

# THE ARMENIAN Mirror-Spectator

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## NEWS IN BRIEF

# Armenian Property Damaged During George Floyd Riots Across US

By **Aram Arkun** Mirror-Spectator Staff

## Chicago Riots Threaten Armenian Businesses, Armenian Consulate and Church



Repairing the common entrance of the Armenian Consulate in Chicago and Oscar Isberian Rugs

CHICAGO – Protesting over the death of George Floyd deteriorated into looting in Chicago’s downtown and migrated into the suburbs over the weekend. Armenian-owned businesses and institutions were among those in danger and some suffered damage.

Oscar Isberian Rugs has four branches. The one on West Kinzie Street is in the River North neighborhood, a center of arts, tourism and restaurants. Co-owner Oscar Tatosian is the Honorary Consul of the Republic of Armenia in Chicago, and the see CHICAGO, page 9

## Looting and Arson Hit Armenian-Owned Stores in Southern California

LOS ANGELES/LONG BEACH, Calif. – According to reports on news and social media, Armenian-owned stores were among the victims of rioters and looters in various parts of Los Angeles and Southern California over the last weekend as social order broke down following widespread protests of the George Floyd murder of May 25.

Among these were stores pillaged and set on fire in the downtown jewelry district on Friday night, May 29.

see CALIFORNIA, page 16



A screen shot from news coverage of the Long Beach riots



Denver khachkar vandalized.

## Colorado State Capitol Khachkar Genocide Memorial Vandalized

DENVER – The Colorado state capitol khachkar memorial to the Armenian Genocide and to the victims of all crimes against humanity was vandalized with spray-painted graffiti on the night of May 29-30 in downtown Denver during the protests sparked by the death of George Floyd due to police brutality. It appears that the whole area, including another statue and the government building, was targeted. The perpetrators have not been identified.

see DENVER, page 9

## A Vibrant Argentine-Armenian Community Awaits End of COVID-19

By **Taleen Babayan**

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina – Although the usually lively streets of the capital city are silent, the culture and spirit of the people mingle from all four corners: in the

kitchen of the popular restaurant, behind the curtain of the cathedral altar, backstage of the theater and from the closed doors of apartments that give way to the soothing sweet sound of music played by musicians like Ruben Hovsepian.

A violinist in the Orquesta del Tango de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (The Tango Orchestra of Buenos Aires), Hovsepian has

been in lockdown for over two months but continues to play tango pieces with his fellow members. They rehearse and perform as an orchestra virtually and share their performances online through social media, including a recent video of Nocturna by Julián Plaza, with a caption that reads: in the times of compulsory social isolation.

see ARGENTINA, page 7

## CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

## Armenian Funeral Homes in New York and New Jersey Overwhelmed by COVID-19 Crisis

NEW YORK/NEW JERSEY – Armenians who are active in community life come together in all types of venues which have been affected by the novel coronavirus, and this includes the final venues for many, funeral homes and cemeteries. In some parts of the US,

By **Aram Arkun**

Mirror-Spectator Staff

there are still Armenian-owned funeral homes which often have been family-run businesses handed down from generation to generation. Their ties run deep with local Armenians and they have been struggling to deal with the heavy death toll of COVID-19 along with the restrictions placed on their operations by government authorities. Those in New York and neighboring New Jersey turned out to be in a particularly dangerous global hotspot or center for the spread of COVID-19 in March and especially April of this year.



see FUNERALS, page 5

## Armenian PM, Family Infected With COVID-19

YEREVAN – Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said on Facebook on June 1, that he and all members of his family have tested positive for the coronavirus.

“We are having no symptoms,” Pashinyan said, adding that he will self-isolate in his government residence and continue to perform his duties from there.

Pashinyan lives there with his wife and three young daughters.

“It’s obvious that my family members were infected by me and I can guess where and how I got infected,” he said in a live Facebook broadcast. He suggested that he contracted the virus from a government employee who served him water during a recent government meeting in Yerevan.

“I will be working from home, namely the prime minister’s residence,” Pashinyan went on. “I have all necessary conditions here.”

Pashinyan’s spokeswoman, Mane Gevorgyan, said later in the day that there are no plans yet to have members of the Armenian government or the prime minister’s staff undergo coronavirus tests. But Gevorgyan did not exclude that such tests will be carried out if they are recommended by doctors.

“The government officials who have been in contact with the prime minister have followed the set rules: they wear masks, practice social distancing, disinfect hands and so on,” she wrote on Facebook.

Pashinyan said in this regard that he believes he might have only infected “as few people in the government as possible.”

## Leadership of Armenia, Artsakh Honor Sardarabad Heroes

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – The top leadership and clergymen of Armenia and Artsakh honored the memories of the heroes of Sardarabad Battle on May 28. President of Armenia Armen Sarkissian, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, President of Artsakh Arayik Harutyunyan, Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II and President of the National Assembly of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan attended the official event dedicated to the Republic Day and the May Heroic Battles.

They laid a wreath at Sardarabad Monument and paid tribute with a Lord’s Prayer.

As a result of the coronavirus pandemic the citizens of Armenia are not allowed to visit Sardarabad Monument this year.

On May 28 Armenians worldwide celebrate the 102th anniversary of establishment of the First Republic of Armenia and the historical victory in the battle of Sardarabad.

On May 28, 1918, the Armenian National Council declared in Tbilisi the establishment of the First Republic of Armenia.

Hovhannes Kajaznuni was the first Prime Minister of Independent Arm

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### Sudan to Siberia

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## ARMENIA

## News From Armenia

## Armenian Carriers Banned from Flying Within EU

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) – The European Commission on Monday, June 2 updated the EU Air Safety List, banning all Armenian airlines from flying within the European Union, as they do not meet international safety standards.

All airlines certified in Armenia were added to the list after further assessment of the country's safety oversight capabilities. The decision follows the hearings of the Armenian Civil Aviation Committee (CAC) and six Armenian air carriers.

"The decision to include the Armenian carriers on the EU Air Safety List has been made based on the unanimous opinion delivered by the Air Safety Committee. The Commission, with the assistance of the European Union Aviation Safety Agency, stands ready to cooperate and invest in Armenia to improve its aviation safety," said Commissioner for Transport Adina Valean.

Operational restrictions have been placed against Aircompany Armenia, Armenia Airways, Armenian Helicopters, Atlantis Armenian Airlines, Atlantis European Airways, Mars Avia and Skyball.

## Kocharyan's Lawyers, Foes Disagree on European Court Opinion

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – Former President Robert Kocharyan's lawyers and detractors offered on May 29 different interpretations of conclusions drawn by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) regarding the legality of coup charges brought against him.

Kocharyan is prosecuted under Armenia's Criminal Code dealing with "overthrow of the constitutional order." The accusation rejected by him as politically motivated stems from the 2008 post-election unrest in Yerevan that left ten people dead.

The current code was enacted in 2009. Kocharyan's lawyers maintain that the article in question cannot be used retroactively against him. Prosecutors insist that there are no significant differences between the two definitions of the crime.

Kocharyan's legal team last year asked Armenia's Constitutional Court to declare the coup charge illegal. A Yerevan judge who initially presided over the trial likewise asked the court to pass judgment on the legality of the accusation.

The Constitutional Court in turn decided in July 2019 to request an "advisory opinion" from the ECHR as well as the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe.

The ECHR's Grand Chamber released a lengthy and complex opinion on Friday. Citing the European convention and "case-law," it concluded that Kocharyan cannot be prosecuted for overthrowing the constitutional order if that entails "more serious consequences" for the ex-president than "usurpation of state power" would.

## MP Warns Yazidis in Afrin Targeted

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – Member of Parliament from the ruling My Step faction Rustam Bakoyan sounded the alarm on May 30 about pro-Turkish radical groups targeting the Yazidi community in Afrin, Syria.

"Syrian radical groups, sponsored by the Turkish government, have taken control over the Afrin region, including Yazidi villages in this area. These groups are committing various atrocities against the Yazidis, they are forcing them to convert, to forcefully migrate – at the same time creating conditions for demographic changes in the region," Bakoyan, who is of Yazidi ethnicity, said on social media.

"These groups are forcing the Yazidis to attend Islamic mosques. Some Yazidi holy sites in Afrin have been turned into mosques. Cruel atrocities are being committed against Yazidi women and children," he said.

The MP also posted a photo of a Yazidi young woman who was killed by the Turkish-sponsored groups.

# Armenian Health Authorities Press for Renewed Lockdown

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan revealed on Tuesday, June 2, that health authorities are urging him to re-impose a nationwide lockdown to stop the accelerating spread of coronavirus in Armenia.

Pashinyan did not rule out such a measure but voiced serious misgivings about it, saying that it could cost the Armenian economy dearly.

"I want to note that the healthcare system keeps telling us that we should impose lockdown restrictions as soon as possible, and the office of the commandant [enforcing the state of emergency in Armenia] discusses that issue on an almost daily basis," he told a news briefing held outside his official residence.

"But the problem, my dear compatriots, is that we have already gone through a period of restrictions and seen that it brings about very serious, almost disastrous socioeconomic consequences," he said. "We made 100 billion drams (\$206 million) available for social and economic assistance [to citizens and businesses] during that period."

"But one has to understand that the state's resources are not unlimited and

in case of another lockdown we could end up facing the kind of economic crisis which we would not be able to overcome for many years," added Pashinyan.

The Armenian government issued stay-at-home orders and shut down most nonessential businesses in late March shortly after reporting the first major outbreaks of the deadly virus in the country. But it began easing those restrictions already in mid-April. They were practically lifted by the beginning of May.

Critics say that the authorities never properly enforced the lockdown and ended it too soon. They increasingly cite the example of neighboring Georgia whose government only recently began easing serious curbs on people's freedom of movements and reopening the domestic economy.

The Georgian authorities have so far reported less than 800 coronavirus cases and only 12 deaths caused by them, compared with over 10,000 cases and at least 158 fatalities registered in Armenia.

As many as 19 Armenians infected with COVID-19 died on Monday alone,

up from the previous daily high of 15 deaths reported on May 28. The Armenian Ministry of Health also recorded 517 single-day COVID-19 infections. By contrast, only two people in Georgia tested positive for the virus in the past day.

Pashinyan again insisted that Armenians' failure to practice social distancing and wear face masks is the main reason for the continuing rapid spread of the virus. He said that earlier on Tuesday he ordered government and law-enforcement bodies to enforce these rules "in the toughest and crudest way."

The prime minister warned that the authorities may eventually have to re-impose the lockdown and "subject the country to new social and economic shocks" if many people continue to flout the rules.

Pashinyan has repeatedly said before that the success of his administration's fight against the virus primarily hinges on citizens' behavior and "individual responsibility." Critics have responded by accusing him of trying to dodge responsibility for the authorities' failure to contain the epidemic.

## US Govt. Is Funding Website Spreading Covid-19 Disinformation

WASHINGTON (Guardian) – The US government is funding a website in Armenia which is spreading disinformation about the coronavirus pandemic, including warnings that Armenians ought to "refuse" future vaccine programs.

The website, Medmedia.am, was launched with the help of a US State Department grant meant to promote democracy, but instead has been used to promote false information about Covid-19, according to an investigation by the British news website openDemocracy.

Among Medmedia's most popular articles are pieces that have called Covid-19 a "fake pandemic" and falsely reported that a morgue offered to pay hundreds of dollars to a dead patient's family if they claimed the death had been caused by the coronavirus.

The grant was awarded by the State Department to a group called the Armenian Association of Young Doctors, which launched the website last year and is led by a controversial physician Gevorg Grigoryan.

He has been known for his strong criticism of the government's health ministry and its vaccine programs, and has a history of anti-LGBT statements, including remarks posted on Facebook in 2014 in which he called for gay people to be burned.

Grigoryan, who has claimed that he is not opposed to vaccinations, has teamed up with a prominent journalist and lawyer, both with reported ties to a far-right party called Veto, to create what they called a public fact-finding group on the government's response to the coronavirus outbreak.

This week, the group's official Facebook page claimed that the government led by prime minister Nikol Pashinyan, who led a nonviolent reform movement before his election, had "completely failed the fight" against coronavirus. Grigoryan said he was not aligned with a specific political party and denied that Medmedia or the fact-finding project were political fronts aimed at opposing the government.



Dr. Gevorg Grigoryan

"If we look at everything from a political point of view then we're not going to go very far," he said. "But from an expert point of view, the statistics speak for themselves."

Armenia has reported about 7,100 coronavirus cases and a rising rate of infections. The country has also grappled with a drop in childhood vaccine rates, which the health minister, Arsen Torosyan, has blamed on anti-vaccine propaganda.

The State Department declined to comment on questions about the size of the grant or its review process.

A post on the US embassy's website in Armenia said grants under the Democracy Commission Small Grants Program – which are worth up to \$50,000 – are awarded on a competitive basis to local NGOs and are meant to focus on issues like transparency and accountability in governance, advancing human rights, eliminating corruption, and enhancing economic growth and development.

But the openDemocracy investigation found that, while Medmedia had published some news articles, most of its opinion pieces were republished Facebook posts that spread false information.

Grigoryan told the Guardian that the US embassy in Armenia had contacted him with "concerns" about op-eds and articles on the site. But, he said: "I am sure I was able to answer all those ques-

tions and those concerns disappeared. The site is not an anti-vaccine forum."

He would not say how much money was given to his Armenian Association for Young Doctors by the US embassy, or how much of that was invested in the website. He called it a "small amount" and addressed questions on specifics to the US embassy. The grant period is due to end in several days, he said.

Advertisement

A disclaimer on the Medmedia website said the site was US-funded but that its articles "do not necessarily reflect" the views of the US government.

Grigoryan defended the articles in an interview with the Guardian, saying the website had been "created to make the voice of the public heard." "If someone says that Armenia should refuse vaccinations and the government refutes this with weighty proof, it's already served [the public] good," he said.

Asked specifically about the articles, he said that he didn't share their opinions but said they would not be taken down. "It's not fake news," he said. "It's the opinion of a specialist, the opinion of a doctor, of the head of an NGO. It's an opinion. So it's not fake news."

He denied that posting the articles could pose a public health risk, saying they would "initiate discussion."

While he denied being personally opposed to vaccines, he claimed the articles on his site were representative of skepticism about vaccines in Armenian society.

"The problem is that due to the government's incorrect [information] policy these kinds of articles are becoming widespread," he said.

Grigoryan said his past anti-LGBT statements, including one that said he would "always fight against gays," had been misinterpreted and were prompted by specific cases of "anti-social behavior." Asked about a Facebook post from 2014 in which he wrote that "gays should be burnt and in a public place", he said that the post was a reference to the film Pulp Fiction and was meant as a joke.



## INTERNATIONAL

# Post-COVID Art Blossoms Again in Berlin

By Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

BERLIN – Slowly, cautiously and with painstaking care to ensure the safety and health of visitors, Archi Galentz and Andreas Wolf welcomed art lovers to their gallery in the German capital for the opening of a new exhibition on May 29. It was the first time since the Coronavirus pandemic had shut down normal life in Berlin that people could gather in such a setting. To be sure, guests had to register beforehand and could enter the gallery only five at a time, so that each would always have 20 square meters space. To comply with the regulations, many had to wait a while outside or in the courtyard, with a refreshing drink. Most visitors wore masks, and all had to keep their distance.

Most appropriately, the exhibition was dedicated to flowers, to celebrate the return of spring and the partial return to cultural life. The vernissage also marked the first anniversary of the Gallery Wolf & Galentz's existence. Thanks to the interest displayed by art lovers in the capital, as well as a German art patron and the Renaissance Foundation in Armenia, the young gallery can continue its work, with exhibitions, research and publications.

"Flowers - Approaches to a Contentious Motif," is the title of the new show. Why contentious? Anna E. Wilkins, a Germanist who is a member of the gallery team, provides insight in an essay prepared for the exhibition. She quoted Marina Koldobskaja, one of

the exhibiting artists, who said it was "considered indecent for a contemporary artist to paint flowers." So indecent, that to do so might even place the artist's reputation in jeopardy. Flowers as a subject might seem incompatible with the prevailing tastes and norms in



Works in acrylic by Marina Koldobskaja

contemporary art, Wilkins explains; more often than not today's art glorifies the ugly and the incomprehensible, or exalts what is considered politically relevant. Precisely for this reason, to seek the beautiful through art constitutes a challenge.

The three artists featured in his show have taken up that challenge, adopting different approaches, but all focused on flowers. In the gallery, visitors saw drawings, prints and watercolors by Gisa Hausmann (1942-2015), whose artistic estate is managed by the Wolf-Galentz gallery. The works on display by this Berlin artist depict cultivated flowers, grown in greenhouses, and works in a style, combing print techniques with free brushstrokes, that often recalls the Jugendstil (art nouveau). Marina Koldobskaja (born 1961) from St. Petersburg, works with acrylic, on paper and canvas, and treats flowers in isolation, in flower beds and even in whole fields. Ira Schneider (born 1939) is originally from New York but lives and works in Berlin. Schneider, who was a pioneer in video art in the 1960s and 1970s, uses a concave mirror to photograph flowers, and achieves

abstraction through the resulting distortion. As for his choice of subject matter, he has been quoted saying, "Human beings are made up of 67 percent water and 33 percent flowers."

In the further rooms of the gallery art lovers are treated to works that are part of the gallery's permanent collection, including etchings, oil or gouache painting, engravings and some ceramics. Among the artists represented are Mariam Aslamanyan (including a piece

she painted in the year 2000 at age 92!), Hermann Bachmann, Brigitta Friedrich, Klaus Fussmann, Archi Galentz, G. von Galentz, Joseph Heeg, Alexander Horn, Thomas Kaemmerer, Philip Mager, Olg Neishtadt, Nazeli Nikogosyan and Jürgen Wittdorf.

