, various materials were also distributed. Participants were allowed to use anything they had within their pocket-books as well.

The table whose hat won top honors went to an HMADS alumna and mom, Kristen Kelekian-Hackman.



COMMUNITY NEWS

A New Playwright in Town: Taleen Babayan Dazzles

By Hagop Vartivarian

NEW YORK – The cultural life of the Greater New York Armenian community was further enriched with the theatrical endeavor of Taleen Babayan. Already a familiar name to the readership of the *Armenian-Mirror Spectator* for the last decade with her frequent articles and reporting, we are doubly pleased to see a young talent interested in writing plays, possibly the most difficult genre of literature.



Taleen Babayan on stage with the cast and crew of "Where Is Your Groom" after the performance.

Babayan possesses a deep knowledge of what defines an Armenian-American family: the traditional family clinging firmly to ethnic customs, juxtaposed with the current generation striving to adapt and adjust to a new environment. Whereas during the last century renowned literary figures such as Peniamin Nourigian, Aram Haigaz, Vahe Hayg, Souren Manuelian, and Hagop Asadourian lamented the pain of immigrants arriving from historic Armenia, today Babayan laments the pain of young Armenian-Americans, whose families arrived from Beirut, Aleppo, Istanbul, and Tehran, and who strive to speak and live the Armenian spirit outside of their homeland. We only hope that her endeavor becomes an inspiration to her generation.

She was indeed raised in a traditional Armenian family. Her grandfather, Yervant Babayan, is a prominent educator and prolific writer, and her father, Nerses, was engaged in journalism for many years and associated with the *Armenian Mirror-*

Spectator. Furthermore, she continues to receive the attention and care of her loving mother, Hermine.

Like many others of her generation, Babayan spent her college years away from home in a non-Armenian environment, but maintained the ties to her Armenian culture during that time. She has acquired her knowledge of the Armenian language at home and from Saturday Armenian School. She is worthy of much praise.

Back to the play. "Where Is Your Groom?" is 80-percent English and 20-percent Armenian and they complement each other in perfect harmony. All the young actors at the performance on Saturday, October 26, at The Players Theatre, were essentially the product of the Middle East and close to 250 attendees watched their acting and accurate Armenian pronunciation with pure pleasure.

The play takes place at the home of Koko (Aris Hamparsoumian) and Siroun (Katherine Sabbagh). The couple's two children, Lara (Zarig Baghdadian) and Saro [Haig Minassian], wish to marry non-Armenians, after having bad experiences dating in their own community. Lara introduces her parents to an ignorant American young man, who has not even heard of Armenia. Meanwhile,

Lara's parents introduce her to young men of Armenian families. Finally, she meets the right Armenian and the engagement (khosgab) takes place as well-known singer Robert Chilingirian enters the stage singing a wedding song.

Some on the stage had acting experience and others none, yet all performed very well. The set, featuring an Armenian living room, was beautifully furnished. Other participants included Lori Cinar, Joe Hovsepian, Tanya Bas, Taniel Ohanian, Raffi Gulbenk, Sarkis Yenikomshuyan, Sedrak Yenikomshuyan, Daniella Baydar, Taniel Ekshian, Andrew Saganda and Edwin Baghdasarian. Backstage volunteers were Taleen Baghdadian, Anoush Gulian and Anahid

Kaprielian. Harout Chatmajian, one of the directors of the Tekeyan Cultural Association's Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group, contributed greatly to the acting aspect of the play.

The play teems with the painful phenomenon of Armenian-American contemporary life. For example, the family priest (played by Taniel Ohanian) introduces Paul (played by Andrew Saganda), a seminarian who aspires to become a priest yet who doesn't know one word of Armenian. He will serve in the Armenian Church and if left to such priests, our sacred Badarak will be performed in English one day. Babayan highlights this and many other painful occurrences within our community life in her play.

We congratulate her and the team of young cast and crew and who continue to keep our theatrical heritage alive.

-Translated by Nerses Babayan



Koko (played by Aris Hamparsoumian), Siroun (played by Katherine Sabbagh) and Medz Mayrig (played by Lori Cinar) play matchmaker to Lara (played by Zarig Baghdadian) BELOW: The family home of the Keshishians, who are searching for a suitor for their daughter



The sold out crowd waiting outside The Players Theatre before the show.

Arts & Living

AIWA Presents Exploration of Writer Zabel Yessayan, Post- Genocide Literature

ARLINGTON, Mass. — Intellectuals who survived the Armenian Genocide struggled to come to grips with the enormity of their nation's loss and to find a way to reflect this predicament in their creative work. The writer Zabel Yessayan experimented with several different approaches in her post-genocide writing.

A recognized author, Yessayan had been the only woman on the Turkish government's list of intellectuals to be arrested and sent to exile and death on April 24, 1915, but she managed to evade the police and escape abroad. The 1920s found her living in Paris and publishing various fiction and non-fiction books and articles.

In a talk at the Armenian Cultural Foundation (ACF) on Sunday, November 17, Prof. Nanor Kebranian of Columbia University will examine the topic "The Survival of Empathy: Zabel Yessayan and Post-Genocide Armenian Literature."

Kebranian cites words of journalist Hrant Dink that "echo the wisdom of numerous Armenian intellectuals who survived the Young Turk's genocidal campaign during the First World War" and "signal a veritable crisis of empathy understood in its psychoanalytic sense." Yessayan recognized "both the perils and promises of Armenian-Turkish empathy, of positioning oneself as the other," Kebranian points out. Her talk will explore the implications of this recognition as evidenced in some of Yessayan's postwar writing, especially in terms of survival.



Prof. Nanor Kebranian

Kebranian is an assistant professor at Columbia in the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies. She received her doctorate from the University of Oxford with generous graduate fellowships from both the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation and the Clarendon Fund (Oxford). Her specializations encompass, but are not limited to, late Ottoman social, political, and cultural history, and literary studies. Current projects include a book monograph on late Ottoman prison narratives and a study of "Diaspora" as an anti-communal ethic.

