

ARMENIAN CUISINE: A CONSTRUCT  
IN THE SERVICE OF IDENTITY

by

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## **Abstract**

The central issue of the present paper is to study the role of Armenian cuisine in the reemergence of an Armenian national identity during the wave of national(ist) awakening that swept Soviet Armenia of the 1960s. Focused around a textual analysis of *Armenian Cuisine (Haykakan Khohanots')*, a cookbook first published in 1959 under the auspices of Soviet gastronomic engineer Anastas Mikoyan, the first section of the research findings explores the socio-historic conditions of its creation, as well as its function in the formulation of a unified concept of Armenian cuisine. The second part to the analysis draws from the findings of the first to understand how these socio-historic conditions gave birth to a form of discourse that placed Armenians as its subjects, who upon internalizing said discourse, used it to associate with a glorified historic past seen as central to its national identity. The paper concludes by establishing the unmistakable relation between cuisine and identity, while pondering the inherent dangers of overidentification with nationalist discourse and possible avenues for the future evolution of Armenia's culinary tradition.

## **Introduction**

The director of the Harvard Negotiation Project, Brian Mandell, explains negotiation as the art of letting other people have it your way. Insofar as culture is the point of suture of negotiated meanings, Armenians seem to have been very successful in negotiating their culinary culture. Their approach: brand any and all produce conceived and manipulated in the region as Armenian, no matter how loose their historic relation to the Armenian people.

An anecdotal depiction of reality of course, it does not preclude the fact that cuisine – the endpoint of the conscious manipulation of food – is of foundational importance to who we are, or, to the very least, believe ourselves to be. The centrality of a peoples' culinary tradition to its identity is documented even in contemporary definitions of the term, which explain *cuisine* as a style or method of cooking, especially as characteristic of a particular country, region, or establishment. By its very definition then, cuisine paves the way for a discussion of its identity function by way of implicit reference to the concepts of affiliation and belonging.

While most literature devoted to Armenian cuisine aims to define which dishes belong to the Armenian culinary tradition, the purpose of the present paper is to establish the socio-historic circumstances of the construction of said tradition and its capacity in the formulation of national identity.

## Literature Review

In the introduction to *Armenian Food: Fact, Fiction & Folklore* (2006), Armenian-American couple Irina Petrosian and David Underwood reference a friend, who in the course of their research on Armenian cuisine, is remembered for saying: “I am tired of arguing with people about what is Armenian and what is not. Please give a list of proven, well-researched, authentic Armenian dishes, and I’ll slap it into their faces and say, ‘Here are the genuine originals!’” (p.2). A comic relief in an otherwise serious work, Petrosian and Underwood’s friend expresses however (in so many words) the visceral concern of many Armenians, which is – what is authentic Armenian cuisine?

Petrosian and Underwood attempt to answer this question by delving into the history of dishes traditionally thought of as Armenian in an effort to define their significance in the rituals and traditions of its people and thus establish their authenticity. The book also examines the symbolic importance of individual fruits and vegetables and other produce traditionally associated with the Armenian Highlands. Designed initially as a brief, informative guide on contemporary Armenian food and drink, the work transforms then into an abridged roadmap to Armenia’s rich historical and cultural past “as it were, through the kitchen” (Petrosian & Underwood, 2006, p.1). In doing so, Petrosian and Underwood contribute to a standing literary tradition that seeks to establish the “Armenianness” (Tsaturyan, 2015, p.142) of a particular product or dish through cross-referenced examination of their historical and symbolic origins.

Although the question of culinary authenticity is certainly cause for distress among many Armenians, this somewhat superficial formulation of the issue fails to consider the more intricate question of what the entrenched need for culinary appropriation says about cultural identification. Indeed, little serious work exists today on the function of food and its preparation in the formulation of a distinct Armenian identity, whereas the issue has been widely debated within the

context of other peoples and cultures. A notable example is Professor of Classical Judaism Jordan Rosenblum's *Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism* (2010). There the author draws on existing third century Tannaite literature and later scholarly commentary to demonstrate how the Tannaites' regulation of culinary and commensal practices allowed for the establishment of a singular Tannaitic identity. By detailing the nature and manner of consumption of food of those direct transmitters of Jewish Oral Law known as the Tannaim, Rosenblum demonstrates the centrality of food in the gradual construction first of a Jewish, then Jewish male and finally Jewish male Rabbinic identity.

Others still have approached the issue from a more global perspective. Such is Professor Steven Shapin's *'You are what you eat': historical changes in ideas about food and identity* (2014). Expanding on the axiom 'You are what you eat', Shapin analyses the historical changes in ideas about food and identity by exploring the history of the proverb to establish its relative antiquity, which the author then posits as revelatory of mankind's earliest understanding of the inherent relationship between food and identity. The article also examines the historical metamorphosis of the cultural significance afforded to this relationship, which initially understood and defined in terms of Galenical dietetics and modes of analogical reasoning is later interpreted in rather more materialistic terms.

A number of Armenian and non-Armenian scholars have also adopted approaches similar to those of Rosenblum and Shapin to discuss food and identity in the Armenian context. In an article titled *Khash, history and Armenian national identity: reconsidering post-socialist gender, food practices and the domestic* (2012), independent scholar Kaitlin Fertaly explores briefly the history of the traditional Armenian peasant dish *khash* to comment on greater issues of gender equality and domestic life in post-socialist Armenia. Fertaly delves into the micro universe of individual Armenian women's cooking habits to understand how these condition the much larger

“public” national narratives about “Armenianness” (Tsaturyan, 2015, p.142) and womanhood in post-socialist Armenia. Somewhat earlier, Dorothea Bedigian published an article on the *History and Lore of Sesame in Southwest Asia* (2004), in which she analysed the same relations between food and identity from the perspective of a single ingredient – the sesame. Although Fertaly and Bedigian’s works provide a solid basis for an initial investigation of the relation between Armenian cuisine and identity, these fail to provide a sufficiently comprehensive understanding of the central issue in reason of their differences in scope and methodology.

This is not to say that the works of Fertaly and Bedigian or those similar to Petrosian and Underwood’s are of no bearing on the issue of food as a constituent of Armenian identity. Quite to the contrary, those provide valuable historical context and insight into the creation and evolution of the symbolic significance of food for the Armenian people. Furthermore, these and similar works reference relevant sources and introduce a methodology of work to be emulated in the examination of the main issue. However, the relevance of Armenian cuisine to Armenian identity is discussed here only implicitly, almost demanding a more explicit approach to the matter. Furthermore, most of the existing literature on Armenian culinary culture is of an exclusionist nature in that it fails to draw parallels with other cultures who have or continue to share similar attributes, either culturally or historically.

The contributions of Armenian cuisine to the establishment of a distinct Armenia identity are comparable to Beatriz Marín-Aguilera’s findings in her writings about *Food, Identity and Power Entanglements in South Iberia between the Ninth–Sixth Centuries BC* (2016), which studies the evolution of culinary practices and pottery making among native Iberian tribes and their Phoenician colonizers from the ninth to sixth centuries BCE. The author posits these practices as part of identity negotiations between the colonizers and the colonized within newly emergent and constantly evolving social organizations. Her exploration of the shifting identities of colonizers

and the colonized in colonial situations is of immediate relevance to the study of metamorphosing Armenian identity under Soviet rule and the specific nature of its culinary repercussions.