The exhibition continues to July 28, and promises to be a success, not despite the floral motif, but perhaps because of it. In her remarks, Wilkins recalled a passage in the memoirs of Gisa Hausmann, referring to a period of personal crisis. While struggling with emotional stress, the artist felt a profound need to deal with floral motifs in her art. A colleague who came to visit her and saw some of the new paintings, "lost her composure," as she thought that flowers somehow did not fit her view of a serious artist. And yet the surprise was actually an expression of appreciation. A shift had taken place. Indeed, flowers "can rehabilitate through their beauty." In the current situation, characterized by the social and emotional stress associated with the Corona crisis, beauty – the beauty of flowers – possesses the capacity to heal and rehabilitate.



Pansies (top, 1992) in gouache and watercolor (1989) by Archi Galentz



Vernissage May 29, 2020

## International News

### Turkey to Name Tournament after Boxer Garbis Zakaryan

ISTANBUL (PanARMENIAN.Net) – Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) Diyarbakır MP Garo Paylan has announced that a tournament will be named after Garbis Zakaryan, a Turkish and European welterweight boxing champion of Armenian ethnicity, who was known as the "Iron Fist" and was the first professional boxer of Turkey, Bianet reported on June 2.

Zakaryan passed away on Jan. 25, 2020, at age 90.

Following his passing, Paylan sent a Parliamentary request to Minister of Youth and Sports Mehmet Muharrem Kasapoglu on January 29 and asked him "whether they had any projects to honor his achievements and contributions to the sports in Turkey and to keep his name alive and whether a sports facility would be named after him or not."

Kasapoglu indicated that a tournament will be named after Garbis Zakaryan while they are still considering whether to name a sports facility after him or not.

"We are still expecting that our national boxer, whose achievements were not honored when he was alive, will be given his well-deserved value, albeit too late, and a sports facility will be named after him with the aim of introducing him to the next generations."

### Suspect Detained over Threatened Hrant Dink Foundation Arrested

ISTANBUL (PanARMENIAN.Net) – A suspect who sent a death threat to the Hrant Dink Foundation was arrested on June 1, according to local media reports, *Hurriyet Daily News* reports.

Hrant Dink, a founder and editor-in-chief of the Turkish-Armenian weekly *Agos* newspaper, was gunned down in front of his Istanbul office in 2007 by Oğün Samast, then a 17-year-old jobless high school dropout and an ultranationalist. Samast was sentenced to more than 20 years in jail.

The suspect, identified only by the initials H.A., was detained on May 30.

Turkey's interior ministry on May 30 said that H.A. and an assailant who ripped off a cross outside an Armenian church in Istanbul were detained.

"The provocateur who broke the cross of a church in Kuzguncuk [neighborhood in Üsküdar district] was caught within 24 hours; the provocateur who e-mailed threats to the Hrant Dink Foundation was caught immediately. We will not allow any provocation," Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu said on his Twitter account.

Last week, a man was seen in footage dismantling the cross outside the Surp Krikor Lusavoriç Armenian Church in the historical Kuzguncuk neighborhood, before fleeing the scene.

In another incident earlier this week, the Hrant Dink Foundation informed police they had received an anonymous e-mail, threatening them and Dink's wife, Rakel Dink, they "may turn up one night, when you least expect it." The email contained messages threatening Rakel Dink and the foundation's lawyer with death, the foundation said in a statement.

### Russian-Armenian Appointed Health Deputy Minister

MOSCOW (Armenpress) – Member of the Russian Federation Council Igor Ghahramanyan has been appointed first deputy minister of health, Regnum news agency reported on June 2.

The decision has been signed by Russia's Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin.

"Sincere congratulations. We wish you success and hope for mutual partnership and effective cooperation," Chairwoman of the Federation Council Valentina Matviyenko said.

Ghahramanyan is also serving as first deputy chair of the Federation Council Committee on social policy.

# Community News

## Gov. Newsom Rejects Parole For Sassounian

LOS ANGELES (Asbarez) – Despite a recommendation in December by the Board of Parole in favor of Hampig Sassounian's suitability, Governor Gavin Newsom on Tuesday, May 26, rejected that decision and denied his parole, saying in a lengthy decision that while he acknowledged the steps Sassounian had taken over decades to rehabilitate himself, he did not believe Sassounian to be fit for release.

"I commend Mr. Sassounian for his rehabilitative efforts in prison, but I find they are outweighed by negative factors that show he



Harry (Hampig) Sassounian

remains unsuitable for parole at this time," said Newsom in his letter obtained by Asbarez on Tuesday.

"I believe that Mr. Sassounian has not yet demonstrated that he has developed and sustained the

necessary insight and skills for a sufficiently long period. In particular, I am concerned that Mr. Sassounian has continued to underestimate the vigilance that is required of him, now and in the future, to consistently conduct himself in a manner that promotes the rule of law and avoids fomenting violence, even inadvertently," added Newsom.

"After reviewing and considering the evidence in the record, I believe that Mr. Sassounian must do additional work before he can be safely released. Accordingly, I find that he still poses an unreasonable danger to society if released and I reverse the Board's decision to parole Mr. Sassounian," Newsom concluded in his letter.

"We are extremely disappointed in Gov. Newsom's decision to reject the recommendation of the Parole Board and choose to deny Hampig Sassounian the freedom he deserves," the Hampig Sassounian Defense Committee told Asbarez soon after the governor's decision was published.

"Throughout the decades that he has spent in prison, Hampig has taken every conceivable step to rehabilitate himself and has been a model prisoner, a fact that the governor himself acknowledges in his decision," added the Hampig Sassounian Defense Committee. "We hope that, like in previous instances, the governor was not swayed by pressure from the Turkish government, which used the White House to do its bidding."

"We are concerned that unjustified arguments have received greater consideration than the governor's record on human rights and the experience we anticipated from the governor," the Defense Committee said, adding that it will continue its efforts to seek other avenues for Sassounian's release.

In 2016, Sassounian was granted parole only to see it be rejected in 2017 by then governor Jerry Brown, who cited letters he had received from then Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Attorney General Jeff Sessions opposing the parole.

Sassounian has been serving a life sentence when he was convicted in 1984 for the 1982 murder of Turkish Consul General to Los Angeles Kemal Arikan. In 2002 a federal appeals court overturned a special circumstances finding in his sentence, making Sassounian eligible for parole after serving a minimum of 25 years. Sassounian has now served 38 years. Sassounian will be eligible for parole in 18 months.



Volunteers hand out the food in Armenia.

## Paros Foundation Puts Effort toward Feeding Armenia during COVID-19 Crisis

BERKELEY, Calif.— With stay-at-home orders in place for communities throughout Armenia, The Paros Foundation has risen to the challenge of helping feed Armenia's elderly, at-risk and impoverished populations.

In the Berd Consolidated Communities, which is composed of 17 towns and villages in Armenia's North Eastern border with Azerbaijan, The Paros Foundation responded to an urgent need for food packets to be distributed to 800 elderly and disabled residents in these communities. With financial support from the Armenian diaspora, Paros staff quickly contracted with food suppliers to get the food staples delivered to the Berd municipality where staff and volunteers coordinated this massive distribution effort. This process has been repeated twice to date.

When the spread of Covid-19 closed schools throughout Armenia, the staff at the Debi Arach Children's Center took similar safety precautions and closed its doors temporarily. This, however, created another problem. Many of the children that attend this academically focused after school program count on the nutrition they receive as their main meal of the day. The Paros Staff worked closely with leadership at the Debi Arach Children's Center to prepare and distribute food packets based on the number of children in each household to all the Debi Arach families. This process has been repeated twice to date.

"We launched the #FeedingArmenia campaign to immediately respond to this important need," said Peter Abajian, executive director of the Paros Foundation. "Our next challenge is how to reopen and operate centers like Debi Arach in a safe and effective manner, while staying true to its core mission. While this challenge presents itself to every organizations, I am proud of the fact that our team is already engaged in these discussions and planning."

In the town of Nor Keghi, the mayor led an effort to provide food support for his town's elderly and at risk population. With support from the Nor Geghe Association and its Detroit-based leadership and members, 25 families in need received a large food pack to support them for approximately one month.

Armenia's current stay-at-home order is slowly being lifted, and the hope is that the virus will not spread, but it is unclear when the need for #FeedingArmenia will cease. While much still remains uncertain, one thing is becoming clearer – Armenia will reopen to a new reality. Masks, greater personal space and distancing and enhanced personal hygiene will all become part of Armenia's future. To support #FeedingArmenia, visit [www.parosfoundation.org](http://www.parosfoundation.org).



Food collected for donation.

## Heritage Park Hosts Cooking Demo for What Unites Us Series

BOSTON – David Aleksanyan, owner of the Arsenal Catering Group, will demonstrate Armenian dishes for "Celebrating What Unites Us!" series, a virtual program sponsored by the Armenian Heritage Park.

The program will take place on Friday, June 12 at 10 a.m. via ZOOM.

This virtual cooking series, a collaboration of Age-Friendly Boston, OLDWAYS (a food and nutrition nonprofit) and Friends of Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, is being offered during the COVID-19 pandemic to keep people connected, coming together.

The series was launched two years ago to celebrate the immigrant experience while building community and cross-cultural understanding and promoting healthy and active living – an exciting collaboration of Age-Friendly Boston, The KITCHEN at Boston Public Market and Friends of Armenian Heritage Park. Each month highlighted the cultural heritage of many residents of the City of Boston and beyond. All first met at Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway where a community leader shared his/her immigrant experience. Many walked the Labyrinth. Then walked to The KITCHEN at the Boston Public Market where a chef prepared a signature dish for all to enjoy for lunch and conversation, supported by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts.

## NAASR Sponsors Online Lecture by Dr. Ümit Kurt

BELMONT, Mass. –

The National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) and the Ararat-Eskijian Museum present a lecture, "Armenians and Kurds in the Late Ottoman Empire: A Social History," by Dr. Ümit Kurt on Sunday, June 7.



Kurt, a Research Fellow, Polonsky Academy, Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, will discuss his latest publication.

The program will take place at 4 p.m. Eastern (1 p.m. Western) on Zoom.

Registration is required at [https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_8oyON80TS-CI6Gl-5z5OJg](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_8oyON80TS-CI6Gl-5z5OJg).

YouTube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/c/ArmenianStudies>

## A To-Go Festival at St. James Armenian Church

WATERTOWN – Each year, St. James Armenian Church kicks off the summer months with its annual Armenian Festival. The popular event brings together parishioners, friends, and community members together for an afternoon of food, live music, children's activities, and fellowship on the church grounds.

Unfortunately, due to public health regulations related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the festival cannot take place as planned on its scheduled date of Sunday, June 14.

However, the parish is organizing a to-go version of the annual festival, offering their kebab meals, along with a vegetarian plate, for pick-up to enjoy at home.

Meals will be prepared with limited volunteers, in accordance with public health guidelines, and will be available for online and phone pre-order at designated pick-up times on Sunday, June 14, 12 to 2 p.m.

Meals must be pre-ordered by Friday, June 12, for curbside pick-up only. There will be no seating available on the church grounds. Delivery options will be available for Seniors in neighboring towns. Full details, menu, and ordering information may be found at [www.stjameswatertown.org/festival](http://www.stjameswatertown.org/festival), or by calling the church office.



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Armenian Funeral Homes in New York and New Jersey Overwhelmed by COVID-19 Crisis

FUNERALS, from page 1

## New Jersey

Bill Basralian is the owner of the William G. Basralian Funeral Home (<https://www.basralianfuneralhome.com/>), a small 15-year-old business in Oradell, NJ with, he estimates, approximately 75 percent Armenian clientele.

Basralian said that at the peak of the crisis so far in April, "I had to refuse something like 20 funerals. It was a lot of stress. The people who service me, doing removals [of bodies] and preparations were burning out because of the work. Some of the people helping transport the bodies were not even picking up their phones because they were so overwhelmed with everything."

It was a chain of events that turned into an avalanche of bodies headed for funeral homes like that of Basralian. Nursing homes were unable to provide for the people dying there. Crematories were backed up for almost a month. Cemeteries were doing burials every 20 minutes yet you had to wait five days for an appointment. Even the president of a casket company could be seen personally delivering his caskets to try to

keep up with the demand.

Basralian exclaimed, "The whole business never experienced anything like this before. It was almost like a plague."

In a domino effect, people were bringing bodies from New York to New Jersey funeral homes because New York was overwhelmed. Some of Basralian's friends in the profession had to use refrigerated tractor trailers for bodies, while the local hospital had four such tractor trailers.

Families were desperate. One person, Basralian recalled, had called three funeral homes prior to calling him for help.

Basralian was doing three funerals a day at the peak. Basralian's office administrator Vanessa Case said that on average the funeral home would have 10-12 funerals a month but from March to April they did 44. April itself was the hardest month, with 32 funerals, of which, she said, 30 were noted as confirmed COVID-19 cases. For two weeks that month, there were two funerals a day, morning and afternoon, straight from Monday to Saturday. She confirmed that 22 funerals had to be turned down.

While most deaths were of people in the high risk demographic, there were two or three of people in their late 40s and early 50s, Case said. Things quickly slowed down in May, with only six funerals total, of which only two were of COVID-19 victims.

The virus was scary for the morticians as much as it was for hospital workers. Basralian said, "We were so busy and tired, and we were afraid we were going to get sick ourselves. It came out so fast and killed so quickly. It was like AIDS at first. Sometimes they said that the bodies were in the morgue for 24 or 48 hours and maybe the virus died, but nobody knew....We didn't know if the germs would escape from the mouth when you are standing over the body. You don't know what is going to happen. Though a lot of the victims were senior citizens from nursing homes, there were younger people too."

In March, when people began dying of COVID-19 in large numbers, Basralian Funeral Home treated every case as if it were a COVID-19 one. Basralian and his staff used masks and goggles and put chemicals to disinfect the face of the corpse.

The visiting room was halved in size, with only 9 chairs spaced out from each other. Case said when anyone came to view someone, afterwards the staff completely disinfected the entire room and cleaned with Lysol. Purell stands and hand-washing signs were placed everywhere. The downstairs area including bathrooms was closed to the public, with only one first floor bathroom left accessible.

Traditional visitation prior to the burial was not possible, with New Jersey's governor mandating that no service other than identification could occur at the funeral home. However, it was hard for people who often had not been able to see their loved ones at nursing homes for some time before they died.

Basralian believed that each family needs some time to grieve and see their loved one in the casket. Consequently, he would allow a maximum of 10 family members to come briefly to the home, for a maximum of 30 minutes, usually sometime between two and four hours before the burial. Case said that only some families utilized the opportunity, because others were concerned about the virus and preferred to go straight to the cemetery.

The Armenian Church (both Eastern Diocese and Eastern Prelacy), the Armenian Presbyterian Church and the local Catholic Archdiocese did not allow services at the funeral home and so if there were religious services for people of those denominations, they could only take place at graveside. Some priests would however meet the family at the funeral home to go together in a procession, and this allowed speaking with the priest in the parking lot prior to the gravesite.

Furthermore, some cemeteries had very strict restrictions. Catholic cemeteries in New Jersey, following the guidelines of the Archdiocese of Newark, only allowed one person per family at the funeral, along with one priest and a funeral director. This created great tension. For example, Basralian said, the police were called to one cemetery because people were argumentative and wanted to go in. These restrictions have recently been relaxed to allow up to 20 people.

Families could not have memorial dinners (hokejash). Basralian said, "All these nice people who died could not have any type of recognition, while their children could not have real closure, with people visiting and consoling them."

Basralian Funeral Home took measures early to maximize the safety of patrons and staff, though there were not many guidelines provided to the funeral industry until the peak of the crisis. Case said, "I had a feeling when I was watching what was happening in Italy that it was going to be the same here. So I moved all our arrangements to digitalized format." Prices and types of caskets and various services could all be sent digitally.

Cass said that using digital communications protects both families and the funeral home staff from extra risk of infection. She said, "I think going forward we will be continuing to work with families digitally even after this whole COVID crisis."

A webcam was installed into the wall of the funeral home so that families could do livestreaming of services, and a few have taken advantage of that, Case said. Some of the ceme-

teries also have people filming so the video can be sent to family members who could not be present. Some family members used FaceTime themselves to send to other iPhones.

## New York

The Edward D. Jamie Jr. Funeral Chapel (<http://www.jamiejrfuneral.com/>) is headquartered in Bayside, Queens, and handles funerals for the five New York boroughs and Long Island, though the majority of its business is from Queens. Edward D. Jamie Jr. continued in his father Edward Jamie (Jamakordzian)'s profession. Unfortunately, he passed away this May, but his daughter Marissa Jamie, previously a full-time social worker but always involved in the small family-owned business since childhood, has taken over. She said she intends to go back to school to obtain her license. Several other family members are also involved.

Marissa Jamie said that she too saw a big increase in March and a good part of April, with around 85 percent dying of COVID-19. Most of them were over the age of 40 and though some did have other health conditions there were individuals who only died of coronavirus. The percentage of her Armenian clientele is as high as 45 percent, she said.

Jamie said that she did not have to tell anyone even at the peak of the crisis that her firm could not



help them. However, two or three times it was nec-Marissa Jamie with her father Edward D. Jamie, Jr. on Christmas day, 2019

essary to either ask the hospital to keep the body a little longer, or even to pay other funeral homes to hold a body until space opened up.

The death toll has gone down in the New York area and therefore the situation is easier at present for her funeral chapel.

She and her colleagues use additional personal protection equipment as if they were in health care, and always disinfect a body. She noted that a few other funeral directors have been infected with COVID-19, but it still is not clear whether the virus can survive in the deceased, or if so, for how long. Conversations with clients are now being done remotely as a safety precaution.

Jamie pointed out that all the coronavirus restrictions prevent closure for families, who are unable to fully mourn their loved ones in the way they normally would expect. No wakes are allowed in churches and not even private family viewing is allowed in New York City. Consequently, only direct burials or cremations with a service at the grave site are possible. Jamie said usually about 10 people are present, and there is a very strict protocol to follow. Everyone must stay in his car until the cemetery men bring the casket to the graveyard. People get out of their cars for the service, and only after they leave do the cemetery workers return.