The program is sponsored by the Armenian International Women's Association (AIWA) as part of a current project whose focus is to translate into English and make available the works of the pioneering Armenian women writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yessayan is a major figure of the period, and AIWA plans to release by the end of the year two volumes of translations into English: one the complete edition of Yessayan's memoir of her childhood and early education in Istanbul, *The Gardens of Silihdar*, and the other Yessayan's multi-layered novel, *My Soul in Exile*, along with other short works.

Co-sponsors of the talk are the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research and the ACF.

The public is invited to attend the program, free of charge, beginning at 2 p.m. at the ACF, 441 Mystic St., Arlington. A discussion period and reception will follow the program.

Further information about this program or AIWA's various initiatives to increase the visibility of Armenian women is available by contacting AIWA at 65 Main St., Watertown, aiwainc@aol.com or www.aiwainternational.org.



Jewelry created by Arto Hachikian for families of Boston Marathon Bombing victims

Jeweler Designs Gifts for Boston Marathon Victims

WATERTOWN — Local jeweler, Harutyun Arto Hachikian, on Sunday, November 3, presented jewelry especially designed for the families of Boston Marathon Bombing victims MIT Officer Sean Collier and 8-year-old Martin Richard, as well as injured MBTA Officer Richard H. Donohue, at the Armenian Library and Museum of America (ALMA). "These are special pieces I designed for them from my heart. They are innocent victims of this tragedy," Hachikian explained.

Hachikian was born in 1960 in the Bunyan Gigi village in the Kayseri Province of Turkey. His great-grandfather died during the Genocide. Since leaving Istanbul at the age of 17, Hachikian has worked as a jeweler, traveling to Greece, Canada and New York before settling in Boston in 1984. He has hand-designed jewelry for his Boston-based jewelry store, Anais Jewelry, and for retail stores throughout the country.

Hachikian is no stranger to loss and tragedy. In 2002, Hachikian was in a car accident and sustained a spinal cord injury, leaving him paralyzed from the chest down. "I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. ... I could feel their pain through my own pain," said Hachikian. But Hachikian hopes his story will offer the survivors and their families hope.

Through years of determination and perseverance, he has relearned to make jewelry from his wheelchair, despite partial paralysis in both hands. He relies on his wife, Alice, to help with his daily activities, but he has returned to doing what he loves — designing jewelry. Each piece is custom-designed and made by Hachikian.

"As Armenian-American citizens, we stand strong in support of our American heroes, including the victims of the Boston Marathon bombings. We respect and honor the victims and their families. God bless America. Be strong," said Hachikian.

"They will always be in our hearts and thoughts as an American heroes for freedom," he added.



Jewelry created by Arto Hachikian for families of Boston Marathon Bombing victims

A Mainstream Home for Alternative Art In Armenia

By Elizabeth Zach

YEREVAN (*New York Times*) — Every weekend at the Vernissage Market here, locals and tourists survey handsomely woven Persian rugs, vintage Soviet military medals, samovars, chess sets and intricately carved jewelry boxes. It's like a step back in time to a Silk Road bazaar.

In contrast, just across the street sits a staid and humble building, designed as an auditorium when the Cold War was drawing to a close and then, for a time afterward, left vacant. In front, appropriately, is Yervand Kochar's towering 1959 sculpture "Melancholy," seemingly serving as a testament to the political and economic crises that have convulsed Armenia since the collapse of Communism in the region nearly a quarter century ago.

The statue, however, also gestures promisingly to the building itself, which since 1995 has housed the Norar Pordzarakan Arvesti Kentron, or Armenian Center for Contemporary Experimental Art. Founded by Armenian émigrés to the US and hailed by many as the epicenter of Armenia's culture revolution and renaissance, it hosts exhibits by young, avant-garde artists and offers concerts and performances in its large auditorium.

Among other endeavors, artists at the center initiated and organized Armenia's participation at the Venice Biennale in 1995, and continued to do so for eight years. And the center's founders are set to introduce an independent study program for graduates in the arts and architecture, modeled on a similar one at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York.

"It used to be that many of our young artists would exhibit their work in underground galleries," said Sevada Petrossian, the center's coordinator of architectural events. "We like to think of the center as a mainstream place for alternative art."

For a city of roughly one million, Yerevan's artistic standing and cachet have been notable in the past century. In 1972, the Soviet Union established its first Museum of Modern Art here. The city's National Art Gallery showcases the third-largest collection of European masters in the former Soviet Union, including works by Rodin, Rubens and Tintoretto. And Yerevan itself exudes a distinct bygone elegance, with its softly hued 19th-century tuff stone edifices that line its leafy boulevards.

Aside from the center and its focus on experimental art, there is also the Cafesjian Center for the Arts. Opened in November 2009, it holds an extensive collection of contemporary and glass art, as well as works by Marc Chagall and John Alton, who was of Armenian descent.

And yet, despite Yerevan's artistic fervor, when Edward Balassanian and his wife, Sonia, set out to establish the contemporary and experimental art center, they expected — and encountered — resistance.

"While we believe in academic education, we also promote breaking away from it once study is completed," Balassanian said. "Those within certain art circles, namely some artists schooled during the Soviet era and most of the members of the Painters Union of Armenia, still either don't understand the center's motives and/or vocally reject its projects."

The Balassanians are part of Armenia's global diaspora of eight million. They were both born and raised in Iran, fleeing the country in 1979 after the Islamic revolution and eventually settling in New York.

But when Armenia declared its independence see GALLERY, page 11

— Gabriella Gage



ARTS & LIVING

Big Role for 'A Little Princess' in Boston

BOSTON — Actress Sirena Abalian of Lexington will be featured in Fiddlehead Theatre Company's production of "A Little Princess" at the Strand Theatre (543 Columbia Road, Dorchester) November 21 to December 8.

This production is a Boston-area premiere, and Fiddlehead Theatre Company's first as the new resident company at Boston's historic Strand Theatre.

Tony-Nominated composer Andrew Lipka will present a talkback following the show on Friday, November 29, hosted by WGBH Executive Arts Editor Jared Bowen.

Abalian, a junior at Lexington High School, will play the lead role of Sara Crewe in "A Little Princess." She has been acting in professional theater since the age of 6 and has



Sirena Abalian as Sara in "A Little Princess"

appeared in numerous productions throughout the Boston area including most recently, "Fame, Jr." with Fiddlehead Theatre. She was awarded "Most Promising Performance by a Child Actor" by the Independent Reviewers of New England (IRNE) for her performance as Jojo, in Wheelock Family Theater's production of "Seussical The Musical."