Of equal importance in the discussion of culinary repercussions in the face of significant popular migrations and identity shifts in the Armenian context are Nicola Cozza's findings on the relationships between food and identity among Sahrawi and Afghan refugee children in his 2010 *Food and Identity among Sahrawi Refugee Young People*. There Cozza demonstrates how food functions as a means of communicating differences and similarities that contribute towards identity formation amongst young Sahrawi refugees aged eight to eighteen years residing in an Algerian camp.

Similarities with Marín-Aguilera's and Cozza's research can be found in the work of Roman Hovsepyan and his group of researchers who studied the various dishes of the non-Armenian peoples of Yezidis and Kurds living in present-day Armenia and the role those play in the establishment of a "national" identity. The article summarizes the results of three years of fieldwork conducted between 2013 and 2015 within more than 40 Yezidi and Kurdish settlements across the Aragatsotn, Armavir, Ararat and Kotayk administrative regions of Armenia. Although Hovsepyan and his team succeed in drawing an inclusive picture of present-day Yezidi and Kurdish culinary traditions through detailed descriptions of the various vegetal and animal components of distinctly Yezidi and Kurdish dishes, they fail to explain in finer detail how these traditions contribute towards the formation of a distinct ethnographic identity. Furthermore, the article does not discuss the culinary consequences of the Yezidi's and Kurds' prolonged interactions with their Armenian counterparts.

## Central Research Questions and Methodology

The central issue of the present paper is to study the role of Armenian cuisine in the reemergence of an Armenian national identity during the wave of national(ist) awakening that swept Soviet Armenia of the 1960s. Focused around a textual analysis of *Armenian Cuisine (Haykakan Khohanots')*, a cookbook first published in 1959 under the auspices of Soviet gastronomic engineer Anastas Mikoyan, the first section of the research findings will explore the socio-historic conditions of its creation, as well as its function in the formulation of a unified concept of Armenian cuisine. Additional fields of inquiry in this section will include the socio-economic and political developments in pre-1960s Soviet Armenia that were conducive to the rise of national sentiment. The second part to the analysis will draw from the findings of the first to understand how these socio-historic conditions gave birth to a form of discourse that placed Armenians as its subjects, who upon internalizing said discourse, used it to associate with a glorified historic past seen as central to its national identity. Here again attention will be given to the conflicting approaches to and uses of nationalist discourse by local Armenians and their Soviet overlords.

Because an overwhelming share of the available information on Armenian cuisine is scattered across scholarly and literary sources, the methodology of the present research paper involved mainly the collection and analysis of said textual data, which was then cross-referenced with previously examined theories of authority, subjectivity, identity and culture.



## Research Findings and Analysis

### *Part I: Constructing an Armenian Cuisine*

The incursion of the word *cuisine* into the Armenian culinary lexicon is by all accounts a fairly recent event. First popularized by *Armenian Cuisine (Haykakan Khohanots* <sup>՝</sup>), a cookbook published in 1959 under the patronage of “Soviet gastronomic ‘engineer’ Anastas Mikoyan” (Tsaturyan, 2017, p.1), the use of this novel term in reference to a relatively ancient practice in Armenia spoke to the socio-economic and ideological developments in the presently Sovietized country. In its double entendre, the Armenian word for *cuisine* – *khohanots* <sup>՝</sup> – became a linguistic tool in the service of Soviet ideology and national(ist) discourse alike. For defined as “a style or method of cooking, especially as characteristic of a particular country, region, or establishment” (Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English, n.d.), the word *cuisine* appeared to satisfy the national(istic) aspirations of an Armenian minority determined to counter Soviet acculturation and assimilation through culinary differentiation. Meanwhile, the understanding of *khohanots* <sup>՝</sup> as kitchen (that is, as physical space) reflected the eagerness of an emergent, albeit Sovietized Armenian middle-class to flaunt its new material welfare while escaping the perceived backwardness of its agrarian culinary heritage.

Because “culinary art always evolved under the influence of certain [...] [often predominant social] classes” (Pokhlyobkin, 2004, p.3), the absence of an Armenian élite under Persian and Ottoman rule did not allow for the sort of culinary differentiation evidenced across Europe and Russia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Pokhlyobkin, 2004, p.3). Prior to their Sovietization and rapid industrialization and urbanization, Armenians remained essentially true to a localized agrarian form of sustenance dictated by the natural precepts of the land. The significance of the absence of “that comparatively recent historical innovation, the 'nation', with its associated phenomena: nationalism, the nation-state, national symbols, histories and the rest”

(Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p.13), but most notably recognizable state borders should not be overlooked either. The Bolshevik enclosure of Soviet Armenia within recognizable, albeit arbitrary borders, prompted the “social engineering” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p.13) of a unifying national identity hereby identifiable with a specific geographical area. The concept of an Armenian national cuisine emerged then as one expression of this newly defined national, albeit Sovietized identity.

In contrast, it would appear that the predominance of royal courts in the ancient communities of Armenian Antiquity that still enjoyed a degree of border specificity did little in the way of fostering a notion of *cuisine* akin to that of today. This in spite of the evident distinction between the eating habits of the ruling classes and those of the common peasantry. This could be said to justify Armenian-American couple Irina Petrosian and David Underwood’s (2006) circumvention of the term *cuisine* in their discussion of the culinary customs of ancient Armenians, referencing instead royal dinner tables in *King Tigran’s Table* and noble feasts in *Medieval Feasts of Armenian Nobles*. Similarly, Armenian ethnographer and philologist Vardan Hats’uni’s referential *Dinners and feasts in ancient Armenia (Jasher ev khnchuyk’ Hin Hayasdani mech, Ճաշերն եւ խնճոյք հին Հայաստանի մէջ)*, published as late as 1912, still views Armenian cuisine in terms of individual dishes and festivals. Because the grouping of Armenian eating habits under the modern term *cuisine* appears essentially as a Soviet construct, the discussion of Armenian cuisine cannot be divorced from a thorough analysis of Piruzyan’s *Armenian Cuisine* and the socio-historical context of its genesis.

Published in the larger socio-historical context of national awakening that swayed Soviet Armenia in the 1960s, *Armenian Cuisine* quickly became a cornerstone in the definition of ‘authentic’ Armenian cuisine. Although “[i]t is only in our own time and place that we can expect to know, in any substantial way, the general organization” (Williams, 1983, p.52) of life within a given socio-cultural environment, *Armenian Cuisine* remains important in its ability to afford a “sense of [...] the actual experience through which” (Williams, 1983, p.52) the *social character*, that is the “valued system of behavior and attitudes,” (Williams, 1983, p.52) and the *pattern of culture*, that is the “selection and configuration of [valued] interests and activities,” (Williams, 1983, p.52) were lived in Soviet Armenia. This is as much true of the ideological rhetoric evidenced in the introductory articles to the cookbook as of the composition and presentation style of featured dishes and the tableware upon which those appear. Viewed as a whole, those subtle elements become crucial in the latter discussion of the identity function of *Armenian Cuisine*. Therefore, without falling into that extreme of interpreting *Armenian Cuisine* as a “mere by-product” (Williams, 1983, p.51) of “the particular society within which [it was] expressed” (Williams, 1983, p.51), it appears nevertheless that Piruzyan’s work cannot be read, the process of negotiation of its meaning (Nealon & Giroux, 2011, p.23) cannot occur without the Armenian national(ist) context existing within the larger Soviet communist framework. This not least because *Armenian Cuisine* was in equal measure a product of and a tastemaker for these overlapping structures. The study of *Armenian Cuisine* “is then not a question of relating the art to the society, but of studying all the activities and their interrelations, without any concession of priority to any one of them we may choose to abstract” (Williams, 1983, p.51).