Social distancing and the wearing of masks are enforced but this is very difficult. Jamie said, "How do you tell family members not to hug and comfort one another?" Occasionally, though, she saw an uncomfortable family member herself stepping away.

As all services are now closed casket, Jamie said that upon request, which has happened several times, the funeral home will text a photograph so that the surviving family members are able to see that indeed it is their loved one. At times family members use Facetime to allow people not physical there to observe the burial. In the future, Jamie said that she will look into providing more electronic means of making services accessible to those who cannot physically be present.



## Tekeyan Cultural Association

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## OBITUARIES

## Dr. Raffy Hovnessian

### Physician, Philanthropist, Community Leader

NEW YORK – Distinguished physician, community leader, and philanthropist Dr. Raffy Hovnessian passed away on May 27, 2020 at the age of 81.

The son of survivors of the Armenian Genocide, Arakel and Dirouhie Hovnessian, Raffy spent his formative years in Aleppo, where he attended grade school and college.

Inspired by his mother, a nurse and midwife, and the teachings of renowned physician, theologian, humanitarian and Nobel Peace Prize recipient, Dr. Albert Schweitzer, Raffy earned a Bachelor of Science degree in 1958 and a Doctor of Medicine degree in 1962 from the American University of Beirut (AUB).

While in medical school at AUB, he specialized in internal medicine and gastroenterology.

In 1965, Raffy married his Vicki Shoghag, in Beirut. The marriage was officiated by Dr. Hovnessian's lifelong friend, the Very Rev. Karekin Sarkissian. Decades later, Rev. Karekin would be elected Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin I.

Shortly after their union, Dr. Raffy and Vicki settled in the United States, where he continued his medical education in New Jersey and later at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

During the most intense period of the Vietnam War, Hovnessian was drafted in the United States Army, earned the rank of Major, and served as chief of the Ireland Army Community Hospital in Fort Knox, Ky., where he focused on treating fellow service members afflicted with infectious diseases of the stomach and colon.

The couple had three children – Armen, Ani, and Aileen – and settled in Northwest Indiana near Chicago, where Raffy established a successful private medical practice, while Vicki became a curator and collector of contemporary art.

A Fellow Trustee and member of the Board of Directors of the Armenian Assembly of America (1986-1988), Dr. Raffy Hovnessian served with grace and humility. His commitment to faith and family was remarkable. His insights and work with the Assembly's government affairs and grassroots initiatives were impactful and deeply appreciated. Dr. Raffy championed quality programming for Armenian youth, including the Terjenian-Thomas Assembly Internship Program in Washington, DC of which his son, Dr. Armen Hovnessian, is an alumnus ('89).

For two decades, he served as a Diocesan Delegate of his local parish, Saints Joachim & Anne Armenian Apostolic Church of Palos Heights, Ill., a church to which he and Vicki contributed tremendously for over four decades. He served as Vice Chair and Delegate at the National Ecclesiastical Assembly in the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin for the election of Catholicos in 1995 and 1999. He served on the Diocesan Council of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America and on the boards of directors of St. Nersess Armenian Seminary and the Armenian Church Endowment Fund, in addition to serving as a member of the Diocesan Board of Trustees.

Dr. Hovnessian was also active with and contributed to several educational, professional, and philanthropic organizations, including the American University of Armenia, Armenian American Health Professionals Organization, Armenian General Benevolent Union, Armenian Missionary Association of America, Fund for Armenian Relief, Knights of Vartan,

and the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research.

As the decade progressed, the Hovnessians' service extended beyond the Midwest to aid the people of Armenia in the wake of the devastating earthquake that struck Spitak and Gyumri.



The couple would recall hearing the terrible news on the radio as they drove home on the evening of December 7, 1988.

"Both of us are children of Genocide survivors. My family grew up poor, and I know what it means for people to be in need," Dr. Hovnessian said. "There was no way we could sit on the sidelines and do nothing."

Mobilizing the Chicago-area relief effort, Mrs. Hovnessian raised \$1.6 million through the Chicago chapter of the Armenian General Benevolent Union. In addition, she raised money for fuel and helped collect rice and bulgur to send to the homeland at the start of the Nagorno-Karabakh war, and shipped a million dollars in clothing to help struggling families in the homeland.

He devoted considerable time and efforts towards improving the quality of health care for his brothers and sisters living in Armenia, Javakhk, and Artsakh. A deserving recipient of awards and commendations, spanning several decades, by Armenian and non-Armenian organizations, Dr. Hovnessian inspired fellow physicians, as well as fellow Armenians, to live a life of dedicated service, piety, and philanthropy – all for the greater good. During the 112th Diocesan Assembly in New York City in 2014, the Eastern Diocese named Dr. Raffy Hovnessian as its "Armenian Church Member of the Year."

Significantly, the inspirational story of Dr. Hovnessian's personal and professional life was entered into the Congressional Record in February 1994 by his good friend, U.S. Congressman Peter J. Visclosky, whose 1st Congressional District represents constituents based in Northwest Indiana.

"He was committed to the Armenian Church and community in a universal way, and the love he inspired was likewise universal," wrote Diocesan Primate Bishop Daniel Findikyan in a message to Diocesan leaders. "In my own ministry, I cannot remember a time when Dr. Hovnessian was not a part of it. From my earliest days at the seminary he took an interest in me, encouraged me, offered me the benefit of his wisdom. When I became Primate, he reached out to me with fatherly kindness, giving counsel with generosity and humility."

## Sylvia (Parsekian) Markarian



FALMOUTH, Mass. – Sylvia (Parsekian) Markarian of Falmouth, formerly of South Boston, died on May 28, 2020.

She was the wife of the late Markar Michael Markarian.

She was the mother of Michael Markarian and his wife Elaine, MaryLou Markarian and her husband Medo Eltelbany, Harry Markarian and his wife Diane and Richard Markarian and his wife Margaret; grandmother of Michael Markarian, Brian Markarian, Sarah Illia, Christina Gilman, Paul Markarian, Scott Markarian, Stephen Markarian, Rebecca Markarian and Peter Markarian; sister of Harry Parsekian and his wife Hripsime and the late Charles "Carbo" Parsekian. She also leaves many loving great-grandchildren and nieces and nephews Mark, Steven and Robert Parsekian. She is also survived by many other loving family members and friends.

At this difficult time, due to COVID-19, funeral and cemetery arrangements are private.

## Mary Jo Agbabian

### Dedicated to Armenian Culture

HIGHLAND PARK, Mich. – Mary Josephine (Mary Jo) Agbabian, age 86, passed away on April 12, 2020 after a brief hospitalization at McLaren-Oakland Hospital in Pontiac. She was the first born of five children to the late George and Barbara (Pfeiffer) Wonacott of Highland Park.

Mary Jo graduated from Highland Park High School in 1952 and attended the Harper Hospital School of Nursing in Detroit; after receiving her R.N. she worked for seven years as a surgical scrub nurse in the Ear, Nose and Throat Department at Detroit Osteopathic Hospital in Highland Park. There she met her husband, Dr. Vahagn Agbabian. They married in October of 1961 at the Hai Getron in Detroit and celebrated their 52nd anniversary about 6 months before her husband's passing in 2014.

A devoted wife and mother, she cared for her home and family, often helping out her husband at his private medical practice.

She was an avid swimmer all her life and volunteered as an aquatic aerobics instructor at the Birmingham YMCA for 25 years.

Mary Jo was a member of Saint Sarkis Armenian Apostolic Church (Dearborn Michigan) for the duration of her married life and a founding member of the Armenian Renaissance Association Sophia Chapter. Together with fellow ARA members she established the ARA scholarship committee.

A woman not born of Armenia descent, she embraced the cultural and became integrated into the Armenian community, studying the Armenian language, learning Armenian dances and developing her ability to prepare Armenian foods. She particularly prided herself on her success in the kitchen.

Mary Jo was an avid reader and writer. She developed her knowledge of, and an informed perspective on Armenian history and culture and of contemporary Armenian politics through reading of Armenian newspapers, attending lectures, viewing documentaries.

She and her late husband enjoyed traveling, visiting many of the major regions and cities of the United States, Canada, Mexico and the European continent; multiple trips to Armenia, the historical Armenian provinces in Eastern Turkey, and Nargorno-Karabakh (Artshakh). She loved spending vacations with her family and visiting her extended family in Northern Michigan, particularly the Traverse City area and the village of Elk Rapid, regularly swimming in the waters of East Grand Traverse Bay (Lake Michigan).

Mary Jo Agbabian will be remembered by her loved ones as an energetic and organized, motivated and inquisitive, generous and gracious, competitive and humorous (though at times serious), intelligent and cultured woman. Her pride and joy were her grandchildren and she loved nothing more than to gather her family on holidays in her home celebrating all of God's blessings.

She was predeceased by her husband, Dr. Vahagn Agbabian D.O. She is mourned by her children: Vahan Agbabian (Julie), Vartan Aghababian, Joanne Agbabian-Black (Glenn), and Aram Agbabian; loving grandchildren: Ani Elizabeth, Alexander Vahagn, Lauren Anahid, and Alexandra Tamar; dear sister of Margaret Etienne, Barbara Presnell (Robert), Richard Wonacott (Lee), and the late Dr. Robert Wonacott MD (Dorothy); loving sister-in-law of Suzanne Derbabian (Edward). She is also survived by many cousins, nieces and nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews.



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# Argentine-Armenian Community Awaits End of COVID-19

ARGENTINA, from page 1

Throughout the composition, 15 performers pop up on screen, each orchestra member from his or her home playing instruments from the piano to the accordion to the guitar.

"The pandemic has affected us greatly since all of our in-person performances and rehearsals have been cancelled," said Hovsepyan, who noted that residents can't travel too far from their homes and need permission to do so. "But we have found a way to pursue our music together and I'm also experimenting and creating for myself while at home."

His projects include composing a violin concerto, which is a fusion of modern tango, jazz and Armenian folk. When he's not busy practicing or performing with The Tango Orchestra, he plays some of his favorite songs with his own personal arrangements - including My Funny Valentine by Frank Sinatra, Groong by Komitas and Une Vie d'Amour by Aznavour, which he posts on Facebook regularly for listeners.

Born and raised in Yerevan, Armenia, Hovsepyan studied at the Komitas State Conservatory and has been performing with The Tango Orchestra for over a decade. His story is like one of many Armenians who arrived in Argentina with new opportunities on the horizon but held his culture close to his chest. He plays a slew of meaningful folk songs, like Dle Yaman on his violin every evening that keep him connected to his homeland. His sentiments are mirrored by the 100,000 or so Armenians who live in Argentina, a country which boasts the largest Diasporan population in South America.

A significant portion live in Buenos Aires, where they are active in music, culture, politics and education, and where their determination and resilience slips into gear once again as the pandemic makes its presence felt in more ways than one.

## Schools Closed, Trip to Armenia Cancelled

Community leader Mihran Sarafian said the government in Argentina had the "foresight to start quarantine early and help prepare everyone for what was to come."

On March 20 the nationwide lockdown, which is still in effect, was implemented and the government imposed one of the strictest travel bans in the world by prohibiting domestic and international flights until August 31. The severe measures helped slow down the rate of transmission in the country of 45 million that currently has about 10,600 cases and 430 deaths; in its capital city of Buenos Aires, there are an estimated 5,200 cases and 170 deaths.

As the greater community grappled with the stay at home orders and dealt with a pandemic that has worsened an already fragile economy, the Armenians continued their activities by making adjustments. Schools shifted to remote learning as did cultural programming and religious ceremonies, but some experiences simply could not be replicated virtually.

"It's unfortunate that the youth will not be able to travel to Armenia this summer, a trip which is very important to them," said Sarafian. "As everywhere else, it is challenging to preserve the Armenian language in Argentina but whenever the youth go to Armenia, they return with an even stronger Armenian spirit."

Providing an overview of the Armenian community in Buenos Aires, Sarafian said a number of them arrived during the Hamidian and Adana massacres, between 1894 and 1909. He noted that this first wave became more organized once the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) was founded in 1906 and ground was broken on influential institutions.

"Those who arrived first had a feeling something worse was coming," said Sarafian. By 1920, Armenian Genocide survivors were arriving on boats, mostly from Cilicia, Marash, Hadjin, and Aintab, after escaping the horrific

massacres. Although the majority were Turkish-speaking Armenians, the community began to flourish.

"They came without much, maybe just one bag," said Sarafian. "But they went to the streets and they worked. They sacrificed and they looked forward, even with that pain."

A third wave arrived post-World War II, according to Sarafian, most of whom immigrated from Greece, Romania and surrounding countries, and whose Armenian speaking skills enhanced the foundations of the burgeoning community.

Today, Armenia Street in the Palermo neighborhood (the largest and most beloved in Buenos Aires) is filled with academic, cultural, social and religious institutions, all within walking distance, that have made a name for themselves both inside and outside of the city, such as Restaurant Armenia, which warmly welcomes locals and tourists alike. The inviting atmosphere and plethora of culture, from the traditional dishes to the Armenian folk dancing, provides a feeling of home. With the eruption of the pandemic, however, the restaurant's usual full-house has come to an end, albeit temporarily.

"In the midst of a huge economic crisis, a social isolation order was issued and the action of millions of people literally stopped," said owner Pablo Kendikian, who noted that only grocery stores, pharmacies and other essential businesses were permitted to remain open, with restricted hours. "The city was practically under siege with very little movement and the images and numbers we saw of those infected and dying in other parts of the world stung us."

## Restaurants in Times of COVID-19

A month after the initial lockdown orders, the government eased its restrictions towards restaurants and Kendikian requested a special permit, abiding by strict hygiene regulations, to offer their menu through delivery within a close radius.

"The government understood the dire economic situation and didn't want to further aggravate the small and medium-sized businesses that make up the majority of the country," said Kendikian. "Since our restaurant has a large structure of employees and services like electricity, gas and water are expensive, we decided to offer delivery service to offset our bills."

The first Armenian restaurant in Buenos Aires, Restaurant Armenia, is favored by all ethnicities and is symbolically located on Armenia Street, which was named in honor of the significant presence of Armenians and their contributions to the city, in 1984.

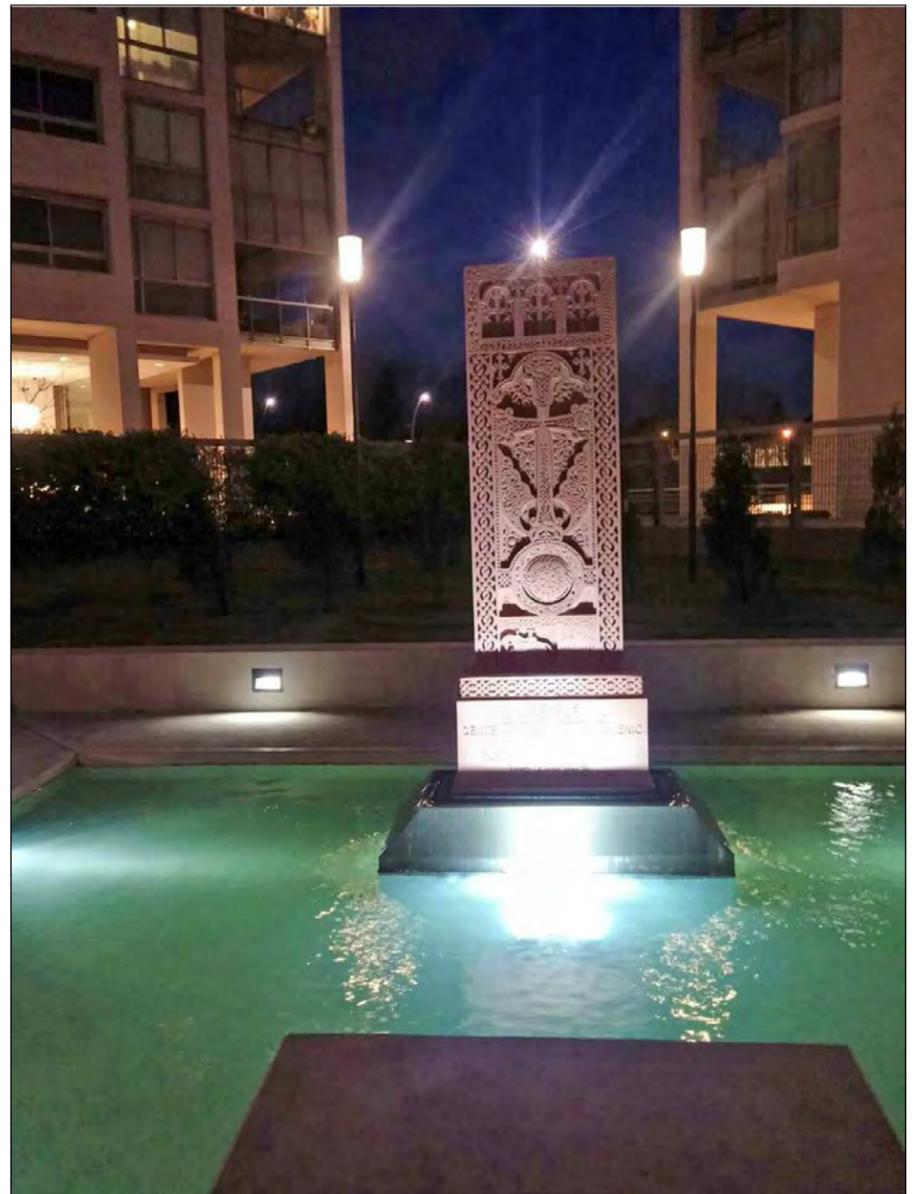
Kendikian sees Restaurant Armenia as an opportunity to share the Armenian culture, drawing on traditions like the bread and salt greeting ceremony and curating a menu filled with madzunov kebab, pashá boreg, manté and ishili keofté, among many other family favorites. On Friday and Saturday nights an Armenian folk performance is featured, and diners are encouraged to participate. Kendikian observes how fulfilling it is to see "non-Armenians dancing to the kochari, shalajo or tamzara, led by the hand of dancers in costumes."