"A Little Princess" tells the story of a little

girl with a big imagination. Separated from her father and the open-hearted Africans who helped him raise her, young Sara is sent to boarding school in London. When things go badly for her there, her imaginative powers come to the rescue, helping to transform a drab institution into a place of magic and mystery. As the girl wins the affection of the other boarders she draws the ire of Miss Minchin, the dour headmistress; Sara is made a servant to the institution when her father is reported dead, his fortune is seized. Sara counters the headmistress's best efforts to degrade her with the grace and virtue of a true princess.

"A Little Princess" is presented through special arrangement with Music Theatre International (MTI).

Fiddlehead Theatre Company is the resident theater company of the historic Strand Theatre located in Dorchester. Since its inception in 1993, Fiddlehead Theatre Company has been dedicated to producing professional theater experiences for the greater Boston community, and educating local youth in the theater arts through its Children's Theatre Division. Fiddlehead's partnership with the City of Boston designating the company as residents of the Strand Theatre has placed the IRNE award winning theater-company on the forefront of Boston's regional theater community. Named after the fantastical fiddlehead fern found in fairytales and symbolic of imagination, Fiddlehead Theatre Company is committed to producing theater that uplifts the spirit while engaging audiences in provocative social issues, motivating and energizing their audiences to renew their commitment to community, and instilling hope for a better tomorrow.

Tickets may be purchased by calling the box office or online at www.fiddleheadtheatre.com. Student, senior and group discounts are available.



Lianna Haroutounian Stars in 'Les Vespres Sicilienne'

By Rupert Christiansen

LONDON (*Daily Telegraph*) — Composed just after *La Traviata*, *Les Vêpres Siciliennes* represents one of the biggest jumps in Verdi's career — an opera in five acts, designed to gratify the exigent tastes of a jaded Parisian public and its demand for extravagant spectacle and extensive ballet interludes.

But given its sprawling plot, extreme vocal demands and a score of variable quality, it has been neglected and even scorned by posterity.

Set in medieval Sicily, it tells a semi-fictional tale of rebellion against foreign occupation, pivoting on a son's discovery that his political

enemy is also his biological father. These are familiar Verdian tropes, handled so lamely and clumsily by the librettists that it is hardly surprising that for the opera's first-ever Covent Garden production, the director Stefan Herheim and his team of dramaturgs and designers have chosen to jettison the superficial historical setting. Instead they freely and poetically explore the work in terms of its historical context and implications.

The Herheimers takes us inside the Paris Opéra of the mid-19th century, where revolutionary artists are battling backstage against the forces of royalist reaction. From the boxes, an audience watches with detached amusement and interest — they don't take it for real, and perhaps we shouldn't either.

Some of you may feel that this represents precisely the sort of arrogant liberty of interpretation that has become extremely unpopular among mainstream audiences, and you certainly can't extract perfect narrative logic from the new *mise-en-scène*. I can only say that I found it magnificent to look at, and profoundly Verdian in its theatricality and response to the music. Others will disagree, no doubt.

But the four principal singers are indisputably excellent: Lianna Haroutounian sings with poise, sweep and warmth as the noble heroine, failing only to render the shimmy and sparkle of her final *Bolero*. The men are just about ideal: Bryan Hymel effortlessly navigates the high-lying tenor role, and stentorian Michael Volle and snakey Erwin Schrott could not be bettered as the double-crossing antago-

nists. This is first-rate casting.

The chorus raises the roof in thrilling fashion, and Antonio Pappano's ardently committed conducting never becomes emptily hysterical: the delicacy and detail of the orchestration glows.

Never mind the production's occasional excesses and eccentricities: executed at every

REVIEW

A Mainstream Home for Alternative Art in Armenia

GALLERY, from page 10

from the Soviet Union in 1991, Balassanian, an architect and urban planner, and his wife, a painter and poet who has exhibited at major venues in the United States and Europe, including The Project Room of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, were eager to return.

After the Islamic revolution, she began concentrating her art on cultural, political and social suppression, and she felt a natural calling toward Armenia. In 1992, she organized her first contemporary art exhibit in Yerevan, including her work and that of eight other artists, culminating in the center's official opening in 1994. She and her husband gradually introduced video and multimedia art to the Armenian art scene, as well as photography as its own art genre.

Not everyone in Yerevan has been receptive. Among those is Anatoly Avetyan, who began his artistic career in the 1970s and has gone on to command strong sales of his art, which includes metal works, paintings and sculptures now owned by current and past presidents of Russia, Finland and Germany, not to mention George W. Bush.

"Much of the best generation of artists has already passed away," he said. Rather than rein-

vent the wheel, he said, he and his contemporaries are pushing for a larger building to house the works now at Yerevan's Museum of Modern Art.

In response, Edward Balassanian said the establishment of the Museum of Modern Art in 1972 was indeed "a daring act," and he draws a parallel between it and the center he co-founded.

"It was an expression of resilience and audacity under politically repressive conditions," he said, noting that his center had "institutionalized the concept and role of the curator as a distinct profession, something that didn't exist previously in Armenia, as such tasks had been performed by government-appointed managers."

With poverty, corruption and a weak democracy continuing to bedevil Armenia, the center's artists say they seek to tether their work to social and political issues alongside questions of national identity and culture. The center organized an exhibition in 2007 called "Yerevan Crisis," for example, which focused on social problems resulting from rapid growth, a spontaneous boom in high-rise construction and escalating property prices.

This issue was also at play in 1997, when Gagik Ghazareh, a film student at the time, was

hard-pressed to find a place to screen his work. Despite Yerevan's growth, there is only one operating cinema in the city, and he did not feel it fit his alternative genre, he said. A friend suggested contacting the center, which offered him a screening room.

"One year later, I was invited by the center to chair their cinema department," said Ghazareh, who joined in 1999, later becoming the center's artistic director and has since gone on to develop annual festivals in Yerevan for film and theater.