This not least because it was intended as such by the authors of the cookbook. Surely it remains questionable whether it is possible to speak of Piruzyan and his editorial team as authors in the canonical sense for none appear to be invested with that author/ity proper to great writers (Nealon & Giroux, 2011, p.11). It does not help that in compiling *Armenian Cuisine* Piruzyan was initially satisfying an order from then First Deputy Chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers Anastas Mikoyan despite having reservations about his ability to complete Mikoyan's request. In his autobiographical *The life of the country – my destiny: on occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War*, Piruzyan writes: “Once I was at a reception with Mikoyan. He suggested that I undertake compiling the *Armenian Cuisine* cookbook. I replied that it was a difficult assignment and that it was unlikely that I would be able to complete the task at hand” (as cited in Piruzyan, 1995, p.112). It remains nevertheless that *Armenian Cuisine* has endured as a point of reference in most contemporary discussions of Armenian cuisine and in this may be said to have conquered the authorial shortcomings of its progenitors. Returning to the issue of negotiated meanings, what remains to be understood from here on is how did Piruzyan and his aides set about ‘constructing’ a concept of Armenian national(ist) cuisine that would comply with socialist ideology, all within the limited confines of a cookbook? The inherent contradictions and concurrences between these socio-political “activities and their interrelations” (Williams, 1983, p.51) once again point to the necessity of studying the genesis of an Armenian cuisine within the local context of national awakening, itself existing within the increasingly industrialized and urbanized socialist reality of the Soviet Union.

The ‘construction’ of an Armenian national cuisine begins in the introductory articles to *Armenian Cuisine* “dedicated to the history of the establishment and development of [...] the Armenian culinary arts” (Tsaturyan, 2017, p.3). Composed in the true “spirit of Soviet politicized publishing practices” (Tsaturyan, 2017, p.3) that emphasized “the scientific method to guarantee

the veracity of circulated materials” (Tsaturyan, 2017, p.3), these articles have remained, for all intents and purposes, the main frame of reference in the study of Armenian cuisine for the past sixty years (Tsaturyan, 2017, p.3). Although the term ‘Armenian’ remains largely undefined across the articles (other perhaps the mention of “Armenians [as] one of the most ancient peoples to inhabit the Soviet Union,” Harutyunyan, 1985, p.17), Armenians are essentially portrayed as the direct descendants of the Urartians. A statement made very much in defiance of contemporary ethnogenetic theory, which characterizes Urartians as an ethnic group distinct from that of the Armenians, while Armenians are believed to bear a degree of ethnic commonality with the Urartians. This descendent relation is best exemplified by the introductory articles’ repeated references to Urartian food stuffs and culinary practices of which Armenians are identified as the immediate heirs.

In his “The natural-historical bases of nutrition of the Armenian people” (1985), Professor Suren Yeremyan, former director of the Institute of History and a member of the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of Soviet Armenia (Tsaturyan, 2017, p.3) explains: “[t]he technique of vineyard cultivation and preservation, developed in the times of Urartu, experienced little change and was still practiced in the nineteenth and even twentieth century [in Armenia]”. Modern Armenian agrarian traditions are thus conjoined with the more ancient agrarian legacy of Urartu in an effort to “establish continuity [of a largely ‘invented tradition’] with a suitable historic past” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p.1), while disregarding (rather conveniently) prospective foreign, namely Arab and Turkic cultural influence on the grounds of persistent historical enmity. This despite evidence of a positive relation between the culinary traditions of Armenians and Seljuk Turks (Pokhlyobkin, 2004, p.169). A deficiency only mildly compensated by Professor L. B. Harutyunyan, a member-correspondent of the Soviet Academy of Medical Sciences (Tsaturyan, 2017, p.3) and author of the third in the series of introductory articles to *Armenian Cuisine*. While

his “Conditions of the emergence of Armenian national cuisine” (1985) only briefly discusses the cultural influences of neighboring Greeks, Assyrians, Persians and other peoples on the ever-evolving eating habits of Armenians, Harutyunyan’s main focus remain the agricultural, animal husbandry and food processing practices of the ancient Urartian inhabitants of the Armenian Highlands. Practices which are then once again directly related to contemporary Armenian culinary habits on account of their historic suitability. Whether Yeremyan and Harutyunyan’s failure to reference the eventual culinary influences of the historically dominant peoples of Arabia and Central Asia stemmed from their propositional incompatibility with the subject matter of their respective paper; or was merely a convenient omission to avoid conflict with the established Urartian narrative remains an open question to be discussed in the second part to the present paper. “The popularity and broad recognition of [those articles and] the publication [as a whole] among Armenians derive[d] from the consistent interpretation of culinary practices through the prism of a national historical narrative” (Tsaturyan, 2017, p.1) that squared perfectly with the rehabilitated nationalist rationale of the 1960s. Historical continuity was paramount to this rationale.

The Soviet Armenian practice of naming dishes after Turkish administrative regions and individual cities typically thought of as Armenian (kololak of Urfa, soup of Taron, barbecue of Kars) was yet another exercise in the “interpretation of [Armenian] culinary practices through the prism of a national historical narrative” (Tsaturyan, 2017, p.1). One systematically occurring within the larger context of mounting Armenian nationalist fervor. A typical example of “the use of ancient materials to construct invented traditions of a novel type for quite novel purposes” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p.6), the assimilation of culinary dishes with historic Armenian lands was a novel means of telling “the story of the Armenian people” (Tsaturyan, 2017, p.4) and its culinary heritage. Done by relating them this time to a more recent but no less significant historic past, one marred unfortunately by tragedy and loss. The continuity of this new historical narrative

surrounding national cuisine with “a suitable historic past” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p.1) that need not “stretch back into the assumed mists of [Urartian] time[s]” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p.2) was thus guaranteed. The identity function of these naming practices will also be examined later in the paper.

The roots of this newly awakened nationalism originated in the 1920s during the formative years of the Soviet Union. Although “[n]ationalism was officially condemned” (Suny, 1997, p.357) during this time, Lenin was quick to realize that “[a] degree of autonomy for the smaller nationalities was necessary [...] in order to win them over to the Soviet cause” (Suny, 1997, p.351) and efforts were made “to realize certain national aspirations of the Armenians, particularly in the cultural sphere” (Suny, 1997, p.355). The Communist policy of *korenizatsiia* (rooting) or “nativization” that sought to “encourag[e] members of local nationalities to run their own republics” (Suny, 1997, p.355), functioned in tandem with the mass exodus of Muslims to Azerbaijan (Bournoutian, 2006, p.321) on the one hand, and the rapid integration of Armenian exiles from across the region and beyond on the other, to establish a socially and culturally “renationalized” (Suny, 1997, p.356) and hereby more homogenous Armenia. Despite its Sovietization, “Armenia became more Armenian in the 1920s” (Suny, 1997, p.356).