"Restaurant Armenia serves as ambassador for the Armenians," said Kendikian. "It is a tribute to a country like Argentina that opened its arms to refugees fleeing their own lands and that helped them grow and support their families while preserving their traditions and their history."

## AGBU Center

The AGBU center, which is home to the AGBU Marie Manoogian Educational Institute, is the epicenter of activity, socialization and culture for the community, but has been unusually quiet during the last few months.

The eight-floor complex, replete with a swimming pool, school, theater troupe, scouts,



young professional and women's guild organizations, among many other endeavors, is on hold. The usual Friday and Saturday night dinner service, which attracts over 500 people and serves as a fundraiser for students to travel to Armenia, have been converted into meals for the needy.

"It's a new phenomenon for us for the AGBU center to be closed, along with the school and all of our usual programming," said Antonio Sarafian, vice chairman of AGBU Buenos Aires. Like other schools, they have shifted online and with parental help have been able to navigate the challenges and maintain a sense of normalcy.

Instead of cancelling all of their cultural programming, however, AGBU Buenos Aires decided to form the "Cultural Windows" series where communities all over the world virtually meet with Argentinian Armenians.

"When all of us connect we have a better understanding of what is going on in everyone else's world," said Sarafian. Their first event was on April 24 and they discussed how the pandemic affected Armenian Genocide commemorations. The series has attracted people from Spain, Armenia, France, the US, Canada and Holland, among many other nations. The hour and a half program is live streamed from the organization's Facebook page and thousands have tuned in.

As Sarafian and the rest of the chapter members await decisions regarding the school opening and the center as a whole, they are doing their best to maintain a sense of community and normalcy during the unpredictable times. The chapter, which was established in 1911, continues to focus on the young generation, which includes third and fourth generation Armenians, so they "learn the Armenian language and culture and are proud to be Armenian."

"We are trying to strengthen Armenia but our Diaspora needs to be strong as well," said Sarafian. "The Diaspora and the homeland have to come together, hand in hand, so both can usher in a new dawn."

While the pandemic dominates the headlines, the publication of the bilingual Sardarabad Weekly is still in effect, as are the activities of the Tekeyan Cultural Association of Buenos Aires.

In its 45th year of service, Sardarabad Weekly, along with the TCA, upholds its mission to support Armenia and the historical and cultural legacy of the Armenian people, accord-

ing to editor Diana Der Garabedian.

"We work to awaken the sense of pride of belonging to a thousand-year-old nation and to bring our younger generations closer to our institutions," she said. Through the Sardarabad Weekly, information about news and activities of the Diaspora and the homeland, ranging from historical to academic to artistic themes, help "preserve our Armenianness."

The TCA particularly supports the development of Armenian artists, offering space, curating exhibitions and hosting events in Buenos Aires and other major cities in Argentina. They also organize book presentations and conferences that touch on politics, literature and medicine, that are all open to the public.

"Unfortunately, as a consequence of the pandemic, we had to suspend all face-to-face activities since March," said Der Garabedian. But that did not prevent them from developing a portion of the projects they had planned.

Regarding the 105th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, the TCA presented the "Indelible" exhibition online, which is a collection of photographs taken by Pablo Kamalian of objects brought by Armenian refugees and immigrants when they arrived in Argentina.

"They are almost centuries-old objects, such as books, Bibles, mortars, embroidery, inkwells, and everyday utensils that our grandparents brought in their suitcases and that can be appreciated in a unique photographic exhibition, with references to which family it belongs to, when it was brought and a brief history of the object," said Der Garabedian.

On the same day, they launched the exhibition "105 Years of Living" that encompassed the work of close to 20 artists, whose projects are inspired by the Armenian Genocide.

"We continue to develop our activities, adapting ourselves to new circumstances, since in our country mandatory preventive isolation is very strict," said Der Garabedian. "We should not go outside unless it is absolutely necessary to make a purchase of basic necessities or go to the doctor, so all other activities are considered secondary."

In partnership with the John F. Kennedy University in Buenos Aires, Der Garabedian oversees the conversational Armenian classes, Talk Time, led by Prof. Sose Hadjian, which have now been moved to the Zoom platform.

"Our institutions are not foreign to crisis, so see QUARANTINE, page ?



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Argentine-Armenians Contend with COVID-19

QUARANTINE, from page 7

we are trying to sustain all community activity with enormous human effort, working twice as long and without income," said Der Garabedian. "The outlook is not a good one, but we must trust that we will succeed."

## Colegio Armenio Vicente Lopez

Colegio Armenio Vicente Lopez, which serves preschool through secondary grades, prides itself on providing an education for its students, aged 2 to 18, that prepares them to become active citizens in public life.

"The goal and motto of the Vicente Lopez National School is to ensure education, maintain human values, encourage inde-



Colegio Armenio Vicente Lopez

pendent thinking and be of service to the public," said Karine Harutyunyan, director of education. "We strive to create ready, mature and versatile individuals."

While Armenian language lessons began in the apartments of survivors and descendants of the Armenian Genocide, over time the Armenian Educational Foundation of Vicente Lopez was established. The founders of the school sought to create an environment that encouraged the Armenian heritage and culture and within its greater community built the St. Kevork Church, Sirinian Stadium and a park that includes a khatchkar brought from Armenia and named by the local government in 2019 "A Small Armenia." All of these institutions play an integral role in the school's daily life as activities are organized in tandem.

The bucolic atmosphere, however, has ceased for the time being as the community wrestles with the coronavirus.

"The COVID-19 pandemic came as a surprise to the world," said Harutyunyan. "Here in Argentina, one of the first reactions of the government was to close schools in order to maintain public health."

In response to the new challenge, the Vicente Lopez National School embarked on a new form of teaching and immediately switched to online education, which was not an easy task, according to Harutyunyan.

"The families of the students and our mutual trust helped us become successful," said Harutyunyan, who noted that teachers, students and classmates met via Zoom, which has helped combat social isolation. The students have been able to adapt to the approach to learning in a short amount of time.

"Teachers deserve special appreciation," said Harutyunyan. "They immediately created an education based on the requirements of distance learning and carried out the educational mission while preparing interesting lessons and virtual cultural events."

The assistance of school psychologists was also enlisted to help with the transition.

"Every step we took was for the purpose of a quality and modern education," said Harutyunyan. "The key to success has been the united staff, our Board of Trustees, our families and greater community as we overcome these new educational difficulties."

Charitable organizations have ramped up their humanitarian initiatives in the face of the pandemic, including the Armenian Relief Society of South America that assists the Armenian community in the region and throughout the Diaspora and the homeland.

One of the most difficult aspects of the pandemic has been the impossibility of meeting in person, according to Graciela Kevorkian, who serves as the chairperson of the Regional Executive Board, which comprises seven chapters throughout Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil.

"Due to the mandatory quarantine and the prohibition of meetings, we have been forced to interrupt our events and activities that were scheduled months in advance," she said. "In every sense, we have had to adapt to the prevailing situation, taking advantage of new technologies to remain connected to one another."

The members communicate regularly by telephone, Whatsapp and Zoom within their chapters and the chapters around South America. They've had their hands full restructuring activities to

adhere to the current circumstances yet are still carrying out their programming and agenda, such as training members, conducting interviews with professionals, and socializing virtually through cooking and gym classes.

Nevertheless, the pandemic and the quarantine have "profoundly affected" the ARS, most significantly by disrupting the daily life of the organization's Onnig Bodourian - Ohannés Diarbekirian Senior Living Facility in Buenos Aires that currently houses 60 men and women in its five-floor building. The ARS operates another elderly facility in San Pablo, Brazil, as well.

"By government order, visits to geriatric homes are strictly prohibited, so the relatives of the residents and those who are part of the institution cannot go and only the medical, health-care and administrative personnel can enter," said Kevorkian. "Our communication with them is constant and we have met all of the mandatory hygiene and safety requirements for these circumstances."

Being part of a global structure, the ARS chapters in South America are actively participating in all initiatives promoted by the worldwide organization, including the Global Emergency Relief for COVID-19 that provides aid to communities throughout the world, including Armenia and Artsakh.

Since its founding in 1933, the ARS in South America has been involved in social assistance, education, culture, health, and empowerment of women. They provide assistance to families in need, collaborate with public hospitals, work with Armenian schools and help spread culture, particularly through their Armenian dance ensembles, "Nairi" and "Shirag" in Buenos Aires and "Sasun" in Córdoba, another Armenian-populated city in Argentina.

"We've joined with other organizations to provide help to those in need during the pandemic, such as helping purchase and deliver medicine and food, offering free psychological assistance over the phone or online and giving free medical consultations and electronic prescription services," said Kevorkian.

## Armenian Diocese

The Armenian Diocese of Argentina and Chile has also been extending help to families in need, coordinating with the Armenian Center of Argentina to receive and deliver clothes and food for needy families. They are also remaining vigilant in their faith and performing Divine Liturgy at the Armenian St. Gregory the Illuminator Cathedral.

"Due to the quarantine, which has been compulsory in our country, parishioners are not allowed to go to places of worship to pray, however we have been performing Holy Mass every Sunday behind closed doors from the San Gregorio El Illuminator Cathedral, with live transmission via Facebook," said Archbishop Kissag Mouradian, Primate of the Armenian Apostolic Church for Argentina and Chile. "We also offer special prayers for healing and share content, words of encouragement, and prayers with our faithful through social networks."

The Cathedral is well-known in the Palermo neighborhood and stands as a symbol of the prominence of Armenians in Buenos Aires, so much so that it is a stop in the official tour program of the City of Buenos Aires.

The Armenian Center of Argentina (Centro Armenio) de Argentina binds the community together with the mission of preserving the Armenian language, culture and traditions in the country. Located adjacent to the St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Cathedral, the organization has stalled its day to day tasks.

"The pandemic has affected our activities like the rest of the sectors, however we continue our work virtually," said Alex Hadjian, who serves as the Press and Communications Director. While all of their offices are closed, the organization has collaborated in receiving and distributing clothing, food and toys and arranging shelter and housing.

"Keeping the Armenian community alive from such a distance and so many years later is a constant and challenging job," said Hadjian, who acknowledged that their community's greatest challenge is the preservation of the Western Armenian language. "Fortunately, however, each new generation of descendants of Armenians in Argentina keeps the Armenian identity with the same intensity, respecting customs, traditions, remembrance and the demand for justice in relation to the Armenian Genocide."

Sergio Nahabetian, president of the Armenian Institutions of the Republic of Argentina - IARA, a coordination space for the institutions of the Armenian community in Argentina, emboldens joint activities of organizations and encourages closer contact and communication.

"This year it was impossible to carry out the central event that is organized annually on April 24th and the rally organized by the youth," said Nahabetian. "It is not yet decided how activities will continue, since there is a situation of uncertainty in the whole country."

The open-ended lockdown has made it impossible for organizations to realize their programming and scheduling regarding

future activities. For now, the IARA is focused on assisting their fellow community members.

"Different proposals emerged from the institutions to help the elderly, collect food, donate blood or offer their spaces to the authorities," said Nahabetian. "We work on these plans while we are all on pause and await more clarity."

The oldest newspaper in the Armenian community in South America, Diario Armenia had not missed one single issue from the date of its inception on April 26, 1931 up until the pandemic hit and all print operations were suspended on March 18, 2020. Since its print issues have been put on hold due to the quarantine, the bilingual newspaper, which produces content in both Spanish and Armenian, has turned its focus to its digital site and Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to disseminate news of the community in Argentina and Armenia.

"We are working from home since we can't gather in the office," said Director of Agencia Prensa Armenia Pablo Kendikian, who notes that their editorial staff is composed of seven members, freelancers and a correspondent in Yerevan, Armenia, who currently produces weekly video reports from there. "The pandemic has seriously affected the finances of Diario Armenia and on top of the economic crisis in the country, COVID-19 has contributed to the nation's high inflation."

Founded by Armenian Genocide survivors who arrived as refugees in Argentina, Diario Armenia was initially published twice a week with exclusive content in the Armenian language "with great effort and without great resources."

"Each issue was distributed house by house by volunteers," said Kendikian. "Thanks to the contribution of many readers and thanks to a complete set of Armenian letter linotypes that arrived from Boston, the newspaper increased its frequency to become a daily that lasted for many decades."

The newspaper was eagerly awaited by its readers since it served as the main source of local news for Armenians early on, who did not yet know the Spanish language.

"Through the newspaper, readers found out about labor laws, the country's political and economic situation," said Kendikian. "They also learned about what was happening in the Armenian Diaspora and in the then-Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic."

As Diario Armenia continues its reportage, the team also continues to carry out the meaningful task of digitizing each of their issues in an initiative funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

Diario Armenia has a historic place in the Armenian press as influential intellectuals "passed through the newsroom," according to Kendikian.

"From the beginning, the newspaper tried to keep the Armenian identity, accompany the fight for the Armenian cause and spread all the activities of the different institutions of the community in the South American region."

Although the theater is now dark seven days a week, the spirit of the Tadron Teatro has not been crushed. Founded in 1996 by artistic directors Kalusd and Herminia Jensezian, who desired to create the first Argentine-Armenian Theater Exchange, the award-winning venue has inspired a number of cultural, social and political themed plays that have been recognized by the City of Buenos Aires for its Cultural Work and the Defense of Human Rights.

In recognition of the Armenian Genocide, Tadron Teatro holds a special event on April 24 of every year that focuses on the theme of "Theater x Justice" that reflects the truth, memory and justice of society. The series has gained acclaim and received accolades for upholding human rights.

"We have been staging the Theater X Justice series, uninterrupted, for 14 years and were in full preparation for this year," said Jensezian, who cites the loss of 665 theater-related jobs in the city, the majority of whom worked in the independent theater. "We were at the beginning of our theater season and workshops but the pandemic caused us to suspend all of our programming, which has been an expensive and tough break."

The stress of the pandemic has created a reality ripe with anxiety and worry, feelings that Jensezian says can be channeled into art.

"We're learning to cope with these scenes that feel as if they are lifted from science fiction and we are all the involuntary actors," said Jensezian. "During this time we have to take the necessary actions to keep the flame of the theater burning, even if that means we work remotely and virtually to connect with our actors and students."

The massive upheaval around the world has allowed Jensezian to look at the time of crisis through a philosophical lens, encouraging contemplation as a way to cope.

"We should reflect on the effects the pandemic will have on our minds and our bodies," said Jensezian. "The questions we ask ourselves now will push us into new territories, allowing us to reinvent ourselves and the work we create."

As a lifelong participant and patron of the theater, Jensezian has faith in its ability to transform during periods of tragedy and to "trust the strength of the theater that has gone through various crises and catastrophes in the thousands of years of its existence."

"As theaters we have the energy, passion, and drive to emerge stronger from this experience and to continue doing what we love the most," said Jensezian. "After all, the theater is the space of the dignity of man."



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Chicago Riots Threaten Armenian Businesses, Armenian Consulate and Church

CHICAGO, from page 1

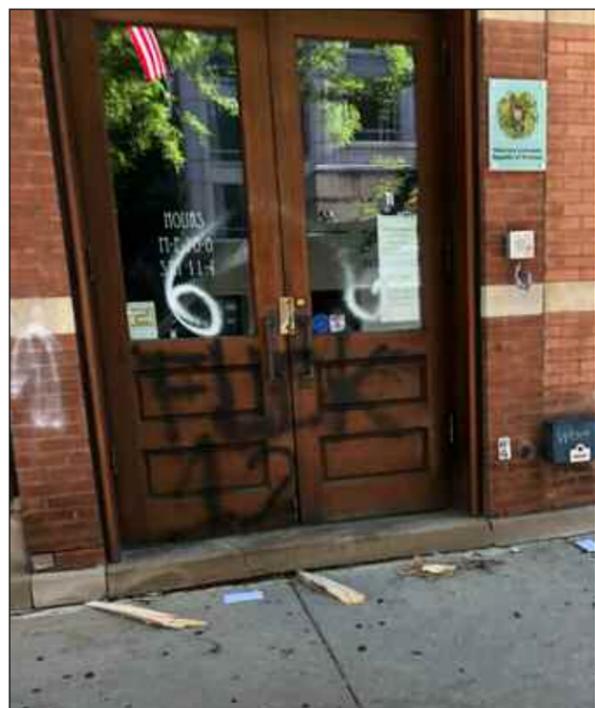
store and the consulate share a common entrance. He noted that it was near an intersection with LaSalle Street which was one of the main arteries into the business district. The police did not close off that bridge because it is an important two-way street allowing security and emergency vehicles to pass.

Tatosian said of the crowd of looters on Saturday night May 30, "About midnight, they smashed windows, and smashed the door. They tried to get in but they couldn't go any further. There were some display items they were able to steal. They graffitied the entire façade." Tatosian added that the store, which also is the site of the honorary consulate, was well barricaded from the inside as always so no special precautions were needed.

Repairing the damage to the common entrance of the Honorary Consulate of the Republic of Armenia in Chicago and the Oscar Isberian Rugs store

As the honorary consulate, Tatosian said he was in communication with the mayor's office and ready to help any Armenian citizens who require assistance. So far, fortunately he said, there has been no need for this in connection with the riots.

Brindille, a Michelin star restaurant co-owned by chef Carrie Nahabedian, is also in the River North district and also had been attacked by looters. Its custom-made window was shattered by a fire extinguisher. In an article in the Chicago Tribune, reporter John Kass related her reaction: "I just broke down. I was sick-



Graffiti at the common entrance of the Armenian Consulate in Chicago and Oscar Isberian Rugs

ened by what happened to Mr. Floyd; who wasn't? But then Brindille is attacked? I know it's just property and just a building and just a restaurant. Thank God nobody was hurt. But it's our restaurant, it's my dream, and all the love and care we put into it, and they destroyed it because they could. It's personal, an attack on everything we stand for."