Vahram Akimian, another young filmmaker who joined the center's staff in 2005, is now the program director for the "One Shot" International Short Film Festival, which has partners in Italy, the Netherlands, Russia and Slovakia, among other countries. He was also the center's associate curator of the Armenian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2009. Today, he is the center's director of video, cinema and theater.

"Our government speaks of a 'national culture' or 'national art,'" said Akimian one afternoon at the center as he looked across the street at the bustling Vernissage Market. "But there's still no agreement today on what that is."



Lianna Haroutounian

artistic level with terrific flair and verve, this is grand opera at its grandest — a gorgeous visual and musical treat.

The opera will run through November 11. The performance on November 4 was relayed live to cinemas in HD; a relay will be broadcast on BBC Radio 3 on November 18.

The Armenian
Mirror-Spectator
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ARTS & LIVING

Music, Literature and Religion in German-Armenian Cultural Dialogue

GERMANY, from page 1

In both Berlin and Stuttgart, it was culture that consolidated the bridge between the German and Armenian participants. Following greetings by Vartkes Alyanak of the Berlin Armenian community, representatives of the mayor and the Armenian Embassy spoke. Diaspora Minister Hakobyan reported on progress in the independent Republic's political and economic development. In his keynote speech, Prof. Mihran Dabag, from the Institute for Diaspora and Genocide Research of the Ruhr University in Bochum, picked up the theme introduced by his predecessors, of the "homeland" – a question that has acquired new meaning for Armenians in the Diaspora since the establishment of an independent nation.

Among the many Armenians living abroad are world-class musicians who have succeeded in mastering the greatest achievements in both the European and Armenian traditions. Berlin had the honor of hosting soprano Hrachuhi Bassenz and bass Gor Harutyunyan as well as Anahit Ter-Tatshatyan on the piano, who presented works stretching from Giuseppe Verdi to Komitas.

In Stuttgart the cultural festival opened with music and concluded with a gala concert. Following an ecumenical prayer service by Father Diradur Sardaryan and Protestant min-

days whose aim it was to "bring the two cultures together and to present Armenian culture, which has had great significance for the European development, to a broader public." The initiative carried as a slogan, "Enthralling Diversity, Fascinating Culture!" The events ranged from speeches, for example on "Armenia between Integration and Identity Safekeeping," by Prof. Karen Swassjan, to a round table discussion on "The Diaspora as Bridge Builders in Development Cooperation – The Example of Armenia." Participants could become acquainted with crucial features of Armenian culture, like its cuisine, through an introductory cooking workshop, for example, or learn some basics of Armenian in a quick language course. An event highlighting Armenian fairy tales provided a taste of folk culture.

German participants also had a chance to get sample Armenia's rich literary heritage.



Diana Kruger



Conrad Kuhn and Christoph Haacker recite works by Charents.

ister Matthias Vosseler, pianist Ruben Meliksetian, who has been awarded the "Komitas medal" by the Armenian Diaspora Ministry, performed works by Rachmaninoff, Wagner-Liszt and Komitas. Four days later, the several hundred guests who filled the New Palace hall for the gala concert had the opportunity to hear magnificent soloist singers and instrumentalists who offered selections from the European and Armenian classical traditions as well as contemporary repertoire. Mezzosopranos Juliette Galstian and Anna Manasyants, and Baritone Mikael Babajanyan gave passionate renditions of arias from operas including "Sayat Nova," "Carmen" and "Don Carlos," whereas cellist Vache Bagratuni, violinist Kristina Altunjan and pianist Tatevik Mokatsian delivered a brilliant performance of the *F-Minor Piano Trio* by Arno Babajanyan. The Acoustic Colors Quartet from Yerevan was the "surprise" announced for the second part of the concert: mezzosoprano Varsenik Avanyan joined with pianist Vahagn Hayrapetyan, saxophonist Armen Hyusnunts and Norayr Kartashyan, expert on the duduk and other traditional wind instruments (as well as drums), dazzled the audience with one vibrant piece after another. The quartet displayed technical and musical mastery of European compositional excellence in combination with traditional Armenian folk melodies, and transformed them through "cosmopolitan free-jazz" improvisation into a unique musical experience. As one newspaper wrote: "Their repertoire consists of their own works as well as elaborations of model examples of Armenian music. All their arrangements reflect an excellent feel for musical forms and produce a lively mixture of different stylistic and sound levels which is internationally comprehensible."

Between the opening and concluding musical experiences were a series of activities over four

Author Konrad Kuhn from Vienna presented an overview of the life and works of Yeghishe Charents, and Christoph Haacker delivered a fiery recitation of selections in the new German translation by Kuhn – who, for his

part, recited a couple of poems in the original. A special treat at this event was musical accompaniment by Mikael Bagratuni (the 16-year-old son of the cellist), who played some of his original compositions on the piano. Authors also presented some new works on the history of Armenia: former Greek Ambassador to Armenia Leonidas Th. Chrysanthopoulos introduced the German edition of his book, *Caucasus Chronicles, Nation-Building and Diplomacy in Armenia, 1993-1994*, and I was invited to do a reading from my book, *Through the Wall of Fire: Armenia – Iraq – Palestine: From Wrath to Reconciliation*. The highpoint among the literary contributions was a performance of Dogan Akhanli's play, "Anne's Silence," which deals with a Turkish-German immigrant girl's discovery of her Armenian roots. At the end of the emotionally powerful monologue, which was brilliantly performed by actress Bea Ehlers-Kerbekian, Rainer Blankenburg opened a round table discussion with Sibylle Thelen, author of a book on the Armenian issue in Turkey, and myself, which members of the overflow audience joined. Most wanted to learn more about the background of the ongoing debate in Turkey and the perspectives for progress towards recognition of the genocide, especially in the context of the Gezi Park movement.

No portrayal of Armenian history and culture could be complete without exploring the role of the church. On Sunday, October 27, a special service took place at the Holy Cross Church (Surb Khatch) to celebrate its 30th jubilee, dur-

ing which Archbishop Karekin Bekdjian, Primate of the Diocese in Germany, delivered the blessing of the Catholicos to church leaders and choir members. Later the same day, Margret Jaschke and Prof. Robert Stähle illustrated a project on the restoration work on biblical texts being conducted at the Matenadaran in Yerevan, and Sardaryan presented a new volume of the complete liturgy of the Armenian Apostolic Church in a German translation, which he worked on together with Prof. Gabriele Winkler, a leading authority on the subject.