This ‘Armenianization’ of Armenia marked the realization of a long-standing aspiration to national unity and formed the basis of a sense of national pride that would in turn serve as the bedrock to the popular awakening of the 1960s. And though the Sovietization of Armenia propelled the country into a new age of rapid industrialization and urbanization that established Armenia as a modern state, the fact remains that these developments bore cataclysmic consequences for Armenia’s agrarian existence and by extension its culinary traditions. The delimitation of an Armenian state inspired massive waves of “[displaced] Armenians from Greece, the Middle East, and France” (Suny, 1997, p.356) to join “the migrant intellectuals and

dispossessed bourgeois from Tiflis, Baku, and Moscow” (Suny, 1997, p.356) in their search of a new home in the new-found capital Erevan and the few semi-urbanized towns in its vicinity. This wave was joined by the “[p]oor peasants [...] from the countryside” (Suny, 1997, p.356) looking for decent-paying work. The accommodation of such “disparate elements” (Suny, 1997, p.356) gave rise to a “new urban population” (Suny, 1997, p.356), which, in its cultural zeal, also combined varied culinary experiences. Ironically, “the widely based variety of [‘Armenian’] recipes” (as cited in Freeman, 1977, p.144) that emerged in consequence of the aggregation and progressive appropriation of these varied eating habits, a variety said to be “among the prerequisites to the emergence of a full-fledged cuisine” (as cited in Freeman, 1977, p.144), today both justifies the discussion of Armenian cuisine and nullifies that of its authenticity.

The elemental disparity of Armenia’s new urbanites also found expression in their equally disparate ability (possibly opportunity) for social and economic development within their newly-integrated urban milieu. Social and economic differentiation fostered a new middle class increasingly eager to break away from its agrarian past. An endeavor that went in hand with the Soviet mission of “transforming Armenia from a backward locality into a prosperous socialist republic” (as cited in Piruzyan, 1963, p.5). From a culinary standpoint, “[r]ural masses in their urbanizing zeal were not pressed to choose a Soviet menu, but voluntarily voted for Soviet foods with their rubles because of the perceived association with cultural progress” (Petrosian & Underwood, 2006, p.228). This attack in the urban centers on Armenia’s agrarian heritage was made worse by the migration of peasants and the national culinary traditions of which they were the repositories into an urban environment that inherently transformed both. Indeed, “[a]s the rural population contracted and the urban population was deprived of household plots, national cuisine in all industrial countries [began to lose] its position since home cooking required greater amounts of products and time” (Pokhlyobkin, 2004, p.4). Thus, as “[Armenian] food emerge[d] from its



traditional [agrarian] moral and social matrix” (Appadurai, 1988, p.8) into the newly developing urban realm of Soviet socialist reality, “it [became] embedded in a different system of etiquette” (Appadurai, 1988, p.8) of Soviet high taste. As a result, food in Soviet Armenia became both a national common denominator and a social differentiator.

The coming to power of the Man of Steel, Joseph Stalin, disrupted the fragile balance in Armenia between partisan aspirations to national and cultural self-determination and socialist ambitions of Soviet hegemony. His policies of collectivization, industrialization and Russification brought an end to the “cultural revolution” (Suny, 1997, p.356) of the 1920s and would bear heavily upon Armenia’s culinary heritage.

Concerned with the unsatisfactory economic growth of the Soviet Union, Stalin thrust the state into a new scheme of industrial development of hitherto unprecedented scale and intensity. The objective was to produce vast quantities of industrial output that could then be traded for agricultural goods in an effort to revitalize the Soviet market (Suny, 1997, p.358). The “Stalin Revolution” of the 1930s also saw the forced collectivization of agriculture that assimilated private farms into collective or state farms – into *kolkhozy* or *sovkhozy*. Applied to all constituents of the union alike, these policies of rapid industrialization and forced collectivization would have destructive repercussions upon the still largely rural population of Armenia. The exodus of villagers from the countryside that had begun in the 1920s intensified under Stalin’s rule and thousands continued to flock into “the towns where they made up the greater part of the expanding industrial labor force” (Suny, 1997, p.360). Agrarian communities were now more than ever perceived as “a second-class social group in Soviet society” (Suny, 1997, p.360). And although “[p]opulist discourse idealized village life and the peasants as repositories of folk wisdom and indigenous values” (Petrosian & Underwood, 2006, p.230), villagers were in fact “derided and scorned by society” (Petrosian & Underwood, 2006, p.230).

The consolidation of such breakneck-paced industrialization with the mass migrations of villagers dismayed by the violence of collectivization supposed the rapid growth of urban centers wherein greater number of peoples needed to be systematically fed. Sustenance on such a vast scale meant that culinary practices also needed to be industrialized. As Armenian food continued to emerge from “its traditional moral and social matrix” (Appadurai, 1988, p.8) to feed the rapidly growing populace of urbanized centers, an emergence already initiated during the initial industrialization efforts of the 1920s, “it [became] embedded in [the] system of etiquette” (Appadurai, 1988, p.8) of restaurants and especially public catering establishments (*obshepit*).

The task of adapting socialist gastronomic policy to the contemporary needs of a largely industrialized and urbanized Soviet society fell to none other than Anastas Mikoyan (that same Mikoyan who would latter commission *Armenian Cuisine* from Piruzyan). Already Minister of Foreign Trade and a highly influential character in the Soviet machinery of the time through close association with Stalin, Mikoyan used cuisine as an ideological tool to “reorganiz[e] the eating habits of the working classes” (Tsaturyan, 2017, p.3) and educate “the cultured person” (Tsaturyan, 2017, p.2). Indeed, “in the Soviet realm the issue of how, how much, what and where to eat conditioned policy from both economic and ideological perspectives” (Tsaturyan, 2017, p.2). How ironic then that Mikoyan’s objective to “reorganiz[e] the eating habits of the working classes” (Tsaturyan, 2017, p.3), while simultaneously educating “the cultured person” (Tsaturyan, 2017, p.2) should come to be so mutually exclusive. Indeed, Mikoyan’s attempt to present contemporary Soviet gastronomy as evidence of the increasingly cultured essence of Soviet urbanites in his 1939 *The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food* was nullified by the introduction into the working class *quotidien* of the *obshepit*. Mikoyan’s brainchild, the *obshepit* was an establishment of public catering that ultimately facilitated and occasionally removed the need for cooking and eating at

home. As such, *obshepits* partly altered the status of cuisine as indicator of high culture, instead transforming it into an industry that functioned within the greater industrial rationale of the USSR.