Nahabedian said, "Their actions had nothing to do with the man, Mr. Floyd, who should have been honored. Look around the country. In all the cities. This was an organized attack. What does Gucci have to do with the murder of Mr. Floyd? Or Versace?"

Nothing. Or any place that was destroyed." She added, "We've lost something critical. We've lost our civility. And that's what's breaking my heart."

One of the local stores of Argo Tea, a company cofounded by Arsen Avakian in 2003, on Dearborn Street and Adams, had its windows smashed, not far from Chicago's city hall.

There are Armenian jewelry stores in the downtown area of Chicago affected by the riots, but there is no word so far of whether any were damaged.

## Armenian Church

Even Armenian churches were in danger of damage during the weekend. St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church of Chicago is not in the downtown but still is considered within the city limits of Chicago.

Church pastor Fr. Andreas Garabedian said that as Illinois was moving forward with reopening of businesses and churches, his church decided to welcome parishioners back for the divine liturgy for the first time since the COVID-10 lockdown on Sunday, May 31. After everything was concluded, he left but roughly an hour or an hour and a half later, he received a call from his secretary informing her that riots were taking place in the area.

Fr. Andreas said he immediately left his home and drove back. He said, "I am not armed but I personally believe that somebody should be at the church at that moment, and I am the first and last line of defense, especially with the police being as strained as they are. I put on my coat and stood in front of the church, not to attract attention but to show that it is not an abandoned building and that somebody is there."

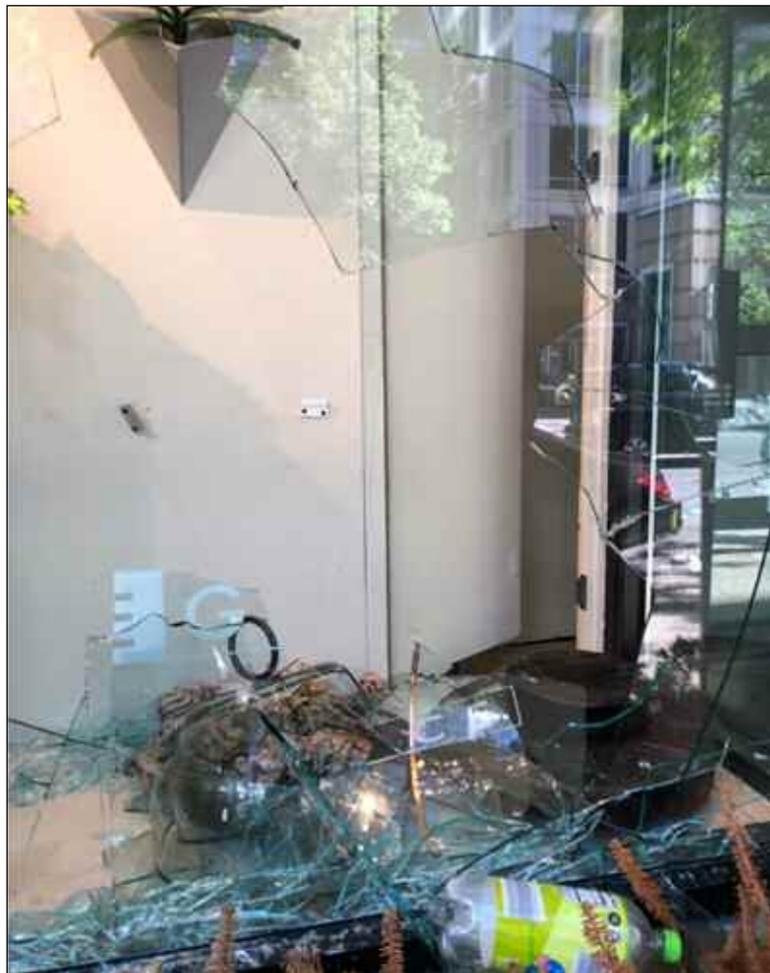
He said he could not tell the identity of passersby, because everyone was masked, but as he approached the church, he saw cars driving by with antifa [anti-fascist] flags, and people screaming out of their cars, death to the pigs, death to the cops. He noted that you have to be scared in such a situation because there could be crazy people present.

Two or three blocks away, there was a shopping center or strip mall area with stores like Target, Jewel-Osco (a supermarket), Five Below, Foot Locker, Chipotle and McDonalds. The police told Fr. Andreas that all those stores were smashed and hit. Hooligans threw bricks through windows and the area had to be completely evacuated by the police.

Fr. Andreas and his neighbor, a Greek Orthodox restaurant owner, stood side by side and saw, Fr. Andreas said, "People were in the street. The police was in the street. People were yelling and screaming. Rioters were kicking cars." Some people cursed Fr. Andreas, and others, he said, were spouting what he called misinformation and conspiracy theories. He stayed until 7 or 8 p.m. to make sure nothing will happen to the church and returned again in the morning.

He said that thankfully nothing happened to the church so far, and police were patrolling up and down the streets, while downtown Chicago is completely under lockdown. The National Guard had been called to help.

Fr. Andreas said that in general, "It was just a smorgasbord of people taking advantage of the situation. Even if people were not criminals, seeing the opportunity of a broken store window, they would run in and grab something." In other words, this was not



Damage at the Oscar Isberian Rugs store

a protest any longer, but strictly rioting, he said. The police told him that they were overwhelmed and had to decide who to arrest and who to let go.

Fr. Andreas said that as a church, the Armenians believe all lives are precious regardless of names and even religion, and must be defended. He said that he personally thinks, and believes the Armenian Church would agree, that we want justice and we want the truth to come out. Anyone who is guilty, he said, should answer for it. In fact, he even spoke about the George Floyd situation in his Sunday sermon, and said he would protest and stand up for truth and justice if need be.

However, he concluded, "As the church, as a community, as Armenians who know what suffering and injustice is, yes, we cannot relate to the plight of African Americans, and the struggle they go through every day, and yes, we stand next to them and stand arm-in-arm, but what is happening is not about Black Lives Matter anymore. It is distracting from what really needs to be done."

As far as St. Gregory the Illuminator Church itself, he said he realized, seeing what happened in Denver to the khachkar (see this Mirror article), that just being a church does not necessarily mean anything and the situation was far from over. He said, "I plan to be at the church regularly and show there is a presence here. I am a big guy. If somebody sees me, hopefully they will stay away - not that I can do anything, and I do not want to cause a ruckus or violence. The church is my home. Everyone who comes and prays here is family. Like any father or parents who defend their family, I will defend my church. Hopefully it won't come to that though."

## Colorado State Capitol Khachkar Genocide Memorial Vandalized

DENVER, from page 1

One oddity is the phrase "Sample Text" spray-painted on the building behind the monument.

The following Facebook link provides a video of the monument and its immediate surroundings from May 31 taken by Simon Maghakyan who confirms the reality of the incident: <https://www.facebook.com/thesimon/videos/10158533969637292>.

Below is a statement from the board of directors of the Armenians of Colorado organization from May 30 from the organization's Facebook page. It both condemns the injustice against African Americans and the vandalism of the monument.

President of the organization Sona Hedeshian later added on Facebook that several Armenian

community members offered to help with the clean up but the organization asks that no one tries this at present. The organization will work with the state of Colorado to have it cleaned and restored professionally.

Unfortunately, according to Maghakyan on June 2, despite the warnings some individuals attempted to clean the khachkar on their own, and possibly damaged it further.

Dear community,

We are heartbroken to inform you that the Colorado State Capitol khachkar memorial to the Armenian Genocide and to the victims of all crimes against humanity has been vandalized with spray paint graffiti during the ongoing protests in downtown Denver.

Since the khachkar commemorates the victims of all crimes against humanity, including

slavery and state-sponsored racism, it is ironic that individuals who claim to seek justice have vandalized the very monument that honors the victims of injustice.

Protest leaders have repeatedly denounced violence and vandalism. We do not hold the peaceful protesters responsible for the behavior of violent individuals. As Armenian Americans, a community that has survived genocide and centuries of oppression, we recognize and condemn the ongoing injustices against our African-American community and we join them in calling for justice for George Floyd.

Earlier today, our community leadership discussed scenarios for protecting the khachkar monument before we found out that it had been vandalized. One idea to protect the monument was boarding it up, which

could have made the khachkar more vulnerable by making it inflammable.

Any vandalism against the capitol khachkar is particularly painful given that it is a replica of one of the 3,000 medieval cross-stones of the legendary Djulf cemetery destroyed by Azerbaijan's government in 2005 as part of their plan of erasing the Armenian history in Nakhichevan.

We will continue to monitor the ongoing protests and consider short-term and long-term solutions for the protection of the Colorado state capitol memorial to the victims of all crimes against humanity.

If necessary, we will rebuild our sacred monument again and again, while defending human rights and equality for all.

Board of Directors  
Armenians of Colorado

# Arts & Living

## From Sudan to Siberia: Mkrtych Ulikyan's Odyssey

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN – In the distant 1980s, during one of the faculty English lessons at school, classmate Azatuhi Ulikyan showed us a family photo. “This is my grandfather in Sudan,” she said.

In the middle of the black-and-white photo was a man surrounded by half-naked women and men. What a surprise! So the grandfather of one of our schoolgirls in this gray Soviet school lived in distant and exotic Africa and was photographed with the people of one of the local tribes, whose women were half-naked! That photo left a strong impression on me. A few years later, based on that, I drew a small painting. And many years later, studying the history of African-Armenian communities, I remembered that photo and decided to follow in the footsteps of Sudanese-Armenian Ulikyan.

I found Azatuhi Ulikyan, now the holder of a doctorate, and an associate professor at the Control Systems Chair of the National Polytechnic University of Armenia and Educational Engineer at the Armenian National Engineering laboratories. She introduced me to her uncle, Andranik Ulikyan, who was born in Sudan. The latter gladly agreed to tell the extremely remarkable story of his family, which I present below.

### African Deportation

Mkrtych Ulikyan (in English he transcribed his name as Magarditsh Ouliguiian), was born in 1904 in Constantinople, to Toros and Hnazand Ulikyan. He had two brothers, Garbis and Takvor, and a sister, Madeleine. During the Armenian Genocide, the father took the children to an American orphanage in Constantinople, made them cross over the fence and left, hoping that the children would be safe. Afterwards Toros Ulikyan left for Egypt. In 1920, 16-year-old Mkrtych and his brother Takvor left their younger brother and sister at the orphanage and moved to Egypt to join their father.

From a young age, Mkrtych had a great love for cars, and he became a mechanic in Egypt. Learning that in neighboring Sudan there was a great demand for car specialists, Mkrtych collected a little money and went alone to the Sudanese city of Al-Obeid, knowing no one there. In this city, he met a local man who told him that a wealthy Armenian lived in El-Obeid, by the name of Sarkis agha. The man took Mkrtych to show Sarkis' two-story house. One day Mkrtych went and knocked on the door of the house, asking the Sudanese servant to tell the landlord that a compatriot wanted to talk to him for five minutes. The servant soon told Mkrtych that the landlord was inviting him inside. He waited for 10 minutes, was served cold lemonade, until a large man with a mustache, wearing a house robe, came down the stairs.

Sarkis agha was very happy to meet the young compatriot, looked carefully into Mkrtych's eyes and immediately understood his soul. “How can I be useful, son?” Sarkis agha asked. Mkrtych said that he wanted to start a truck business, but did not have enough money to buy a car. Five minutes later, Sarkis agha handed Mkrtych the funds he needed. The young man waited for him to receive a receipt. “My son,” said Sarkis agha, “I know why you are not leaving. If I had not been an honest man, I would not have given you money. Go and buy what you want with this money, enjoy it, when you do not need that money, then you will repay your debt.”

Thus, thanks to the support of the Armenian compatriot, Mkrtych Ulikyan's business started. One truck became two, two, three and then four and in the depths of Africa, Mkrtych ran his own business, transporting people and cargo from one Sudanese settlement to another.

see SUDAN, page 11



Conductor Gurchen Petrosyan

## Gurchen Petrosyan

### “Conducting Is a Kind of Magic”

YEREVAN/SAINT-PETERSBURG – Russian conductor Gurchen Petrosyan was born in 1991 in Nalchik, in the Kabardino-Balkaria region of North Caucasus. He

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan

Special to the Mirror-Spectator

studied at the College of Culture and Arts of the North Caucasus State Institute of Arts, majoring in choral conducting, in Rosa Khashukoeva's class, who sent the student to the Saratov L.V. Sobinova State

Conservatory, department of choral conducting (Nelli Vladimirtseva's class).

In 2015 Gurchen graduated from the Saratov State Conservatory as a choir conductor and in 2017 as a symphony orchestra conductor. He took part in master classes by Theodor Currentzis, Denis Fisher and Yuri Simonov.

During his studies, Gurchen became a laureate of a number of competitions, including the Krasnoyarsk International Competition of Conductors of Academic Choirs (1st Prize, 2015). In 2015-2017, he was the assistant conductor of Saratov State Conservatory Symphony Orchestra, and in 2016-2018, he was the conductor of the Volga Chamber Orchestra.

Gurchen Petrosyan performed with the State Symphony Orchestra of Armenia, New Russia State Symphony Orchestra, the Mariinsky Theater Symphony Orchestra, the State Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra of Kostroma Region, Astana Philharmonic State Symphony Orchestra, the Moscow State Symphony Orchestra for Children and Youth, the Hong Kong Sinfonietta Symphony Orchestra.

Since March 2018, Petrosyan has been the trainee conductor at the Mariinsky Theater of St. Petersburg. There he made his debut as an opera conductor with “The Tsar's Bride” by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and. He acted as an assistant conductor in the productions of the operas “Falstaff” by Verdi and “The Girl of the West” by Puccini. Gurchen also conducted “The Nutcracker” by Peter Tchaikovsky in two different productions, “Pan Voyevoda” by Rimsky-Korsakov, “Betrothal in a Monastery” by Prokofiev, as well as other performances and various concerts.

In December 2019, he directed the orchestra on tour of the Mariinsky Ballet in Baden-Baden.

**Dear Gurchen, the first time I heard about you, in 2015, was when you won the first prize at the Krasnoyarsk International Competition of Conductors of Academic Choirs. Today, we are proud to see your Armenian name as a conductor of one of the best opera houses in the world.**

I have only the fondest memories of the Krasnoyarsk competition: in addition to winning, I was also lucky to meet wonderful colleagues with whom we still stay in touch. Five years have passed since that time, and fortunately, I increasingly believe that if you really want something very much, it will certainly come true, even if you have no idea how this could happen.

see CONDUCTING, page 13

## A New Life for Seventh-Century Armenian Wall-Painting Art

YEREVAN – The Armenian and English-language book *The Restoration of Wall Paintings in Several Armenian Churches of First Christian Ages* is the result of an eight-year research, study and restoration campaign of frescoed cycles, carried out in various early Christian churches located on the slopes of the mystical Aragatz Mountain. The authors have repeatedly traveled to Armenia, engaging with passion, devotion, means and professionalism to recover, preserve and restore wall paintings of extraordinary beauty and historical-cultural value. Their goal is to maintain and transmit the immense load of messages, coming from the depths of the centuries.

This 330-page work recently published by Tigran Metz Publishing House in Yerevan contains 703 color photos and pays homage to the pioneer of the field, the Russian scientist Lidia Dournovo, who in the 1950s and 1960s, had made reproductions of many frescoes now deposited in the National Art Gallery of Armenia.

The following is a slightly abridged version of Patrick Donabédian's foreword to this book:

In the history of medieval Armenian art, wall painting is one of the least studied and most problematic spheres. Here are some reasons for this situation: the small number of surviving fragments and their poor condition, the complexity of the historical-religious basis, the almost complete destruction of the heritage in the historical western part of the country, and, in the case of miraculously preserved fragments, their inaccessibility to field work. This is why there is still no more-or-less comprehensive view and research about early Christian and medieval Armenian wall painting art. Our knowledge is especially limited in the field of artistic decorations of seventh-century monuments, although some information is available from N. Kotanjyan's book *Monumental Painting of Early Medieval Armenia* (Yerevan, 2017). Meanwhile, in that era, there were very favourable conditions for the spread of wall-painting art.

Beginning in the late sixth century, and particularly during the period between the late 620s and the early 690s, Armenian architecture saw its first Golden Age. During that time, dozens of high-quality, original and innovative religious structures were built in Armenia. These domed buildings, with their complex and thoroughly planned compositions, had fine and unique sculptural ornamentation. After the construction of Zvartnots, beginning from the mid-seventh century, architectural sculpture acquired a uniqueness unusual for Armenia and even some luxury. Within the same period, the type of monuments with column or cross-crowned quadrilateral carved memorials was also developed. Moreover, that rapid upsurge of Armenian architecture and sculpture occurred in the period when the other major Christian centres of the East, such as Byzantium and Syria, were experiencing deep crisis, and almost no significant structures were created there.

In the sixth and seventh centuries, the Armenian Church had a clear favorable position in regard to wall painting and struggled against iconoclasm. In Armenia, one of the standard bearers in defense of iconography was the chronicler Vrtanes Kertogh. In his work *About Iconoclasts*, to contradict the opponents of iconography, he brings forward the following argument: ‘it is not because of the colours that one prostrates, but because of Christ, for whom they are painted. . . . We recognize the invisible through the appearance of God, and the colours and images are the see PAINTINGS, page 12



## ARTS &amp; LIVING

## Sudan to Siberia

SUDAN, from page 10

Soon, fortune smiled on him in his personal life too. In El Obeid, he met a businessman named Kyriako Hermes, whose wife was an Armenian woman named Aghavni. Some time later, Aghavni's sister's daughter, Azatuhi Matosyan, came to see her aunt from Khartoum. Azatuhi was born in Ankara to a large Armenian family. His father, Minas, was a soldier in national hero Andranik's army; then his family was deported and settled in Khartoum, where Minas had several shops. Kyriako Hermes introduced Mkrtych to Azatuhi and the two hit it off. Mkrtych's parents came from Egypt, and the young couple got married.