The Armenian Cultural Days in Stuttgart represent a considerable achievement, especially in light of the fact that Sardaryan, who initiated the project three years ago, came to the Armenian community in Baden-Württemberg only in 2007. The increasing number of Germans who attend the events testifies to their growing interest in Armenia, its history, culture and current political process. And now, from November 15-24, the Theater am Olgaek, which hosted the play and some readings, will hold an Armenian film festival including sessions with directors.

Such events also prove that language need not be an obstacle to cultural exchange as a part of understanding among different peoples. Music, of course, plays a singular role in the process because of its universality, as pianist Hayrapetyan from the Acoustic Colors Quartet emphasized. In impromptu remarks in English at the end of the gala, he said he believed "It is music that will save the planet."

Sponsor a Teacher in Armenia and Karabagh 2013



Since its inception in 2001, TCA's 'Sponsor a Teacher' program has raised over \$563,000 and reached out to 4,440 teachers and school workers in Armenia and Karabagh.

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ARTS & LIVING

CALENDAR

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NOVEMBER 23- Holiday Fair 10-3pm, Holy Resurrection Armenian Church, 1910 Stanley Street, New Britain. Featuring Armenian food & pastries, Vendors for holiday shopping, Kitchen Cafe, Santa appearance from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Admission is free. For more info, contact the church office at 860-223-7875.

MASSACHUSETTS

NOVEMBER 10 – “The Art of Madeline and Eunice Kolligian” opening reception. 3 to 5 p.m. Armenian Library and Museum of America, Inc. (ALMA), 65 Main St., Watertown. Contemporary Art Gallery (3rd floor). Free Admission. For more info. info@almainc.org, (617) 926-2562.

NOVEMBER 10 – St. Stephen’s Ladies Guild presents “The Gamavor Story,” performed by the Way We Were Ensemble of New York/ New Jersey, 2 p.m., St. Stephen’s Church Hall, Elton Ave., Watertown. Tickets: \$20 advanced purchase, \$25 at the door, \$10 children under 12. For tickets, contact Mary Derderian at hyeguina@yahoo.com or 781-762-4253; make checks payable to St. Stephen’s church.

NOVEMBER 16 – Armenian Women’s Welfare Association (AWWA) 38th Annual Luncheon Auction, Burlington Marriott, Burlington; 11 a.m. silent auction and bidding; Guest auctioneers Al Kaprielian and Cindy Fitzgibbon; \$60 per person, Visa and MasterCard accepted. For reservations and info, contact: awwauction@gmail.com.

NOVEMBER 16 – Second annual Mer Doon Benefit Dance, 7:30 p.m. to 1 a.m., Charles Mosesian Cultural and Youth Center, 465 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown. Featuring John Berberian, Bob Mougamian, Mal Barsamian and Bruce Gigarian. Mezza, dessert table and more. Tickets: \$40 adult, \$30 student; for tickets and table reservations, please call Mark at 617-256-5358.



On November 16 at 11 a.m., the Armenian Women’s Welfare Association (AWWA) will host its 38th annual Luncheon Auction at the Burlington Marriott, Burlington, MA. There will be silent auction and bidding with guest auctioneers Al Kaprielian and Cindy Fitzgibbon. Tickets are \$60.

NOVEMBER 16 – 50th anniversary celebration of the Lowell Armenian Relief Society Center, 6:30 p.m., 142 Liberty St., Lowell, MA. Appetizers, cocktails, music. Free admission, donations welcomed. Reservations by Nov. 9, please call either Sona Gevorkian, (781) 275-8875, or Sossy Jeknavorian, (978) 256-2538.

NOVEMBER 17 – “The Survival of Empathy: Zabel Yessayan and Post-Genocidal Armenian Literature,” presentation by Columbia University Professor Nanor Kebranian. 2 p.m., Armenian Cultural Foundation, Arlington. Sponsored by the Armenian International Women’s Association, with the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research and the Armenian Cultural Foundation.

DECEMBER 6 – Anniversary celebration by Lowell “Ahoronian” Gomideh, 6:30 p.m., St. Gregory Church, North Andover; dinner and program honoring 50-year

members Steve Dulgarian and Joe Dagdigian; remembering the 25th anniversary of the earthquake in Armenia; soloist Nina Hovsepien, accompanied by Mary Barooshian; donation, \$20 adults, \$10 students.

DECEMBER 6 AND 7 – Trinity Christmas Bazaar, Friday, 3-9 p.m., Saturday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., Holy Trinity Armenian Church, 145 Brattle St., Cambridge.

DECEMBER 15 – Erevan Choral Society and Orchestra-Christmas Holiday Concert, 7 p.m., Church Sanctuary, Holy Trinity Armenian Church 145 Brattle St., Cambridge. Save the date, details to follow.

MICHIGAN

NOVEMBER 24 – Members and friends of Detroit Tekeyan Cultural Association honor the retiring chairman of the TCA CHAPTER, Nora Azadian, 5 p.m., Belian Art Center, Troy.

NEW JERSEY

NOVEMBER 9 – Armenian Democratic Liberal Party of Greater New York invites all to an evening with Hasan Cemal in an open discussion with the audience. 9.30 a.m., Tekeyan Center, 560 Sylvan Ave., First Floor, Englewood Cliffs. RSVP Shoghig Chalian, 201-803-0240.

RHODE ISLAND

NOVEMBER 9 and 10 – Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church, Providence, 83rd Annual Armenian Food Fair and Bazaar, Saturday, 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m., and Sunday, noon to 6 p.m., Egavian Cultural Center, 70 Jefferson St. Authentic Armenian food and pastries, Take-out food booth. Armenian Market featuring traditional Armenian favorites. Activities for children. Daily & scratch ticket raffles. Silent auction, Penny social, TV room for football. Cash, Check, Visa and MC accepted. Free admission – everyone welcome. FREE valet parking. Call 401-272-7712 or visit www.armenianfoodfairri.com

Shushi Dance Ensemble Performs in Rhode Island

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of St. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church, 70 performers and more than 50 parents of the Shushi Armenian Dance Ensemble of St. Vartan Cathedral in New York visited another state – Rhode Island. On October 19, the ensemble took the weekend trip to this historical state and made some time for sight-seeing the mansions of Newport.