Despite its ability to feed the working multitudes, the industrial institution that was public catering and the largely uninteresting and vulgar foods it served had the adverse effect of simplifying and standardizing public taste. A vivid illustration of the far-reaching ripples, both temporal and spatial, of these simplification and standardization practices is offered in the unapologetic words of Vladimir Mukhin, head chef of Moscow's prestigious *White Rabbit* restaurant. After referring to dressed herring, a layered salad of diced pickled herring, grated boiled vegetables (potatoes, carrots, beet roots), chopped onions and mayonnaise (Wikipedia, 2018) as a "complete piece of shit" (Netflix, 2017), Mukhin goes on to denounce the impact of Soviet gastronomic policy on Russian cuisine. He explains: "Russians suffered 75 years, two and a half generations of Soviet time, when people were fooled into eating this gray urban grub. And our mentality has remained the same ever since. I really hate that period because it destroyed all Russian cuisine" (Netflix, 2017). Such a vile perception of Soviet culinary heritage runs tragically contrary to Mikoyan's aspiration to cultivate the cultured Soviet citizen by way of his/her exposure to healthy and tasty food.

In the same manner with Russia and other constituents of the Soviet Republic, public eateries in Armenia had the undesirable effect of removing the peasant migrants turned industrial workers from their traditional agrarian eating habits. The greater amount of time, effort and produce required for the preparation of national dishes made those unviable under the conditions of limited preparation and eating time and increased number of peoples to feed dictated by industrial reality. The scarcity of foodstuffs did little in the way of remedying the situation. Women at home faced similar issues in their private kitchens. Indeed, in the manner that the urbanization of rural masses transformed, and hereby threatened Armenia's culinary traditions of which

villagers were the typical repositories, so did the increased involvement of women in the industrial workforce. Removed from the kitchen, women who were now employed could no longer afford the necessary time and effort to the traditional culinary practices of their mothers, who had in turn inherited them from their mothers. “The liberalization of women meant their detachment from food” (Petrosian & Underwood, 2006, p.234), which, akin to all industrial countries, also signaled the loss of position of Armenian national cuisine (Pokhlyobkin, 2004, p.4).

The situation was made worse by the decline of “official enthusiasm for *korenizatsiia*” (Suny, 1997, p.364) after its initial promotion “in the years of the First Five-Year Plan (1928-1932)” (Suny, 1997, p.364). Repression of nationalist expression including in the culinary field meant that food could no longer function as a marker of national identity and unity. Instead, “local nationalism” (Suny, 1997, p.364) and its culinary derivative were increasingly subjected to the Soviet patriotic cause, itself “often a disguised form of Russian nationalism” (Suny, 1997, p.364). Ultimately, “Armenians were pulled in two directions; on the one hand, their country had become more Armenian, [...] more conscious of its heritage; on the other, strict limits shut off avenues of national expression” (Suny, 1997, p.369). Armenia’s culinary heritage stood at a precipice.

The death of Stalin and nomination of Nikita Khrushchev to the post of General Secretary of the Communist Party ushered the USSR into a new era of political and economic reform. In Armenia, the sense of ‘Armenianness’ (Tsaturyan, 2015, p.142) shared among its people found renewed expression in the new nationalism born of Khrushchev’s political leniency. Bolstered by the policy of *korenizatsiia* and “cultural revolution” (Suny, 1997, p.356) of the 1920s, this “renewed nationalism among Soviet Armenians was [...] the result of social, economic, and political developments both under Stalinism and in the years of gradual reform since 1953” (Suny, 1997, p.378). A contradiction in terms seeing that this new nationalism was also a manifestation of “[t]he material and spiritual tensions built up under Stalin” (Suny, 1997, p.369) and his

repressive antinationalist policies. Policies which in Armenia would soon be reversed with the arrival in March 1954 of Anastas Mikoyan who, in a complete (one might say convenient) reversal of roles, was now a close colleague of the new Party leader (Suny, 1997, p.371). Having entered a period of political, as well as cultural “thaw” (Suny, 1997, p.371) with its Soviet overlord, Armenia at the dawn of the 1960s experienced a veritable national awakening.

Like the “Armenian language, literature, and arts” (Bournoutian, 2006, p.321) that had “continued to unite and revitalize the nation within the limits imposed by communism” (Bournoutian, 2006, p.321) in the 1920s, so *Armenian Cuisine* in its literary capacity was both a consequence of and an important tool in Armenia’s renationalization efforts of the 1960s. Compiled under inherently contradictory circumstances, the cookbook itself was also laden with contradictions. A promotional product of Soviet reality, *Armenian Cuisine* was at heart a nationalistic endeavor that “continually pushed the limits of national expression” (Suny, 1997, p.378) within the acceptable bounds of communist ideology. By the same token, the cookbook sought to textualize a typically oral agrarian culinary tradition, which, if it could not be inflated to service a nationalistic purpose, was renounced because of its perceived association with cultural backwardness within the new middle-class of Soviet Armenia.

For all their perceived backwardness, the culinary traditions of Armenia’s agrarian past remained nonetheless the sole viable basis upon which the modern concept of Armenian cuisine could be constructed. Pursuant to Arjun Appadurai’s (1988) first in a series of strategies for “constructing conceptions of a national cuisine” (p.18), Yeremyan and Harutyunyan first sought in their introductory articles to *Armenian Cuisine* “to inflate and reify an historically special tradition and make it serve, metonymously, for the whole” (pp.18-19) of the Armenian culinary experience. The “historically special tradition” (p.18) in question became that of Urartu, which in its inflation and reification was also connected historically to the invented culinary tradition of

*Armenian Cuisine* to demonstrate the latter's potency. In so doing, Piruzyan and his editorial team made "use of ancient materials to construct invented traditions of a novel type for quite novel [nationalistic] purposes" (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983, p.6) dictated by the renativization efforts of the 1960s. The processes of inflation and reification discussed mainly in geographical terms in Appadurai consequently acquired additional temporal connotation in *Armenian Cuisine*.

This temporal element also became the unifying theme used in the introduction to *Armenian Cuisine* to justify the authors' more or less subjective assembly of recipes into a universal notion of Armenian cuisine. Appadurai (1988) explains:

Another strategy for constructing a national cuisine is inductive rather than nominal: The author assembles a set of recipes in a more or less subjective manner and then, in the introduction to the book, gropes for some theme that might unify them. (p.19)

Recipes, it is worth mentioning, often drawn from divergent culinary traditions, ranging from those of the Middle East to those of Western Armenia and the greater Anatolian Plain, with little actual discussion of their historic-ethnic origins and the history of their inclusion in the Armenian diet. In this, *Armenian Cuisine*, like all cookbooks to some degree, belonged to the "literature of exile, of nostalgia and loss" (Appadurai, 1988, p.18). A quality made more potent within Armenia's wider historical context of quasi-permanent absentee statehood and the more recent tragedy of the Armenian Genocide. A cataclysmic event that exerted destructive influence upon Armenians' cultural, including culinary heritage in its ability to displace and consign to oblivion a large segment of its traditional bearers of culinary memory. The pain "of exile, of nostalgia and loss" (Appadurai, 1988, p.18) in *Armenian Cuisine* is evidenced in the designation of particular dishes according to ancient Armenian provinces (kololak of Urafa, bozbash of Etchmiadzin), which in itself became a means of telling "the story of the Armenian people" (Tsaturyan, 2017, p.4). The latter inclusion of a section devoted to oriental dishes also served to "establish a connection or, at

any rate, the possibility of establishing such a connection to an Armenian diaspora also associated with episodes of [Armenia's] tragic history” (Tsaturyan, 2017, p.5).