Their first son, Andranik and other three were born in Sudan, while two more were destined to be born in the Soviet Union. Mkrtych gave Armenian names to all the children, except for daughter Madeleine, whom he named in memory of his prematurely deceased sister in Constantinople. The Ulikyans were deeply religious people who raised their children with a Christian upbringing. Mkrtych Ulikyan subscribed to Cairo's *Arev* (Sun) daily newspaper. There were no Armenian school in El-Obeid, and the father ordered to speak only Armenian.

Mkrtych registered a cargo office with four trucks belonging to him all over Sudan, which provided him with a stable income. He recognized all of Sudan and its peoples, the Arabs, the Ethiopians, the Copts, and the local tribes. He once transported a local clergyman with his 40 wives in the back of a truck. Once, while passing through a remote village, the truck was surrounded by the members of a local tribe. Mkrtych was told that their leader was ill and was threatened not to be released until he and his team helped the patient. Fortunately, Mkrtych had a painkiller to alleviate the condition of the sick chief. The incident is reminiscent of the photo mentioned at the beginning of this article, where Mkrtych Ulikyan is standing in front of a sick tribal leader, surrounded by half-naked residents of the village. It was a special honor bestowed on Mkrtych because, according to the laws of that tribe, no one had the right to be at the head of the tribal leader.

In their free time, Sudanese Armenians spent time together, often with 25-30 people, embarking on an outing, during which Mkrtych put out a barrel of beer for them. He always had two guns in his car, and one gun in his pocket to protect himself from the dangers on the roads.

There were few Armenians in Sudan, about 800 people, and their number has decreased year by year. Most of them left for Egypt.

### The Homeland Is Calling

After World War II, when the repatriation of Diaspora Armenians to Soviet Armenia began, Mkrtych Ulikyan also decided to join the caravans.

Receiving the privilege of joining the caravan of repatriates from Egypt, Ulikyan sold his house, left the four trucks and the prosperous life to their Sudanese servants, and left for Egypt with his family. In order to take him to Armenia, he bought four new Ford trucks and placed boxes of different goods in each of them: food, clothes, soap and car spare parts. In Alexandria, these cars were delivered to the port to load the ship. Three other Sudanese-Armenian families, the Nalchajyans, the Fabrikatorians and the Semerjyans, were also there in their cars. In Cairo, Mkrtych met a well-known Arab businessman who, knowing about his intention to move to Soviet Union, advised him not to go to a poor country that had just emerged from the war. He offered Mkrtych to return to Sudan and promised to hand over a more extensive cargo business, sharing the profits with him. Mkrtych also met with his French, Belgian and Danish friends, who offered him to move to Europe together and work together, but Ulikyan was not to be swayed.

Those who want to immigrate because of the quarantine announced in Egypt were not allowed to leave the country. The Ulikyans were forced to stay in Cairo for a year with the others, where Andranik's son attended the kindergarten of the local Kalousdian School.

The day of departure arrived. The repatriates boarded the Soviet ship, which had been confiscated during the war from Germany and renamed "Pobeda" (Victory). By the way, the future famous singer Gohar Gasparyan was traveling in the same boat. The owners of the cars were informed that due to the lack of space on the ship, their

cars would come with the next Romanian ship "Transylvania." Those cars never arrived.

### The Collapse of Dreams

One kilometer from the port of Batumi, "Pobeda" stopped, and the passengers were ordered to dump the food they had at sea, reasoning that there is everything in the Soviet Union and that is forbidden to enter the port with the food. People started throwing their food into the water and a few minutes later they were surprised to see that many people were swimming from the shore and taking everything that had not been sunk. Seeing this, Mkrtych's brother-in-law hid four pieces of *basturma* in their woolen blankets. People started looking at the port of Batumi through binoculars and saw with horror that a woman was holding a carbine in her hand near the checkpoint, and another was carrying charcoal in a wheelchair. The Egyptian-Armenians, who were mostly wealthy, realized that they had fallen into the trap.

At the port, the people filled the barracks, and were offered sour borscht, which the Egyptian-Armenians had never tasted before. Seeing the low-quality black bread, they mistook it for chocolate cake, until they bit into it and saw it ooze salt water when squeezed.



Mkrtych Ulikyan with the members of a tribe, whose chief he helped with some painkillers.

Arriving in Yerevan, the Ulikyans were housed in a three-story building, which had just been built by German prisoners of war. Mkrtych started working at the truck repair point. Initially, he went to work in his English suit and tie, until he was told that it was not appropriate attire for a Soviet worker: the boss told him: "Take that rope off your neck!"

After the war, wishing to restore the loss of human resources, the Soviet government organized a campaign to return to the historical homeland representatives of the immigrated peoples of the USSR. The Soviet state, at the cost of bringing hundreds of thousands of repatriates to its country, wished to strengthen its image of a powerful state that had won the war, then set about freeing itself from Armenian repatriates by exiling many of them to Siberia and the Altai.

On June 12, 1949, at 2 p.m. someone knocked the door of the Ulikyans' apartment. An Armenian captain, with two Russian soldiers, entered and ordered to collect the items immediately and leave the house. Seeing four small children and one in a diaper, the captain was filled with pity. "I am commanded to take you," he said. "Don't curse me, big brother, if I don't take you, they will take me with you. I can only do you a favor now. I am given ten minutes to collect your property, but I give you half an hour. Take what is valuable with you, especially warm clothes." Mkrtych took his wife's jewelry, which would later come to the aid in their troubled days, so he remembered that captain with gratitude for the rest of his life. In the commotion, they forgot the baby in a diaper at home and had to return after him. In the village of Ulukhanlu (now - Masis), the Ulikyans, along with thousands of other repatriates, filled the wagons of a freight train. And after a cruel journey of eighteen days, the repatriates who obeyed the call of the homeland, as a result of a cruel game of fate, found themselves in wild and wretched Siberia, in Stalin's exiles. Their only fault was the desire to live in the homeland and serve it, for which they left their quiet life and became the victims of the insidious game of Soviet propaganda.

### Life in the Taiga

Thus, for the Ulikians, who had not yet recognized Armenia properly, Sudan was replaced by the Zalesovsky district of Altai krai for six years. There were 45 exiled Armenian families in that district, 25 of whom were repatriates. Mkrtych's family was taken 32 kilometers from Zalesovo, deep in the taiga, where there were only three hunting lodges and a small kiosk. They gave him a tent and ordered him to cut down the trees and build a house. Mkrtych built a wooden cabin with the other exiles. The woolen blankets brought from Africa allowed the family to withstand the 35-40 degree frost. But even in Siberian conditions, the Ulikyans were able to maintain their Christian identity, they taught their children to cross themselves before meals, which was rare for the Soviet reality.

Mkrtych Ulikyan was exiled a year later. One night in 1950, at 2 a.m., there was a knock on the door of his Siberian cabin, and Mkrtych was taken away. Two hours later, he was brought home beaten and bloody. In order to have grounds for exile, Mkrtych was forced to sign that he was a member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, but he refused to sign it. The same story was repeated in 1951. He was

beaten again and refused to sign it again. Moreover, it happened according to an order received from Armenia.

Mkrtych went to work at a local power plant, while his wife, Azatuhi, that educated, mollycoddled aristocratic lady, and her 8-year-old son Andranik tore off the stumps near the cabin to sow potatoes. It was very difficult to get food. Mkrtych soon learned that residents of the nearby Obukhovo village were selling rabbit meat. Together with his eldest son, he reached the village in the woods, ignoring the cold and the fear of wild animals, and gave his wife's golden bracelets and bought frozen rabbits. Thus, in the harsh conditions of Siberia, potatoes and rabbit meat were a salvation for the Ulikyans. And the large family was made whole with another daughter who was named after Mkrtych's mother, Hnazand.

### Surprise Meeting in Barnaul

Two years after Stalin's death, in 1955, Mkrtych wrote a letter to Kliment Voroshilov, chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, stating that they, being from Africa, were not accustomed to the cold climate and asked for permission to return to Armenia. The answer was not long in coming; a letter signed by Voroshilov himself came in 10 days, but it was written that they could move to any republic of Central Asia, but not to the Caucasus. Mkrtych soon received an official permission to leave Siberia. The Ulikyans traveled by train to the main city of Altai krai, Barnaul, from where they were to travel by train to Central Asia. However, as the number of people wishing to leave was high, they could not validate their tickets for three days. At the train station Mkrtych by accident saw an Armenian repatriate, Mardo Pokrachian, who was a boxing champion in Middle East. Mkrtych did not know him personally, so, wanting to attract his attention, he told his son loudly in Western Armenian: "Son, run and get some boiled water!" Hearing this, Mardo approached Mkrtych and said: "Brother, you are an Armenian. You are one of those who came from there, right?" "Yes, I am from Egypt."

"What's your name?" "Ulikian." "Are you Ulik's brother?" Mardo said, hugging Mkrtych. It turned out that he recognized one of Mkrtych's brothers, whom he affectionately called Ulik.

Knowing the plight of the Mkrtych family, Mardo, a tall, very hairy man who had spent four years in prison for beating five Russians mocking his hairiness, all of whom were frightened, took the train tickets. Opening the door with a kick, he entered the station chief's room and, in his broken Russian, demanded a written permission to validate the Ulikyans' tickets. Then he approached the cash register and forced them to validate the tickets, telling the protesting crowd that he was doing it for a family with six children.

The next train arrived only the next day. Mardo came back to the station with his friend, also an exiled repatriate Kevork, who, as it turned out, was also known by Mkrtych. Mardo approached the train door and shouted at the crowd again in his broken Russian that the first to enter the train was the family with six children. A man with a briefcase and hat approached and yelled on Mardo. The former athlete slapped the man who fell on his back. Only then was the crowd silenced. Kevork was the first to enter the train and take a seat for the Ulikyans. Before leaving, Mkrtych asked Mardo if he was going to return to Armenia. "I have found my life by terrorizing the Russians here, should I go there and be arrested again? No, I will not go," Mardo said. He later visited Armenia, but lived most of his life in Barnaul and died there.

### And now - Uzbekistan

The Ulikyans reached Uzbekistan and settled in Fergana. As a driver, Mkrtych went to work in a car park in the Toshlok region, 48 kilometers from the city. When he first went there, his son Andranik joined his father to translate the conversation into Russian. Mkrtych, who was fluent in six languages, did not want to learn good Russian, and Andranik, who went to school in Siberia, did not learn to read and write in Armenian and always surprised those around him with his impeccable Russian accent. Therefore, we can imagine the extreme astonishment of the Russian officer during his military service, when after praising Andranik Ulikyan's perfect Russian, he saw the note "Sudan, Africa" in his passport as his birthplace.

The Ulikyans lived in Uzbekistan for a year. During this time, Mkrtych supplied cotton raw materials and seeds to the processing factories in the Toshlok region. He especially remembered the funny incident that happened in Uzbekistan during the years he lived there. Mkrtych reproduced his photo with the Africans and kept a copy in his wallet, realizing that it could be useful when he met traffic inspectors. And once his car was stopped by the senior traffic inspector captain and instead of the driver's license, he started to study the African's photo and asked about it, especially about naked women. In the end, he refused to return the photo, and instead he did not bother Mkrtych again.

In 1956, the new Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, publicly condemned Stalin's cult of personality. The Ulikyans finally received the official certificate of the authorities, according to which they were considered unjustified repressed and received the right to return to Armenia.

### "Like Everyone Else, So Do We."

Overcoming new kinds of difficulties, Mkrtych's children became owners of jobs and families in Armenia. Mkrtych himself continued to work as a driver. He never regretted repatriation, did not try to leave the Soviet Union, did not complain about the trials that came to his life, and when his son, Andranik, sometimes complained about the difficulties of Soviet life, he always said: "Never mind, son, like everyone else, so we do." Only two days before his death, Mkrtych, re-evaluating his past life, considered it necessary to apologize to his son for bringing them to the Soviet Union. "Never mind, dad, like everyone else, so we do," Andranik replied to his father.

Mkrtych Ulikyan lived for 93 years, dying in 1997, and his wife, Azatuhi, passed away three years later, at the age of 82.

While still living in the depths of Africa, Mkrtych Ulikyan expressed concern about the future of his children growing up in unfavorable conditions for Armenians. Today, his descendants continue to live mostly in Armenia, each contributing to his chosen field. Thus, at least at the cost of certain trials, the efforts of Mkrtych Ulikyan to preserve the Armenian identity, as we see, have not been in vain.



## ARTS &amp; LIVING

# Armenian Cultural Hour Goes on in Rhode Island

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Whether or not you have a Facebook account, you can find the LIVESTREAM of the event through the parish's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/pg/armenianchurchprovidence/videos/>

The Cultural Committee of the Sts. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Church of Providence, RI is pleased to announce the start of a new series of programs entitled “Armenian Cultural Hour” for parishioners and friends. In this difficult time, when many are compelled to comply with quarantine, it is very important to support people morally. Therefore, the Cultural

Committee has organized for you, along with “Meet with Armenian Doctors”, a series of unique programs from concerts of famous Armenian musicians from around the World.

You can see and hear many of our musicians and singers from different countries on the screens of your computers. Cultural & Music Director of the Church, Maestro Konstantin

Petrossian, invited the best musicians to take part. He has already received the consent of musicians and singers from the USA, Armenia, Argentina, Germany, Canada, Portugal, Spain, and England. All of them will prepare a special program for you and will perform for free of charge. All concerts will be online. Before each Friday, the Culutral committee will notify the public by media and facebook the title of the event.

•June 5 - Armenian Music Festival ( VMA, 1997) - part two Soloists: Lili Chookasian (Metropolitan Opera Star, NY), Ellada Chakoyan (soprano), Razmik Papikyan (tenor), Vago Ohanyan ( bass-baritone), Joanne Mouradjian (soprano), Michael Mirzabekof ( clarinet), Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra, Armenian Chorale of RI. Konstantin Petrossian, Artistic Director & Conductor

•June 12 - “Meet with Armenian Doctors” - Dr. Raffi Calikyan, Pulmonologist. Topic:



RI Philharmonic orchestra, Soloists; Lili Chookasian ( Metropolitan opera ), Ellada Chakoian, soprano, Razmik Papikyan, tenor, Vago Ohanyan, bass-baritone, Joanne Mouradjian, soprano, with Konstantin Petrossian Artistic director & Conductor

Update on Coronavirus

•June 19 - “Armenian musicians of the World for you” Hovhannes Shahbazyan, pop-

ular singer (CA)

•June 26 - Documentary “Garni, Geghard” (in English)

## A New Life for Seventh-Century Armenian Wall-Painting Art

PAINTINGS, from page 10

memories of the Lord and his servants’. As an additional argument, Vrtanes Kertogh presents a rather long list of subjects painted on the walls of Armenian churches, opposing them to the idols erected in pagan temples.

Under such circumstances, it is natural that monument painting received a powerful impetus. And actually, there are many traces of the paintings preserved on the internal walls of some seventh-century Armenian churches. However, until recently, the number of fragments of visible images was too small. Only four monuments with remnants of ‘readable’ wall paintings were mentioned by the scientific community. Those are the churches of Mren, Lmbat, Arutch and Talin, with the fragments of paintings preserved in the altar apse and on its conch as well as some minor leftovers of images preserved on other walls. Unfortunately, the Mren church, which lost its southern wall nearly twenty years ago, today stands on the verge of collapse, and, being situated on the Turkish side of the Armenian border, is almost inaccessible.

However, since 2013, the situation has begun to improve. Two individuals with particular dedication and great professionalism were determined to focus attention on the early-Christian sanctuaries located in the Shirak and Aragatsotn provinces of Armenia. One of them is Christine Lamoureux, a Belgian living in Italy and a professional restorer of wall paintings, and the other the restoring architect Arà Zarian, the offspring of a famous Armenian family, also living in Italy.

Their activities in Armenia started in 2012 from Vorotnavank. Next they moved to Shirak where, from 2014 through 2017, they accomplished a large project in Lmbatavank. Being greatly impressed by the results achieved in Lmbat, the officials of Artsakh invited the two restorers to come to the aid of the thirteenth-century wall paintings of the Katoghike Church of Dadivank. That work was implemented in 2014 through 2017, and upon its very successful completion, a remarkable book was published by K. Matevosyan, A. Avetisyan, A. Zaryan, Ch. Lamoureux, Dadivank: The Revived Wonder (Yerevan, 2018). At the same time, conceiving that the number of wall paintings available in some seventh-century monuments of the Shirak and Aragatsotn areas exceeds the number of those already known or assumed, and realising the extraordinary importance of that phenomenon for Armenian culture, they decided to continue and expand

their activities within this territory.

The cleaning and strengthening are carried out with great care, and completions are made to a minimum degree – only in necessary cases, with the conditions before and after the intervention and permanently documented. The second figure of the team is a real one-man band, performing all the countless administrative, organisational, and supply responsibilities along with participating in all the above-mentioned important and complex technical actions.

It is noteworthy that Arà Zarian considers it necessary to describe all those actions for each monument in the book, just as meticulously as they were performed, and to elaborately document every step with photos. One important clarification should be taken into account in evaluating this painstaking, long-term, and resolute exercise: all this has been done and is still being done largely at the expense of these two dedicated individuals.

An eloquent example of the accomplished work is the wall paintings in the previously mentioned Katoghike Church of Dadivank, which, after being cleaned of a thick layer of dirt, dust, and soot, then strengthened by Christine Lamoureux and Arà Zarian, regained their original brightness. Moreover, due to their cleaning, an inscription was discovered revealing the date the wall paintings were executed: 1297.

In this very way, the following churches were studied and then partially or completely underwent the above actions between 2013 and 2017: St. Stephen in Lmbat, Karmravor in Ashtarak, St. John in Mastara, St. Mary and St. George/St. Sargis in Artik, and, to a smaller degree, the large and small churches of Talin, St. George in Garnahovit, St. Theodore the Commander in Yeghvard, the six-apse church in Aragats, St. Stephen in Gosh, and St. Gregory the Illuminator in Nor Kyanq. As a result, Armenology and art history were enriched by a number of very important discoveries.