In the evening, St. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church Cultural Committee and the ACYOA Jrs, hosted members of the ensemble and their families to a meet and greet with dinner and dancing. Father Shnorh Souin, pastor of St. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church led the group to the church sanctuary to light candles and pray.

The following day, October 20, Shushi had its debut performance in Rhode Island with a patriotic program of song and dance. Under the leadership of artistic director and choreographer Seta Paskalian-Kantardjian, 66 dancers of the ensemble along with artists from Los Angeles, Calif., musical director Andranik Mouradian and vocalists Salpi Mailyan and Armen Hovannesyanyan, provided a performance that earned a standing ovation.

On the occasion of the premier program of Shushi in Rhode Island, Souin presented Paskalian-Kantardjian and the Shushi Dance Ensemble with a memorable plaque.

For more information on Shushi Dance Ensemble, visit www.shushidance.org.



Shushi Dance Ensemble group photo



Salpi Mailyan and Shushi dancers entertained the crowd.



Taking a bow at the conclusion of the program



COMMENTARY

THE ARMENIAN Mirror Spectator

Established 1932

An ADL Publication

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The Armenian Mirror-Spectator is published weekly, except two weeks in July, by:

Baikar Association, Inc.

755 Mt. Auburn St., Watertown, MA 02472-1509

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

U.S.A.	\$80 a year
Canada	\$125 a year
Other Countries	\$190 a year

© 2011 The Armenian Mirror-Spectator
Periodical Class Postage Paid at Boston, MA
and additional mailing offices.

ISSN 0004-234X

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Armenian Mirror-Spectator, P.O. Box 302, Watertown, MA 02471-0302

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COMMENTARY

Six-Hundred-Year-Old Dream Fading

By Edmond Y. Azadian

"Am I the last poet? Am I the last singer [singing the praise] of my country?" wondered the poet Vahan Teryan in the aftermath of the Genocide. It was a doomsday situation which led the poet to such a degree of desperation.

Armenia has gone through many catastrophic experiences throughout its turbulent history, but it has survived, sometimes miraculously, by the turn of unforeseen events.

Today the most optimistic people have only that mysterious force to pin their hope on. Otherwise the country is once again on the verge of that doomsday situation.

Finger-pointing, lamenting, expressing anger and frustration are no remedy for the situation. A sincere national soul searching would be a timely approach.

People have been wondering what happened to the long and arduous road to independence. Were the dreams and struggles of six centuries only to see Armenia free and independent in today's situation?

After six centuries of dreaming, Armenians are abandoning their homeland in droves. The statistics are very depressing and there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel. At the dawn of independence in 1991, Armenia's population stood at 4 million. Today it stands at 3 or 3.1 million. For a small country of 4 million, the loss of 1 million has a devastating effect.

Following the fall of Sukarno's regime in Indonesia, General Suharto's dictatorship massacred 500,000 ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. All-powerful China did not even raise a finger, because that was the politically-correct policy, but above all, the loss of half a million Chinese for a country of 1.5 billion is insignificant demographically.

Only during the first nine months of the year 2013 Armenia's population has decreased by 10,000 people. A poll carried out at the end of December 2012 showed that 50 percent of the remaining population would leave if they had the opportunity. This statistic was conducted by the Institute for Political and Sociological Consulting under Samvel Manukyan.

According to this institute the causes of migration are many, chief among them the income gap, lack of confidence in the justice system and low public involvement. We have to add also the blockade and the impending threat of war.

There are conditions that are beyond the grasp of the Armenian government. Even if some miracle happens and the diaspora forces join the Armenian government to overcome those challenges, nothing could change the geopolitical map of the region, where Turkey and Azerbaijan have joined forces to strangle Armenia out of existence.

The tenor of Azeri President Aliyev's inaugural speech, as he took office for the third time recently, was that his country will continue isolating Armenia internationally. At times he has stated that Azerbaijan will wait to see Armenia further depopulated to be ripe for a take over. He claims Armenia to be part of Azerbaijani territory, perhaps based on the newly-discovered document that his grandfather was born in Yerevan.

Our ally and defender Russia has not been helpful in stabilizing the region to reassure Armenians to continue living in their ancestral lands. Adding insult to injury, Russia has opened immigration offices in Yerevan offering able-bodied workers to move to Russia's scarcely-populated regions with job and citizenship offers. Thus, destitute Armenian families reluctantly take advantage of these incentives and depart permanently from Armenia.

One uncertainty which has plagued the Armenian people is

the issue of Karabagh. Is Karabagh included in the Customs Union? Should war break out, does defense of Karabagh enter into the military agreement between Yerevan and Moscow?

Recently, some reassuring voices have been heard from the Russian side. Indeed the commander of 102nd Russian base in Gumri, Andrey Ruzinsky, has stated: "If the Azerbaijani leadership decides to restore the control over Karabagh through war, the Russian military will intervene in case of a war and Armenia will pay a price." Without trying to interpret the last caveat, let us say that the warning carries some weight but it is not a substitute for a treaty.

Armenians believe that the Russian base is there for their defense, whereas Moscow has far more important strategic goals in the region; it intends to project its posture to keep the balance between Turkey and Iran and in the current situation to monitor the war in Syria. It is a known fact that arming Armenia and Azerbaijan on the same level only exacerbates the situation rather than reduces the tension which is the main cause scaring the Armenian population away.

Returning to the domestic situation, the Armenian government can and must take some measures. It is said that investments in Armenia have dropped 65 percent. Diaspora-Armenian investments have dropped even more dramatically. Only the rule of law can correct this situation. How many Diasporan Armenian investors have to be beaten or killed to warn them to stay away?

In addition, taxation is exercised in an unfair manner. The tax authorities are tolerant of oligarchs while the full brunt of the taxes is directed at the middle or lower classes to discourage small businesses. The food monopolies have driven prices three or four times higher than prices in the region.

There is a 35-percent unemployment rate.

For a middle class family a vacation in Turkey or Georgia is more affordable there than any resort in Armenia.