The new nationalism of the 1960s and the sense of “pride of Armenian abilities, skills, and achievements” (Bournoutian, 2006, p.327) it inspired (of which culinary achievements were an integral part) appeared however to trump the dire elements of the country's historical past. A sense of pride visible, albeit implicitly, even in Yeremyan's (1985) readiness to draw parallels between the ‘modern’ culinary practices of Soviet Armenia and those supposedly backward agrarian practices of ancient Urartu: “The great variety of dishes developed in the course of the long history of the Armenian people is once again introduced into everyday life in its primordial form” (p.16). In this and much more, *Armenian Cuisine* functioned then both as a consequence of and a tool in the homogenization of Armenian culinary tradition that in turn aided in the social and cultural homogenization of the 1960s. This process of nationalization through homogenization was all the more justified in the face of Stalin's earlier policies of cultural Russification that saw “Russians [...] elevated to the level of a superior people and the nationalities lowered to a second-class category” (Suny, 1997, p.364). The latter policies of rapprochement (*sblizhenie*) and eventual melding of nationalities into a single nationality (*sliianie*) (Suny, 1997, pp.374-375), although milder in tone, still threatened the preservation of Armenians' national distinctiveness. This during a time when “Armenians were both more Armenian in consciousness and more eager to express their ethnic distinctiveness and protect it against incursions from the central power” (Suny, 1997, p.378). Armenia's colonial existence under the Soviet Union was therefore all the more “reason to activate the national culinary discourse” (Tsaturyan, 2006, p.145) because of its ability to “inspire national mobilization, especially in the context of anxiety around national identity” (Tsaturyan, 2006, pp.145-146). The rediscovery of national cuisine in Armenia anticipated the 1970s' global shift towards national cuisines as a means of opposing the bluntness and facelessness of rationed

cuisines in the developed countries of Europe and the United States. A shift that was to be largely conditioned by the improved access of peoples to foodstuffs and food technologies that rendered the preparation of “more delicious and valuable dishes of national cuisines” (Pokhlyobkin, 2004, p.6) possible for urbanites “without much loss of time and labor” (Pokhlyobkin, 2004, p.6).

Without going into too much depth presently, a few words must be said here about the possible role of diasporan Armenians in bolstering national sentiment through culinary innovation. The 12 August, 1961 decision of the Council of Ministers of Soviet Armenia to initiate a new program of homecoming of exiled Armenians saw the return between 1962-1965 of some “1.655 families for a total of 6.949 people” (Aghayan, 1970, p.359). The “particular care given to strengthening established cultural ties with diasporan Armenians” (Aghayan, 1970, pp.360-361) meant amongst other things the introduction of new, as well as development of established culinary practices in Soviet Armenia. A development documented in the introductory paragraphs to the added “Oriental Dishes” section of *Armenian Cuisine*: “In the interest of systematizing those Eastern dishes consumed in everyday life by Armenians ([...] both the local population and repatriated Armenians), a number of recipes have been compiled, of which the most interesting in taste and method of preparation are offered in the present chapter” (Piruzyan et al., 1985, p.190).

The evolution of a modern concept of Armenian national cuisine could not however be divorced from the socio-economic and ideological realities of Armenia’s socialist existence. While experimenting with government and economy upon inheriting Stalin’s politically overcentralized and economically stagnant Soviet Union, the new First Secretary of the Communist Party, Nikita Khrushchev, had sought “to change the focus of Soviet five-year plans away from heavy industry to consumer goods, in an attempt to raise the standards of Soviet living” (Petrosian & Underwood, 2006, pp.232-33). Although a welcome change in the face of “disproportionately high investments in heavy industry [that] had left consumers with little to buy” (Suny, 1997, p.370) and the working



population inadequately housed (Suny, 1997, p.372) after World War II, such shifts did not preclude Khrushchev from capitalizing on Stalin's policies to further industrial development under his own Seven-Year Plan (1959-1965). Not least because industry continued to be perceived as the main catalyst of economic growth.

In Armenia, the monetary appeal of industrial work in the more developed urban centers encouraged during the whole of the 1950s and 1960s “[t]he shift from farm to factory, village to town” (Suny, 1997, p.372) that had already been initiated in the 1920s. A shift made all the more potent by the “permanent structural weakness” (Suny, 1997, p.370) of the country's agricultural sector. The need to accommodate these rural newcomers turned industrial workers justified then the spike in residential construction that began in 1956 and would last the whole of the Seven-Year Plan period (Aghayan, 1970, p.371). As a result of such rapid growth of infrastructure, “[c]ity folks moved into individual apartments and, for the first time, enjoyed having their own kitchens” (Petrosian & Underwood, 2006, p.233). A development that was to be of consequential bearing on the establishment of a concept of national cuisine.

Such demographic shifts functioned in tandem with the increasingly improved living standards of the general populace to allow for the reemergence of a middle class that had already begun to lay roots in Stalinist times. The improved purchasing power of this reinvigorated urban élite, made possible by the steady growth of the country's GDP (76%) (Aghayan, 1970, p.372) and an average 26.2% increase in salaries (Aghayan, 1970, p.372) throughout the Seven-Year Plan period, encouraged many Armenians to seek out greater diversity in their experience of social and cultural life. A trend visible as much in their culinary aspirations as those of dress and other material goods. In his introduction to *Armenian Cuisine*, Piruzyan (1985) explains: “Increase in popular welfare [has led] to a constant rise in demand for food products. In an effort to satisfy the

most diverse consumer tastes and demands, [...], a wide range of products is being developed” (pp.5-6).

“[T]he cultural rise of the new [solvent] middle classes” (Appadurai, 1988, p.5) fueled the publication of new cookbooks hereby adapted to the contemporary needs and demands of Soviet urbanites. The *Armenian Cuisine* cookbook, “intended for technologists, cooks employed in public eateries, as well as housewives” (Piruzyan et al., 1985, p.4), was the apogee of such a work. However, contrary to India where it is “a postindustrial and postcolonial middle class [that] is constructing a particular sort of polyglot culture” (Appadurai, 1988, p.5), in Soviet Armenia it was a very much colonial and industrial middle class that constructed this polyglot culture wherein modern socialist ideology melded with nationalized agrarian culture. For it must be remembered that the publication of *Armenian Cuisine* was made possible only after the relaxation of Stalin’s antinationalist policies under Khrushchev’s reversed policy of cultural thaw. Indeed, “[s]uch a book could never have been published under Stalin because local nationalism had been perceived as a great threat” (Petrosian & Underwood, 2006, p.232).

As *Armenian Cuisine* brought peasant food to urban centers, the relative varietal poverty of this culinary tradition required its reevaluation in order to coincide with the image of plenitude and variety supposedly characteristic of Soviet modernity. However, in the way that “*seductiveness of variety* [...] as an important part of the ideological appeal of the new cookbooks, masks the pressures of social mobility, conspicuous consumption, and budgetary stress for many middle-class wives” (Appadurai, 1988, p.10) in India, so the phantasm of plenitude and variety promoted by *Armenian Cuisine* masked the pressures of continued food shortages that came to characterize the Soviet Armenian experience. Shortages that were at the origin of Armenia’s middle-class dependency on black markets and favors (*papakh*) (Suny, 1997, p.373) for acquiring desired goods. Herein lay the absurdity of the Soviet system: imitating diversity and choice by

means of ‘different’ dishes prepared from the same products (Tsaturyan, 2017, p.5), it raised social expectations without actually being able to provide for them. In this, *Armenian Cuisine*’s approach ran contrary to Pokhlyobkin’s (2004) belief that “cookbooks should not be dependent on the availability of products in this or that region or with this of that person” (p.2) but should rather “be the custodians and bearers of the very best culinary traditions [and] promote the proper culinary education of the nation” (p.2).