It turned out that the inside of all the studied monuments had been fully plastered. They had been plastered not only where wall paintings had to be executed (primarily the altar apse and its conch, the adjacent walls and some other places as the sides of the western door in Ashtarak), but also on all other surfaces which were not to be painted. That is, in the opinion of the authors, there were a few (perhaps many) monuments in the seventh century whose inner surfaces were mainly white or solid coloured, and probably only

Mastara’s church was entirely wall-painted inside. It was an amazing and unexpected discovery. Before that, I was convinced that the monuments of the seventh century (Arutch, Bagaran, Yeghvard, Talin, Lmbat, Mren) in which some fragments of plaster (and sometimes of paintings) are or were available in different parts outside the altar apse would have been entirely wall-painted, including the hemisphere of the dome (Patrick Donabédian, *L’âge d’or de l’architecture arménienne: VIIe siècle* [Marseille: 2008], 221).

After having been cleaned and strengthened through the efforts of the authors, the wall paintings of Lmbat gained a new life, with expansive surfaces and refreshed colours. The activity of the restorers was not limited to only the wall paintings, but also touched the sculptures. The cross decorating the vault of the western cross-arm of the Lmbat church was

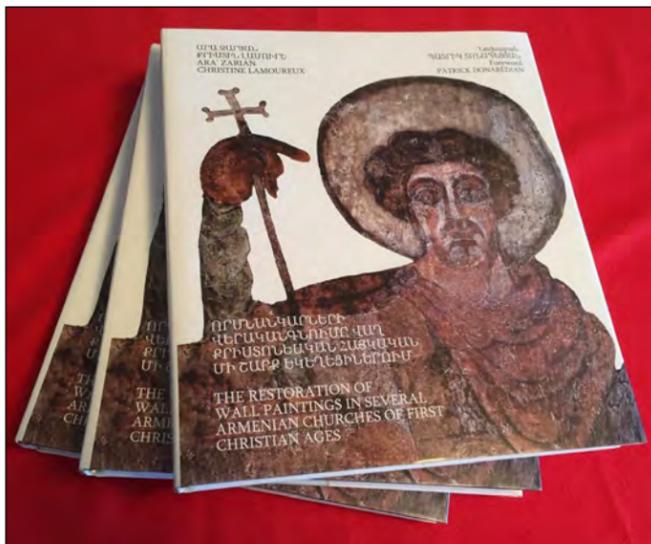
Gabriel’ was revealed. It also turned out that the entire inner surface of the building had been painted. We would remind the reader that nothing was known about Mastara’s wall paintings before. A number of important observations were also made in the large and small churches of Artik. In the first one, it was confirmed that the altar apse had had a large decorative composition, probably with the image of Christ in the centre and a theory of saints below it.

Among the new valuable materials acquired, one revelation deserves a special mention. Lidia Durnovo has touched upon that matter only very casually, perhaps not fully perceiving its meaning. It concerns the existence of an initial non-painted layer beneath the main wall painting, whose traces the authors noticed in most of the examined monuments. Their studies have shown that the initial layer was painted right on the stones of the wall without plastering. It is noteworthy that the initial decoration contained two types of decorations. The first type comprised two- or three-color (white, red and green-blue) geometric or stylized plant patterns – for example, encircled daisy and rays – which most probably were painted in some important places only, such as the squinches and the centre of the conchs. The other type comprised a mysterious two-colour (white and red) “net” composed often, although not always, of rows of white stripes and red dots marking the joints of the wall masonry, which are available in different parts of the building and even on the vertical walls.

This strange phenomenon still cannot be explained. To highlight it, Christine Lamoureux and Arà Zarian offer several hypotheses: we deal either with primary ornaments, which were later refused and covered with a new layer of decoration, or, as the authors tend to think, with a symbolic or even esoteric system having a special purpose and a certain sense. Actually, their observations seem to show that these figures and the rows of stripes and spots were almost immediately covered by the plaster of the main layer. In other words, if these observations are true, the initial decoration was performed with a secret intention to conceal it.

The fact that the same phenomenon can be observed in several monuments of the same age refutes the idea that these were initial mistakes and demonstrates that we are dealing with an accepted and probably regulated action. Although the canons presenting the foundation, naming, and consecration of the churches do not mention it, let us make the following assumption: at the initial stage of the ritual, some geometric, radiating and striped dot decoration was made, containing, perhaps, a mystical meaning and bearing a protective function. And shortly after that, the second phase of the ritual—the main illustration—was executed on the plaster. (Ashtarak’s church seems to have an additional intermediate stage as well.)

For more information or to order the book, email [arazarian@gmail.com](mailto:arazarian@gmail.com).



also freed from the age-old layer of dirt and soot, revealing its original look. Finally, new inscriptions were opened up. Meanwhile, the works carried out in the Karmravor Church of Ashtarak became a watershed in the history of the monument. In the altar apse, the triple image of Deisis was revealed, and below it, the theory of saints of the Church Fathers was discovered. The images of the rider saints, St. Sargis and St. George, on both sides of the entrance were significantly refreshed and defined, and the inscriptions of their names were revealed. The cleaning and examination of the walls showed that the interior of Ashtarak’s Karmravor Church had undergone a three-stage painting. The first stage was implemented initially, right on the stones, which we will speak about later. The second one was a decorative layer, without images, painted on the plaster. And finally, in the third stage, the main wall painting was laid on the previous layer.

The results of the study of Mastara’s St. John Church are more modest but no less important. In the southwestern corner and the southern apse, some fragments of saints’ images, including, perhaps the rider St. George’s image, were discovered, and an inscription ‘Archangel



## ARTS &amp; LIVING

## Conducting is a Kind of Magic

CONDUCTING, from page 10

You were born in Nalchik, a city that has already given Russian conductor art such a master as the USSR People's Artist Yuri Temirkanov. Seems like Kabardino-Balkaria fosters classical musicians.

As we know, masters of conducting were born in completely different places of the world. Perhaps the Caucasus, thanks to the rich, amazing beauty of its nature, and the peoples living there, contributes to the formation of a strong character, the will that the conductor needs to go out to a large team, and with joy, pleasure, excitement, invite colleagues to play together. In any case, you need to really love the conducting process itself, this is an amazing action, a kind of magic, and then, wherever you are born, you will succeed.

**Gurgen, where do your roots come from and do you speak Armenian?**

My grandparents moved to Nalchik from Stepanakert, Artsakh, when my father was 5 years old. In my grandmother's house, I constantly heard the Armenian language in the Artsakh dialect. Of course, I know some everyday phrases, but, on the whole, unfortunately, I cannot say that I speak Armenian. In the future, of course, I would like to learn the language.

**Your older sister, Ruzanna Petrosyan, studied at the piano department at Nalchik School of Music No. 3. Does she have a musical career too?**

My sister always loved to sing, but after graduating from music school, she chose a different path for herself. I am very grateful to her for the continued support and implacable faith that I will always succeed.

**In 2016, 57 young musicians from 29 countries sent applications to participate in the 12th international competition of conductors named after Aram Khachaturian in Yerevan. Only 12 people were allowed to the first round, including you. Was this your first visit to the land of ancestors? What are your impressions of the Yerevan contest?**

It was very nice to be among the 12 participants in the competition. This was my first competition of symphonic conductors, and my first visit to Armenia. I really liked the atmosphere of the city, and the nearby surroundings, amazing temples, museums, and of course, our people's history is so rich. Especially memorable is the



Conductor Gurgen Petrosyan at work

Echmiadzin Cathedral. The level of performance, sound quality, and the feeling of the ensemble of the State Symphony Orchestra of Armenia were also very impressive. It is always joyful to go to such an orchestra level.

**Have you ever had to conduct Armenian music - be it with a choir or with an orchestra?**

We had to conduct Armenian music at a competition in Armenia, but there was still an interesting experience - at the final exam on choral conducting at the Saratov Conservatory, one of the works was Komitas's composition, performed by a female choir and I also found, through the Armenian community of Saratov, a duduk performer that gave an amazing atmosphere in the hall.

**What were your plans for 2020 - and what did you do during self-isolation?**

The plans for 2020 were to continue to develop, perform at contests, festivals. Of course, the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg remains the main place for my creativity. Naturally, I am extremely grateful to this opportunity for Valery Abisalovich Gergiev. Of course, I would be very glad to visit Yerevan again and collabo-

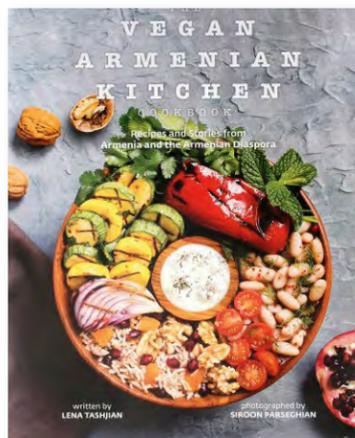
# Recipe Corner

Guest Recipe  
by Christine Vartanian



## Basoots Dolma (Lenten Tolma)

The new *Vegan Armenian Kitchen Cookbook* is a joint project between the creator of YouTube's Vegan Armenian Kitchen, Lena Tashjian, a writer and vegan recipe developer based in Toronto, and Siroon Parseghian, a photographer and creative director based in Los Angeles. This is one of many vegan recipes presented in this colorful and instructive cookbook. According to Lena, this dolma is "served



in a preserved cabbage leaf and contains lentils, chickpeas, red kidney beans, and grains (spelt or bulgur), mixed with spices. It is served cold and sometimes with dried apricot." She adds, "It is a vegan's dream come true - a complete protein packed with iron and B-12 (from the pickled cabbage), and it's delicious."

In Armenian and many Middle Eastern cuisines, dolma refers to a family of stuffed vegetable dishes, most often wrapped in grape or cabbage leaves. Use this same filling - and a similar cooking technique - to hollow out and stuff zucchini, eggplant, tomatoes, or peppers. Dolma taste best served warm or cool (like this recipe), and leftovers can be re-steamed one or more times as desired.



### INGREDIENTS:

1 head of sour preserved cabbage (see page 164 of the cookbook) or pickled cabbage  
1 cup cooked chickpeas  
1 cup cooked red kidney beans  
1 cup cooked green lentils  
1 cup fine bulgur  
2 large onions, finely chopped  
4 tablespoons tomato paste  
1/4 bunch parsley  
1/4 bunch dill  
2 teaspoons dried purple basil (optional)  
1/2 teaspoon savory (optional)  
Salt, black pepper, and red pepper, to taste  
12 prunes (optional)  
7 tablespoons oil  
4 cups hot water

### PREPARATION:

Rinse the cabbage leaves to remove some of the excess salt (optional). Set a few of the smaller or damaged ones aside to line the pot they will cook in. Sauté the onion in the oil until translucent and remove from heat. Combine the chickpeas, red kidney beans, lentils, and bulgur in a large bowl and mix well. Add the herbs (fresh and dry), 2 tablespoons of tomato paste, salt, black pepper, red pepper, sautéed onions, and the oil from the pan, and combine well. Taste and adjust spices as desired.

Line a large pot with the cabbage leaves set aside earlier. Place a rinsed cabbage leaf flat on a plate or cutting board, add a generous amount of the bean-and-bulgur mixture in the middle and begin tightly rolling it, folding in the sides as you go. Start arranging the first layer of cabbage rolls in the pot by packing in the rolls as tightly as possible. Before beginning the next layer, insert a few prunes between the cabbage rolls. Repeat until finished. In a cup, combine the remaining 2 tablespoons tomato paste with 4 cups of hot water and a pinch of coarse sea salt, and stir.

Place a heavy plate on top of the full pot of cabbage rolls and pour in the tomato paste-water mixture down the sides so it doesn't splash up. On low-medium heat, bring the pot to simmer then cook covered for 45 minutes to 1 hour, until the cabbage is soft enough to easily pierce with a knife. Allow to cool and serve garnished with remaining prunes.

Serves 10-12.

(Published in January 2020, the *Vegan Armenian Kitchen Cookbook* is a collection of plant-based recipes and stories from Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora. The 265-page book contains 119 recipes, and covers a range of items, including herbs, pastes, syrups, drinks, breakfast, salads, soups and stews, bread, main dishes like various types of dolma (tolma) and bean dishes, accompaniments (especially various rice, bulgur and potato dishes) and desserts. Information is provided on folk practices like reading coffee grounds or toasting customs. The photographs make the various food items seem tantalizingly close and appealing. The *Vegan Armenian Kitchen Cookbook* can be ordered on the *Vegan Armenian Kitchen* website, where recipes, videos, and more will be shared. While the majority of recipes found in the cookbook are naturally plant-based or Lenten, Lena Tashjian has veganized a few Armenian classics, including khash.) Order at: <https://veganarmeniankitchen.com/product/vegan-armenian-kitchen-cookbook/>

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rate with local teams. Regarding self-isolation, surely, there are no performances, but in everything, I think, it is necessary to look for pluses. For example, thanks to quarantine, it became

possible to devote more time to reading books, listening to broadcasts of performances and concerts of various opera houses and symphony concerts, watching films, learning languages,

doing workout and being with loved ones. But, of course, we are all waiting for the opportunity to restart our beloved work, which we hope will happen soon!



## COMMENTARY

## EDITORIAL

# Can We Breathe Now?

By **Edmond Y. Azadian**

Mirror-Spectator Senior Editorial Columnist

The unnaturally quiet days of the pandemic lockdown came to a screeching halt with the murder of African-American George Floyd, who was choked to death while in police custody in Minneapolis. The disturbing video of the subduing and subsequent death was the last straw.

His death has triggered nationwide protests, looting, burning and more. Sadly, it was the last in a long line of incidents in the past decades. More often than not, police who have killed unarmed blacks have not been charged with committing a crime, or have not had to face punishments commensurate with their acts.

In this latest case, the policeman who was caught on video kneeling on Floyd's neck, Derek Chauvin, was fired, then arrested and charged with third-degree murder. The arrest has not quelled the protestors who are asking for the arrest of the three other police officers witnessing Floyd's ordeal without lifting a finger.

Demonstrations sprang immediately across the US, soon to also give way to looting in several cities, which then imposed curfews.

The crowds have gathered in all thoroughfares of major cities with colorful slogans, such as "No Justice, No Peace," "Black Lives Matter," "We Can't Breathe" and "Abolish Police," etc.

The ubiquitous civil rights activist, Rev. Al Sharpton, showed up at a rally in Minneapolis and gave one of his trademark fiery speeches and reversed the words uttered by the dying George Floyd ("I can't breathe") and asked his fellow believers to start a movement called "We Can Breathe." He also stated, "We are not looking for a favor; we want justice."

It is not just one man's murder that has triggered the current nationwide movement. The fact of the matter is that there has been a tremendous amount of anger built up and it took this last ember to turn the issue into a roaring blaze.

It will take a lot of fact-finding, statistics, and sociological analysis to get to the heart of this outburst. But one can draw some conclusions based on economics.

In the last few decades, the divide between haves and have-nots has grown wider, in fact becoming a chasm, with people of color overwhelmingly falling in the latter category.

Yet another indication of that disparity was manifest in the statistics of COVID-19 victims who were predominantly African-Americans. This demographic has less access to the healthcare system and in general suffers much shorter life spans and poor health. Incidents of heart disease and diabetes, often correlated to economic and educational problems, are rampant in the African-American community.

Women, specifically, are also suffering. In most major cities, African-American women suffer three times the mortality rate of white women during childbirth.

All this takes place in a country that is home to the greatest medical discoveries and hospitals.

The Civil Rights Movement went through a tortuous journey in this country before the Civil Rights Act was adopted. On the way to achieving justice for the African-American community, many leaders and activists were assassinated, such as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Medgar Evers and others.

But what we discover now is that while the laws may be on the books, one cannot legislate behavior. Racist attitudes take a long time to dissipate and they rise to the surface every time a conflict erupts.

In the current political climate, the very top leadership of the country is using racist dog whistles to call to arms fellow believers against minorities in the country. It is a convenient way to manipulate them for a win in November: Sow fear and reap votes.

Former President Barack Obama's recent statement struck a sensitive chord when he said, "We have to remember that for millions of Americas being treated different on account of race is tragically, painfully, maddeningly 'normal.'"

Demonstrators can be broken down into a few categories. Certainly the looters who rob the stores and destroy cash regis-

ters are not motivated by any noble ideology. However, there are people – white and black – who stand up for human rights.

All the protestors are not looters and all looters are not protestors.

President Trump also blamed Antifa and other leftist groups, when the nation needs compassion from the highest office. President Trump instead chose to add a few remarks to his speech from Cape Canaveral, during the SpaceX launch, where he stated that he loved blacks and that he had called George Floyd's family. Then he lashed out at all his detractors, announcing also that Antifa would be banned as a terrorist organization. He also threatened that "when looting starts, the shooting starts."

Two weeks ago, a group of protestors marched to the capitol in Lansing, Mich., to protest the lockdown. Those protestors, all white, were armed to the teeth, carrying automatic assault weapons and even spewing hate speech. At that time, President Trump advised Gov. Gretchen Whitmer to level with those thugs. "These are very good people but they are angry. They want their lives back. See them, talk to them and make a deal," he said.

Earlier, dismissively he had called Michigan's governor "that woman." The reason for that treatment, or rather mistreatment,



was that Ms. Whitmer is on the list of Democratic vice presidential candidates.

Now, victims of racist crimes of the past decade are resurrected. The mothers and other family members of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Ahmaud Arbery and others appear on TV screens to lament the fates of their loved ones and remind every one of their losses, rendering the situation even more complex.

Joining the crows of mourners is Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, the former Los Angeles Laker, who is an eloquent writer and intellectual. Writing in the Los Angeles Times opinion section, "African Americans have been living in a burning building for many years, choking on the smoke as flames burn closer and closer. Racism in America is like dust in the air. It seems invisible – even when you're choking on it – until you let the sun in. Then you see it's everywhere."