Corruption is rampant and only the government can solve that problem, yet the government seems to be part of the problem more than part of the solution. With the youth leaving the country at such an alarming rate, one wonders who will defend the borders.

The current political situation is not conducive to tackle and resolve serious issues. For months now the political debate has been centered around an obnoxious member of parliament questioning the president about his gambling habits at a European political forum as if Armenia did not have any other problems. This is reminiscent of the Byzantine Court debating how many angels could fit on the tip of a needle while Fatih Sultan Mehmet was scaling the ramparts.

On the other hand, the opposition leader and former president, Levon Ter-Petrosian, is asking President Serge Sargsian to resign. But whoever replaces him will be soon surrounded by the same oligarchs who control and strangle Armenia's economy. Any turmoil will deteriorate the situation even further. Influential print and electronic media are financed by foreign sources whose last worry is Armenia's plight. That is why the role of media is more confusing than educating or guiding.

Incidentally, those oligarchs have moved their capital overseas to be the first ones to jump ship should a wreck occur.

No one has yet found or suggested a solution to these dire situations and this column is not presumptuous enough to offer a silver bullet.

Only when the government and the opposition come to their senses, realizing that the problem hurts both sides and needs a supreme and united effort to find a solution internally and fight external threats, will we find some stability in the country and hope for economic improvement and survival.

Notice to Contributors

The *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* welcomes articles, commentaries and community news from our readers. In order to assure the accurate and timely publication of articles submitted, please note the following policies:

- All articles submitted should be typed, double (or triple) spaced and printed in a type size large enough to be clearly legible (10 point or larger). Submissions that do not conform to these specifications will be assigned lowest priority.
- Articles sent by fax are acceptable, and e-mail submissions are encouraged.
- All submissions should include the name of a contact person

and a daytime telephone number.

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- Photos will be published without charge at the discretion of the editors and art director. Photos will be returned only if a self-addressed and stamped envelope is included.
- The *MS* will publish only one article about an upcoming organizational event. For major special events, exceptions may be made only by special arrangement with the editors.
- Telephone numbers, ticket prices and other details (at the discretion of the editors) will not be included in press releases.



COMMENTARY



My Turn

By Harut Sassounian

Land of the Rising Sun: Fertile Ground for Armenians

I visited the amazing land of Japan for the first time last month.

The minute I set foot on Tokyo's Narita Airport, it felt like entering a surreal country – almost too good to be true!

The first thing that one notices is the extreme politeness of the Japanese people. Their repeated bowing to greet guests is incomparably more respectful than our customary casual handshake. I was amazed to find out that everyone gets the same excellent service, at no extra charge! No one gets tips, including waiters and parking attendants.

Japan is impeccably clean. No litter can be found anywhere. Piles of dirt or garbage are nowhere to be seen. You cannot find a single car in the streets with a dent or speck of dust. Even trucks hauling construction materials are covered with a net and hosed down before leaving the loading site, not to scatter dirt on city streets. Amazingly, after a typhoon directly hit Tokyo, there was no debris in the streets.

To top it all, there is very little crime in Japan due to the calm demeanor of the population and absence of guns.

Despite Tokyo's crowded sidewalks, everyone goes about their business, without pushing or shoving, arguing or raising their voices. Drivers respect traffic laws and conduct their cars in an orderly manner, without cutting in front of others or honking horns.

Many people are seen in the streets wearing medical masks. One would think that they were protecting themselves from catching the flu or some other disease from passersby. It turns out that the mask wearers were the ones who had the flu. They were being exceedingly considerate, not wishing to pass their germs onto others!

Besides visiting Japanese shrines and ancient palaces, I had the opportunity to engage in Armenian-related activities in this far away land. I was pleased to learn that the Republic of Armenia had an Embassy in Tokyo. Ambassador Hrant Pogosyan and Attaché Monica Simonyan received me graciously and briefed me about their relentless efforts to foster friendly relations between the two countries. We discussed opportunities for collaboration between the Armenian community in the United States and the Embassy of Armenia in Japan, particularly during the upcoming Centennial of the Armenian Genocide.

A totally unexpected treat was the concert organized by the Armenian Embassy, celebrating the 110th anniversary of Aram Khachaturian's birth. Three top musicians, pianists Armen Babakhanian and Julietta Vardanyan, and cellist Aram Talalyan, had flown from Armenia especially for this one night performance. The Japanese audience, foreign diplomats, and a handful of Armenian students and businessmen were highly impressed with Khachaturian's music and the virtuosity of the performers. I even met a Japanese scholar who spoke Armenian fluently. I had never

heard Armenian spoken with a Japanese accent!

Japanese friends had kindly arranged that I meet CEO's of several major corporations in Tokyo and Kyoto and discuss investment possibilities in Armenia. I was highly impressed by state of the art stem-cell research laboratory at Kyoto University.

Later that day I had the unique opportunity to give a lecture to a group of bright university students and their professors. They spoke English quite well and asked numerous questions, even though I was told that Japanese students normally do not ask questions. My talk covered the Armenian Genocide, the Artsakh (Karabagh) conflict, Syria's civil war, the Arab Spring, the controversial issue of Comfort Women and the necessity of peaceful resolution of conflicts.

After returning to Tokyo, my hosts surprised me by presenting me from the archives of The Japan Times newspaper, a copy of the issue dated October 4, 1998, which had a half-page article about my humanitarian efforts for Armenia on behalf of the United Armenian Fund.

My final meeting was with three high-ranking Japanese government officials with whom I discussed at length Japan's relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, China, Russia and South Korea.

My conversations with Japanese university students and government leaders made me realize that Armenians have made a habit of concentrating all of their political efforts on the Middle East, Europe, North and South America, and totally ignoring the large number of strategically important countries in Asia.

It may be politically and economically more productive to extend the span of our attention to countries whose citizens know hardly anything about Armenia and Armenians.

Kurds Emerge from Embers of Syrian War

By Fouad Ajami

More than 200,000 Syrian Kurdish refugees have moved into Iraqi Kurdistan. They have crossed an international border to be sure, yet it is, in the Kurdish world view, a passage from one part of their homeland to another. The Kurds disregard these frontiers, imposed on the Fertile Crescent almost a century ago by Anglo-French power.