In its attempts to shape urban perceptions of culinary modernity, *Armenian Cuisine* also became an indispensable aide to the liberalized women of Soviet Armenia for whom cooking on a daily basis became increasingly problematic. Indeed, women’s greater involvement in the industrial labor force meant their continued “detachment from food” (Petrosian & Underwood, 2006, p.234). The conception of a collective form of national cuisine became thus a practical necessity to accommodate the emergent challenges posed to Soviet women by their new social reality. It is of little surprise then that *Armenian Cuisine* should mention housewives as one of its main audiences: “The book is intended for technologists, cooks employed in public eateries, as well as housewives” (Piruzyan et al., 1985, p.4). This demonstrated how “[a]ll areas of life in the Soviet age [were] politicized; [...] even permeating such seemingly mundane subjects as cuisine” (as cited in Tsaturyan, 2015, p.151). What is more, in subordinating “[t]he regional idiom [...] to a central, culturally superior, idiom” (Appadurai, 1988, p.4), the cookbook became in this respect another tool in the hands of Armenia’s new élite for breaking with its unsophisticated agrarian past.

For all its efforts to distance from this undesirable past, Piruzyan’s work could not however force the complete abandonment of its culinary practices, not least because the modern national cuisine it conceived was founded upon a rural culinary heritage. If anything, “the display of different dishes prepared from the same products” (Tsaturyan, 2017, p.5), discussed above from

the perspective of Appadurai's (1988) "*seductiveness of variety*" (p.10) concept, allowed for a "cultural diffusion [of sorts], whereby familiar dishes in local areas were enriched with other dishes from the same products from other regions of Armenia" (Tsaturyan, 2017, p.5). Such cultural diffusion spoke to the development of a polyglot Armenian culinary culture in which agrarian culinary traditions coexisted with and influenced modern Armenian cuisine.

***Part II: The Identity Function of Armenian Cuisine***

Compiled in the interest of “acquaint[ing] readers with Armenian national cuisine” (Piruzyan et al., 1985, p.4), the explicit objective of the *Armenian Cuisine* cookbook was, like that of its predecessors and many followers, to offer an official definition of the very concept it sought to acquaint its readers with. In this, the cookbook is a textualized reply to the common cry of Petrosian and Underwood’s (2006) friend against those who would argue about “the genuine originals” (p.2) of authentic Armenian cuisine. What is at issue here, however, is the idea of authenticity itself and the relation it bears to identity. For the perception of what constitutes authentic Armenian cuisine was (and still is), at heart, a subjective experience in that it is conditioned by the interpretive efforts of social subjects of a specific cultural phenomenon. Subjects that come into being through the exercise of designated sets of discursive practices that are then internalized and perpetuated for the purpose of sustaining the identity narrative. These practices and the subjectivities that emerge from and later apply them cannot be divorced from their socio-historic environment for both are equally conditioned by it. “[U]sing the resources of history, language and culture” (Hall, 1996, p.4), subjects develop then into identities (which is to say they acquire a sense of identity) that in becoming they believe and present as being (Hall, 1996, p.4). Ultimately, identity functions as the:

the meeting point, the point of *suture*, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to ‘interpellate’, speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be ‘spoken’” (Hall, 1996, pp.5-6).

Operating under the influence of one another, the *Armenian Cuisine* cookbook and its Armenian consumers establish the ‘Armenianness’ (Tsaturyan, 2015, p.142) of individual dishes by virtue of the conceived discourse surrounding said dishes. For no dish is inherently Armenian

but is instead ‘Armenianized’ through the workings of special discursive patterns adopted by socially conditioned actors. Because these patterns are further related to a “suitable historic past” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p.1) intimately associated with Armenians’ historic identity, their use allows for the latter’s identification with and consequent appropriation of said dishes. The logic behind this approach is fairly simple: we as Armenians (disregarding presently how the concept of ‘Armenian’ is defined here) are the ones to speak in a certain way, that is to say adopt a certain discourse about a particular dish. Because this discourse conditions and is therefore tied to our subjects, there is identification of said discourse and (more importantly) its subject with our own. However, just as “[i]t is *language* that gives the illusion that something called lightning exists separate from the fact of its flash” (Mansfield, 2000, p.57) in Nietzsche’s lightning allegory, it is ““a seduction of language”” (Mansfield, 2000, p.57) to think that the naming of dishes according to ancient Armenian provinces allows for their unconditional appropriation. It remains nonetheless that “the necessarily fictional nature” (Hall, 1996, p.4) of such “narrativization of the self” (Hall, 1996, p.4) “in no way undermines its discursive, material or political effectivity” (Hall, 1996, p.4). What is required to understand these processes of assimilation and appropriation in the Armenian context then is ““not [only] a theory of the knowing subject, but [also] a theory of discursive practice”” (as cited in Hall, 1996, p.2).

In naming dishes according to ancient Armenian provinces, *Armenian Cuisine* makes use of historically and culturally charged “*signifiers* (words)” (Leitch et al., 2010, p.6), which in their “*signified* (concept[ual])” (Leitch et al., 2010, p.6) weight, afford renewed symbolic meaning to the dishes in question. The readers’ recognition of and in the historical and cultural references of these signifiers results in their free and willing “subjectification” (Mansfield, 2000, p.62) through a process known as “interpellation” (Nealon & Giroux, 2006, p.44). In commonsense language, as the cookbook’s readers freely and willfully associate with the words “Ararat” or “Artsakh” for

example on account of their great historic and symbolic value, they are, so to speak, ““subjected” to language – to culture” (Nealon & Giroux, 2006, p.44) and in this are made into subjects. In this, it can be said that “we speak” (Nealon & Giroux, 2006, p.44), or, in this case, call “ourselves into and out of certain categories of identity” (Nealon & Giroux, 2006, p.44).

Upon internalizing the established discourse surrounding Armenian cuisine, these “[i]nterpreting subjects” (Nealon & Giroux, 2006, p.48), in their capacity as “cultural readers and [...] not merely passive receptors of preexisting meanings” (Nealon & Giroux, 2006, p.48), repurpose then said discourse in the interest of perpetuating the identity narrative. A cause made all the more potent in the reformatory years of the 1960s. In so doing, these subjects relate to what Judith Butler (1993) describes as the “reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (as cited in Hall, 1996, p.15). Indeed, for the collective self, which being the sum of individual selves is also somehow transcendent of these selves, to successfully think of itself, that is to say develop a functional self-consciousness, requires both cultural and ideological bases. While in the 1960s the ideological basis was essentially provided by state apparatuses, in the cultural field, it was a cuisine, associated with a past identity, that became one of many such possible bases. Emulating Yeremyan and Harutyunyan (1985), who justified Armenian cuisine by way of its relation to a glorified Urartian past, the repurposed discourse of “[i]nterpreting subjects” (Nealon & Giroux, 2006, p.48) continues to identify with “a suitable historic past” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p.1) to justify and strengthen the present national(ist) identity in the making. A foreseeable approach given that the collective self is itself a focal point of thoughts of and about the past.