America claims to have created a model society for the rest of the world to emulate. Yet in this land of plenty, a large swath of society suffers from hunger, deprivation and injustice.

Armenian Americans should be among the first people to empathize with the plight of the underdog in society because generations of our parents and grandparents also experienced the thrust of the same racism. They were denied entry to grocery stores and other facilities, which often carried signs that Armenians, Jews and dogs were forbidden from entering.

Social and economic upward mobility should not rob us of our humanity. When the demonstrators warn "No Justice, No Peace," that holds true for everybody, including the Armenians. Do we not say that we want justice when we protest the lack of recognition of the Armenian Genocide?

The unrest is continuing. Later, the country will begin to put its house in order and clean up the debris, contemplating what had transpired and questioned what lessons could be gleaned.

The name of George Floyd is one more casualty on the list of race victims.

Already, a mural marks the location where Floyd was murdered. With a sign which reads, "I can breathe now."

Can we also breathe now?

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## COMMENTARY



My Turn

By Harut Sassounian

## Turkey Attempts to Take Over Armenian Properties in Jerusalem

An article in the Jewish Press of February 13, 2020 exposed the activities of the Turkish government to take over the Armenian and Christian Quarters of Jerusalem. The article by journalist Baruch Yedid is titled, "Turkey Working to Take Over Armenian Quarters in Jerusalem's Old City."

Jerusalem's Armenian "residents have told TPS [Tazpit Press Service] about efforts of Turkish officials in recent years to persuade them to deny the Armenian holocaust perpetrated by the Turks a century ago and other actions to acquire property owned by local Christians," according to Yedid.

A Jerusalem Armenian, whose grandfather had survived the Armenian Genocide, told TPS that 40 minutes into a meeting with a Turkish female diplomat, she tried to convince him to drop his activities for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. "I realized that she wanted to persuade me to cease my activity to preserve the Armenian massacre." The Armenian said that he immediately showed the door to the Turkish diplomat who understood that the Armenian community will never give up on the recognition of the Genocide. "We will wait another 100 years, but we will never rescind our demand for compensation until we reach a payment agreement, like the one that Israel signed with Germany," the Armenian said.

Other Armenian property owners in Jerusalem told TPS that Turkish government representatives recently offered them \$3,000 grants for their various needs. However, Armenians rejected the Turkish bribes, calling them "silencing grants designed to ensure that the Turkish government will not be sued for the 1915-1917 massacres." Even though the Israeli journalist Yedid uses the term 'massacre' in line with the Israeli Government's denialist policy, he quickly devi-

ates from that policy by explaining that "the Armenian extermination was a deliberate and systematic genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire during the First World War against the Armenian population in its territory. Even after World War I, Turks, Kurds, and Arabs continued to massacre Armenians until 1923, and it is widely believed that about half the Armenians in Turkey, about 1.5 million people, were murdered." Turks and Kurds did commit Genocide against Armenians, but I am not aware of any massacres of Armenians by Arabs.

Yedid continued his article by citing examples of Turkish attempts to purchase Armenian properties in Jerusalem: "Turkish pressures are also manifest in its activity to acquire Armenian assets. TPS learned that a few months ago, the residents of the Armenian Quarter were shocked to find that one of their homes was sold to a Muslim, three times its real value. An inquiry revealed that funding for the purchase of the Armenian property came from Turkey. Following the incident, some of the community leaders met to review the chain of events and took action to prevent the leakage of the community's assets to the Turks. There is still a lingering fear among the Armenians of the Turks taking over or buying more property."

Yedid cited another Turkish scheme to take over Christian properties in Jerusalem: "One Christian trader, who asked to remain anonymous, said that the Turks recently transferred to the Jordanian Waqf [Muslim endowment] very old ownership certificates, some crumbling, including Ottoman-era documents and property ownership documents in the Armenian and Christian Quarters. The trader, who showed TPS photos of several of the certificates, says the Turks have asked the Waqf to verify the documents which are being used to purchase the assets." It is paradoxical that the Turkish government would not disclose from its archives the certificates of properties (deeds of trust) owned by Armenians prior to the Genocide, yet it would send copies of property certificates to a Jordanian Waqf.

Yedid also covered in his article "the growing Turkish activity in Jerusalem and its support for the Muslim Brotherhood [which] are of concern to Israel. In its recent annual intelligence assessment, the IDF [Israel Defense Forces] Intelligence Division has, for the first time, defined Turkey as a threat."

Yedid then described Israel's reluctance to recognize the Armenian Genocide: "Israeli officials have often raised the

possibility of recognizing the Armenian holocaust as a counter-reaction to Turkish activity against Israel, which includes the hosting of Hamas' terrorist headquarters in Turkey. Over the years, Israel has refrained from officially recognizing the Armenian genocide, fearing that such recognition would damage diplomatic relations between Israel and Turkey." This is a nonsense argument as Israel's relations with Turkey are already damaged and its recognition of the Armenian Genocide will not cause any further damage, just like last fall's recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the U.S. House and the Senate did not negatively affect US-Turkish relations.

The Israeli journalist correctly pointed out that "Turkey monitors all publications on the Armenian genocide and considers the issue of great significance to Turkish national security, and accordingly, the Turks have not relented with their attempt to persuade the Armenians in Jerusalem to cease their commemorative endeavors."

Yedid also reported that the Turkish government has been encouraging Turkish tourism to Jerusalem by paying the cost of travel to mosques in Jerusalem and the West Bank: "Turkish nonprofits operate in Jerusalem daily, helping mainly the Muslim Brotherhood and Jerusalem religious activities. A source in the Armenian Quarter said that Turkish tourists in the Old City have also recently been working against the Armenians, tearing up posters and publications about the Armenian genocide. Graffiti inscriptions in condemnation of the Armenians were sprayed on the Quarter's walls."

Furthermore, the Turkish Heritage Society is active in Jerusalem "in the fields of education, culture, real estate and welfare, and also carries funding for the 'convoy project' to transport thousands of Muslim worshipers to mosques as well as funding tens of thousands of meals to break the Ramadan fast," according to Yedid.

Similarly, TIKA, Turkey's Ministry of Culture and Tourism's Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency, funded several projects in Jerusalem. Dozens of mosques and houses have been renovated by Turkey.

It is up to the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem to counter the Turkish efforts by precluding local Armenians from selling their properties to Turkish buyers. The Armenian Government's Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs should assist the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem to oppose the Turkish attempts to encroach on the Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem.

# Understanding Plight of Black Americans

By Anaïs DerSimonian

**A**S ARMENIANS, we are all too familiar with the violence and oppression that our ancestors endured during and after World War I. Our grandparents and great-grandparents were treated as less-than-human, brutally and systematically murdered by those in power in the Ottoman Empire. And perhaps cruelest of all, this genocide is still not recognized as such by Turkey. One hundred and five years later, there have been no reparations.

During COVID-19, I encourage us as Armenians to look outside of ourselves and come together as a community to condemn and fight against the oppression to which our Black brothers and sisters are being subjected. Some of us might feel that post-slavery and post-Jim Crowe, the oppression of Black Americans has been largely terminated, that they live lives of equal opportunity in the United States. I would argue that this opinion is grossly untrue.

Much like our ancestors in Ottoman Turkey, Black Americans are second-rate citizens in their own country. Much like our ancestors, who were subjected to forced-labor camps, Black Americans are incarcerated at drastically higher rates and perform free penal labor (i.e. legal slavery). Much like our ancestors, who were killed by the Ottoman government for no reason apart from their Armenian heritage, Black Americans are continuously murdered by the police or white "vigilantes" — and there are often little or no repercussions for the perpetrators.

If stories related to COVID-19 are the only news you've been tuning into during this time, here are some recent murders of unarmed black people that you might not have heard about or seen:

Ahmaud Arbery : On February 23, a 25-year-old unarmed

black jogger was running through a white neighborhood in Georgia and he was shot by two white "vigilantes" — a father and son. The men claimed that Arbery matched the description of a man who had committed several break-ins in the area, though it was clearly evident that Arbery was out for a jog. While both men are now in custody for the murder, it took months for justice to be served; due to COVID-19 — and because of the men's personal ties with the District Attorney.

Breonna Taylor : On March 13, a young Louisville EMT on the frontline of this pandemic was shot 8 times and killed in her own home by police officers who thought she was a suspect that they already had in custody. The police executed a "no-knock search warrant" and fired 20 rounds into the apartment. Kenneth Walker, Breonna's boyfriend, was arrested at the scene for firing back at the police officers in self-defense.

George Floyd: On May 25, a Minneapolis man suspected of forgery, was killed by a police

officer, who pressed his knee into Floyd's neck while Floyd yelled "I can't breathe". The four officers involved have been fired from the police force, but Floyd's family is demanding that the officers be tried for murder. Floyd had no criminal record and was a high school sports star.

Armenians — if you don't see these murders as a continuation of the human rights violations done unto our ancestors, then you didn't listen closely enough to stories of the Genocide.

Ottoman propaganda described Armenians as "traitors, saboteurs, spies, conspirators, vermin, and infidels". The Ottomans used this language to justify the murder of 1.5 million Armenians. We have to be especially aware that we don't subconsciously or consciously dismiss the murders of Black people due to our inherent bias, or because of our blind trust in the police force. Every case must be examined. Remember: governments have historically oppressed minority groups to gain power and perpetuate a favorable status quo — but that doesn't mean that we as the people have to fall in line with that oppression.

As survivors of the last century's first, most documented, and least recognized Genocide, Armenians have a unique historical perspective on human rights violations and, thus, a

duty to illuminate today's injustices, wherever they may be. As a group that now directly benefits from white privilege in America, we must do everything in our power to give a voice to the voiceless. Armenian-Americans are a strong, powerful group; we should not underestimate the impact our solidarity and support can have on oppressed.

My advice to the Armenian community during this time is this: stay aware, updated and informed about racial injustices that are occurring in the time of Corona (the atrocities of the Genocide occurred during WWI, and were written off as casual-

ties of war. Do not let the distraction of "bigger news" distract you from the truth). Talk to your family, friends and community members about these murders and others like them; start a discussion about oppression, historic and contemporary, and how we can all fight against it and stand for justice and human rights for all. Additionally, if you are able to, I strongly encourage you to donate directly to the families of

these victims, NAACP, or the Minnesota Freedom Fund; the impact of posting on social media only extends so far.

If you'd like your Armenian identity to be connected to your gift, I have recently organized a GoFundMe that will grant funds directly to #BlackLivesMatter on behalf of Armenians showing solidarity with the movement.

The black struggle in America, like the Armenian struggle in the Ottoman Empire, is not a niche issue — it's a human rights issue. As the survivors of the Armenian Genocide, we have a responsibility to uphold human rights, regardless of who that human is. Let us remain on the right side of history. We need to demand justice, stand by and defend our black brothers and sisters, and use our privilege in America — whether that be financial or social — to continue fighting for justice for all. Our ancestors demand it of us.

(Anaïs DerSimonian is a writer and filmmaker interested in the relationship between media and culture. An alum of Clark University ('17), DerSimonian's various creative projects include a documentary profile on a Democracy Now — a women's NGO based out of Yerevan that uses micro-loaning to help create self-sufficiency in the post-Soviet economy. DerSimonian currently resides in Cambridge, MA.)

ARMENIANS — IF YOU DON'T SEE THESE MURDERS AS A CONTINUATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS DONE UNTO OUR ANCESTORS, THEN YOU DIDN'T LISTEN CLOSELY ENOUGH TO STORIES OF THE GENOCIDE.



# Looting and Arson Hit Armenian-Owned Stores in Southern California

CALIFORNIA, from page 1

According to an AP report, in the neighborhood of West Hollywood, Los Angeles, windows of shops along trendy Melrose Avenue were all broken on the evening of Saturday, May 30. Alan Kokozyan, owner of Tony K's Shoe Store, related that his entire product stock was either stolen or damaged, and he himself was hit in the head with a flying bottle as he tried to persuade looters to spare his store.

On Sunday, while examining the hole in his roof caused by arson, Kokozyan said, "This was not a political protest. This was basically a bunch of thieves getting together taking advantage of a situation."

Fire engulfed a Men's Suit Outlet store in Long Beach on May 31 which belongs to Vasken Samuelian. For a CBS video

report, see <https://cbsloc.al/36VoP8w>.

Nighttime curfews were imposed in Los Angeles County starting on May 31, while social media posts calling for plundering in areas like Glendale, with its large Armenian population, were spreading. Glendale Mayor Vrej Agajanian attempted to reassure the local populace in a video announcement of the curfew that night and on the following evening. He stated on June 1 that the Glendale police department was present throughout the community during the prior night, which passed peacefully, and residents would continue to be protected while the city fully supported the right of residents for protest and self-expression.

Family businesses without sufficient insurance are already starting fundraisers.



Pharmacy manager Eve Bandikian at Kovacs Care Pharmacy in Van Nuys, owned by Arsen Nazaryan

## LETTERS

### Commentary on Church Divide Missed the Mark

To the Editor:

I am writing in reference to an editorial in the Mirror-Spectator that appeared recently under the title of "What's wrong with the Armenian Church." I was initially instantly attracted to read the content as the headline suggested it would probably discuss contemporary issues such as leadership, language, intermarriage, secularism, corruption or other topics that impacting our beloved church today. The first half of the column elevated my anxiety as it was full of abstract references that failed to identify an intent. Still as I read on, I felt certain that a message was coming. I was shocked and very saddened to read something sounding like from the 50's or 60's that attempted to rehash the worn out and divisive partisan rhetoric. Rather than addressing the issue of disunity with the benefit of the learnings of the past decades, it

was simply another attempt to lay blame...in this case the ARF and the Great House of Cilicia.

Problems of this nature are caused by errors in judgment layered on repetitive patterns by all parties. To simply state that the problems of the Armenian Church are all tied to the ARF and the affiliation of some churches in America with Antelias is absurd. No one who loves our church can be happy about the division, but if you are going to make generalizations to a younger and less informed audience, then a balanced picture would add value. I grew up in one of the "unaffiliated" parishes here in New England. Many of them existed in an isolated state from 1934-56. They felt abandoned and had grown to a point that hierarchical affiliation was essential. My parents and their contemporaries were participants during those years and

I know they struggled with the decision, but felt they had no other option. The "surrender" mentality of the Diocese at that time did not help. We now have been active in the Diocese for many years. Our problems are common and should be our focus. During your comment on the consecration of His Holiness Zareh I of blessed memory, you failed to mention that other hierarchical Sees literally boycotted the event....preventing other bishops from participating. There are many who love the Armenian Church who viewed the ARF influence in the Cilician See as a necessary protectorate in a volatile region. Others have a different perspective, but my point is that it would not exist if not supported. Today, with immigration from the Middle East to America, there are thousands of faithful Armenians who grew up with the Cilician See here in the United States. This is a

reality that should be respected.

Calling adherents to Antelias "dissidents" is ridiculous in 2020. Even Holy Echmiadzin abandoned that label years ago. Your reference of "control over the dissident church" seems to go beyond the Prelacy and questions the legitimacy of the Great House of Cilicia itself. This is a hierarchical seat that has existed independently since 1441. It has taken a position of honor with an outstanding seminary, intellectual and literary center. The beloved Karekin Hovsepian, former Primate in America, was also a Catholicos of Cilicia. Dissidents?

I think commentaries such as this are not productive and useful for the M-S. It makes the paper look out of touch with the pan Armenian atmosphere that has driven Armenian thinking in the recent decades. Reconciliation happens when all parties look to the future and not the past....focusing on what we have in common.

— Stepan Piligian  
Massachusetts

### A Church Divided

To the Editor:

Edmond Azadian's column on "What is Wrong with the Armenian Church" (May 30th) is both necessary and enlightening. Yes, the church has been inflicted by political

party interference since 1933 and 1956 as he explained in that writing. Yes, it has been a sad chapter in the history of the church in America and elsewhere. Yes, it is worth remembering and acknowledging.

The question is what do we do now?

My first suggestion is to stop normalizing this church division. We should not have two

church structures in this country, period. We should not accept this as permanent or inevitable. That should be obvious and understood.

Having been deeply involved with this issue both in the Prelacy and now Diocese side, I still believe it is possible to solve this problem. What we need now is leadership. First from the heads of the church, be they Catholicos, Bishop or lay and clergy officials. Back when I was involved with this issue, we were a small group who pursued church unity under the umbrella of both diocesan assemblies but with only token encouragement from church leadership. We were activists in the 1970's and 80's trying to convince people that we should overcome past grievances and come together as one church, one diocese, under the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin, as was the case prior to 1956.

In the end we failed because too many people were just not ready to move ahead and turn the page on this issue. It is now the turn of the new generation to tackle this problem. The Armenian world has changed radically since then. I am convinced that we now have people, starting with the clergy, who are not hampered by past prejudices or politics. They should not listen to those who always look backward and find excuses about how difficult it will be. Think about the future, think about your children or grandchildren. Will they be even in our churches? Will they still be involved? Remember scripture: A house divided against itself cannot stand.

My hope and prayer is that we will find the wisdom and courage to overcome this sad chapter in our church. We must move forward with hope and love to the future.

— Michael Haratunian

### Commentary on Church Got it Right

To the Editor:

Wow - What a powerful, informative article Edmond Azadian wrote about "What's wrong with the Armenian Church!" I think it was beautifully written and explained things more clearly than I have ever understood them before.

I hope this enlightens readers, because I feel it is written very honestly, and well-meant!

He's a heck of a writer and good human being in my opinion!

Diana Alexanian  
Michigan

### Back to Echmiadzin

To the Editor:

(With regard to the commentary on the church divide), agreed that the division from the Prelacy Diocese only weakens us as a people and our church.

My family has traditionally been for the Prelacy, but I chose to take my family to a Diocese church since it is aligned with Echmiadzin and that was the first great church of our people.

Also, look how I am open to the following and reading the Mirror-Spectator, which is also aligned with the Ramgavars but I don't believe in being closed minded.

Ardo Panian  
(Facebook reply)

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