No Kurd is lamenting the erosion of the borders in this tangled geography. The partition of the successor states of the Ottoman Empire brought the Kurds grief and dispossession. The Persians, Turks and Arabs secured their own states. Indeed, the Arabs were bequeathed several states in the geography of "Turkish Arabia" that runs from the Iraqi border with Iran to the Mediterranean.

Kurdistan was singularly betrayed, its people divided among Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Kurdish history became a chronicle of thwarted rebellions. According to a deeply felt expression, the Kurds had no friends but the mountains.

Yet a new life is stirring in Kurdistan. Irbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, once a forgotten fortress town, is a booming city of shopping malls, high-rises and swank hotels. Oil and natural gas have remade the city, as has its political stability, remarkable when set against the mayhem of the rest of Iraq.

The Kurds are shrewd. They aren't about to claim Irbil as the capital of a restored greater Kurdistan, but it has pride of place in their world. It is the home of Massoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdish regional government, and of almost 5 million people, who are officially part of Iraq but in reality belong to an independent nation.

The realists among the Kurds know the power and ruthlessness of the nations that have divided and ruled their world, yet they are determined to make the best of this moment when borders and attachments are suddenly in flux.

It is the fate of Western Kurdistan – Rojava in Kurdish – that has given rise to this new sense of urgency. The war between the Damascus regime and the principally Sunni rebels presents peril and possibility for the 2 million to 3 million Kurds within Syria.

The Kurds inhabit fragments of Syria by the Turkish and Iraqi borders, in the north-

east; their lands contain the bulk of Syria's oil. Arab nationalism, the creed of the authoritarian Syrian state, was avowedly racist in its treatment of them, denying them the most basic and cherished right: use of their own language. The regime of the Assads, father and son, has been cunning and devastating in the way it pitted the Kurds against one another.

Yet in the civil war that erupted in 2011, the Syrian opposition has troubled the Kurds, too. The leaders of the Sunni Arab rebellion were committed to creation of their own centralized state. Turkey's sponsorship of the rebels created suspicions as well. The foreign jihadists who made their way to Syria were yet another source of anxiety.

The Kurds had a small volunteer force of their own, but it was no match for Jabhat al-Nusra, or the Nusra Front, whose Islamist warriors had weapons aplenty, money and unchecked zeal. The group was determined

to impose its rule in areas the regime had left. In mid-July, clashes broke out in Kurdish towns and have erupted intermittently since. Thousands of Syrian Kurds have made their way to Iraqi Kurdistan, where they receive help, even as the authorities in Irbil don't want to encourage an exodus from Syria.

Turkey casts a large shadow. The line that separates the Syrian and Turkish Kurds is artificial. As the prominent Turkish columnist Cengiz Candar observes, the Kurds don't speak of Turkish and Syrian communities. For them the line of separation was a simple railroad track that allowed them to move to and fro, with ease and freedom.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan faces a dilemma. He is invested in a peace process at home with the Kurdish Workers' Party, or PKK, and its imprisoned leader, Abdullah Ocalan. And Turkey has a flourishing relationship with Iraqi Kurdistan, whose oil and natural gas it needs desperate-

ly. Yet the permissive attitude of the Turkish state toward the jihadists battling the Syrian Kurds has been a source of trouble for Erdogan. He has gone a long way toward keeping the jihadists at arm's length.

The dream of greater Kurdistan is just that. History has given the Kurds a second chance in Iraq and Syria, while Turkish democracy gives them a voice in the country's direction. Matters are stagnant in Iran, where the oppression of the Kurds is of a piece with the tyranny of a theocracy.

The Kurds can't erase all the hurts of their modern history and those who choose to stay in Syria remain embattled, yet the isolation that had been their lot is now in the past. At the foot of those once sheltering mountains, a new and a safer life has sprung forth.

(Fouad Ajami is a senior fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution. The commentary was originally written for Bloomberg News.)

Trouble in Armenia's Neighborhood: Middle East Arms Race Intensifies

Armenia's recent military acquisitions and announced modernization of some of its defense capabilities may fit the general context of

By Naira Hayrumyan

a big war prospect in the Greater Middle East that is deemed as real as ever after this

week's direct involvement of Israel in the escalating conflict in Syria. Apparently, an attempt is being made to drag Iran into the war in a country with an allied ruling regime in order to have a legitimate region for strikes against the Islamic Republic that has annoyed the West by its nuclear ambitions. Experts say this is a legitimate scenario, and it is not excluded that the recent reinforcement of missile capabilities of the countries sharing borders with Iran could be connected with this war threat.

Iran has a frontier with Armenia and a de-facto border with Karabagh, so any destabilization of the situation in the country will certainly affect the two Armenian states as well. Therefore, experts suggest that the visit to Armenia by a delegation of senior Russian military led by Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu earlier this week could be connected to the likely developments in Iran.

On January 30 at dawn, Israeli jets violated Syrian airspace and bombed military targets outside Damascus. Two people were killed and five were wounded in the attack on a facility where, according to some sources, Syrian authorities were conducting research on unconventional types of weapons, including biological and chemical ones.

The air raid by Israeli warplanes gave the Syrian conflict a whole new dimension, turning it into a full international conflict, threatening to engulf the entire region.

The high command of the Syrian Army issued a statement in which it said that Israel had entered into an agreement with external and internal forces hostile to Syria. But this was rather the first direct accusation by Syria against Israel.

Meanwhile, international experts believe that any Israeli attack against Syria could lead to a serious deterioration in the situation in the region. Iran has already said that it would consider any such attack as aggression against its territory. Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi stressed that Tehran supports the Syrian people and the political program of settling the crisis in Syria.

The Russian Foreign Ministry has harshly denounced Israel's actions, saying that they could be a gross violation of the UN Charter.

Meanwhile, Israel itself now speaks more about Iran than Syria. Officials in Tel Aviv insist that an Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear facilities will not give sufficient effect and that a U.S. military intervention is necessary. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that the attack must be made prior to the point when Iran completes the process of enriching uranium to 20 percent and 2013 is considered to be decisive in this sense.

So far, Washington has consistently refused to overtly interfere in the processes, not only in Iran but also Syria.

(Naira Hayrumyan is an ArmeniaNow correspondent.)



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