However, two important issues arise from such dependency on the past. First, “[t]o put on to Time, [...] the responsibility for our own active choices” (Williams, 1983, p.56) about what constitutes authentic Armenian cuisine “is to suppress a central part of our experience” (Williams,

1983, p.56) of it today, including the possibility of reevaluation. What is more, such systematic reference to a historic past in discourse defensive of Armenian culinary traditions speaks in fact to a “break in continuity [with] [...] traditional *topoi* of genuine antiquity” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p.7). Inevitable in light of the significant time lapse between the culinary traditions of Armenian antiquity and that of Soviet Armenia, such a “break in continuity” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p.7) challenges the very historicity upon which stand present-day ‘invented’ (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p.1) culinary traditions. It is also important that the historic past discussed above is itself susceptible to subjective processes of selection whereby certain events are discredited and consigned to oblivion (as cited in Tsaturyan, 2015, p.145), while “*others sustain and become symbols of identity*” (as cited in Tsaturyan, 2015, p.145). Such issues that challenge the dual concepts of historicity and tradition do not preclude however the sporadic emergence of “movements for the defence or revival of traditions, ‘traditionalist’ or otherwise” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, pp.7-8). A trend best exemplified by the activities of culinary chef Sedrak Mamulyan and his NGO dedicated to “The Development and Preservation of Armenian Culinary Traditions”. Its mission justified by the axially of “the thesis of “*national cuisine as a factor of preservation of national identity*”” (Tsaturyan, 2015, p.150), Mamulyan and his organization must, like those of its kind, first confront the issue of historical continuity that is proper to “‘invented’ traditions” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p.1) before it may speak of ‘traditional’ national cuisine.

By “‘plac[ing] its own point of view at the origin of all historicity” (as cited in Hall, 1996, p.2), however, Armenians developed what French philosopher Michel Foucault (1970) defined as “‘a transcendental consciousness”” (as cited in Hall, 1996, p.2) with regards to their national cuisine. One seemingly impervious to the inherent challenges faced by the dual concepts of historicity and tradition discussed above. Instead, Armenian cuisine was perceived as a Nietzschean “force” (Mansfield, 2000, p.56) of sorts that elevated above the “gray urban grub”



(Mukhin, 2017) of Soviet gastronomy by way of its relation to a glorified historic past and perceived varietal richness. A perception directly reflective of the growing nationalistic sentiment in Soviet Armenia of the 1960s. For indeed it must be understood that “no meaning or reading can take place outside of a cultural and historical context – and the reading subject is himself or herself subjected *to* the constraints and possibilities of that context” (Nealon & Giroux, 2006, p.48).

In discussing the selective processes that govern the formulation of what become traditional cultures, Raymond Williams (1983) explains: “The traditional culture of a society will always tend to correspond to its *contemporary* system of interests and values, for it is not an absolute body of work but a continual selection and interpretation” (p.55). In this regard, the *Armenian Cuisine* cookbook emerges as a fascinating exception to this rule in that it is the focal point of two contradictory “system[s] of interests and values” (Williams, 1983, p.55). For where the cookbook breaks with “its *contemporary* [socialist] system of interests and values” (Williams, 1983, p.55) by preaching a nationalistic message within a social/communist environment, it compensates by continuously promoting images of plenitude and diversity key to the phantasm of thriving socialist society. In this, the cookbook is the perfect incarnation of “Stalin’s famous dictum that Soviet culture must be “national in form, socialist in content”” (Suny, 1997, p.365).

In the years of Armenia’s national awakening, *Armenian Cuisine* bore the positive consequence of unifying the Armenian people around a common culinary culture that was in turn indispensable to the emergence of a collective, nationalized self. Although necessary in the face of Soviet imperialist policies of cultural acculturation and assimilation, these unifying practices were also ripe with such negative exertions as are proper to all nationalistic expression. Whatever the case may be, people then were willing to submit to Piruzyan’s definition of Armenian cuisine because they themselves were in the process of (re)defining what it meant to be Armenian, let alone what constituted authentic Armenian cuisine. Redefining Armenian cuisine was therefore a

means of redefining the national self. A national self constrained until then by the repressive antinationalist policies of the Stalin Revolution. Here again the discursive practice of naming dishes according to ancient Armenian provinces found special meaning for the Armenian people in its capacity to serve as a means of remembrance of a bygone cultural identity. One virtually erased following the cataclysmic events of 1915 and systematically endangered by Soviet imperialist tendencies. “The construction of a new [...] culinary language, deprived of Turkish words, [was therefore] one of the acts of backlash against Turks who had tried to eradicate any vestige of Armenian life” (Petrosian & Underwood, 2006, p.251). In the same way, the nascent “[p]atriotic fervor [of the 1960s was] also a powerful inducement for using the Armenian names” (Petrosian & Underwood, 2006, p.250) of dishes instead of their Russian equivalents. Those “*signifiers* (words)” (Leitch et al., 2010, p.6) previously used to subjectify the Armenian reader became then linguistic tools of resistance in the hands of these Armenians now engaged in the construction of a new national memory.

The definition of the culinary “Other” (Hall, 1996, p.4) also allowed for the definition of the ethnic “Other” (Hall, 1996, p.4), a concept at the heart of the exclusionary essence of identity theory. For, according to Hall (1996), “identities are constructed through, not outside, difference” (p.4) and “since as a process it [identification] operates across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of ‘frontier- effects’” (p.3). Thus, “[i]t requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process” (Hall, 1996, p.3). More interesting still is how that same discursive work of *Armenian Cuisine* that allowed for the definition of the ethnic “Other” (Hall, 1996, p.4) also created the social “Other” (Hall, 1996, p.4) – here the rural “Other” (Hall, 1996, p.4). However, contrary to the ethnic “Other” (Hall, 1996, p.4) who is consistently left outside, the rural “Other” (Hall, 1996, p.4), for all its perceived backwardness, is an integral part of the Armenian Self and functions therefore as a unifying

element of identity. Just as “[c]ookbooks allow women from one group to [...] be represented to another” (Appadurai, 1988, p.6) in India, *Armenian Cuisine* allowed the rural periphery and its cultural traditions to be represented to the urbanized élite who would forget their agrarian past.

For all its appeal as a unifying and elevating “force” (Mansfield, 2000, p.56), the discourse surrounding Armenian cuisine must not fall however into the same category of misinterpretation evidenced in the Nazi misreading of Nietzsche’s superman concept. Misinterpreted, the forceful element of such discourse could serve as the bedrock to one form or another of gastronationalism. A concept simultaneously born of and designed to feed a sense of nationalism that is not only potentially dangerous, but also not to be confused with the concept of identity and identity construction. For identity and nationalism are fundamentally different concepts functioning according to equally different principles not discussed in the present paper. Such gastronationalist exertions are already present today in the food appropriation wars waged between Armenia and Azerbaijan over such controversial products as *lavash* and *dolma*. Wars that in turn aggravate the entrenched feelings of hate and enmity born of the continued conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave. A conflict itself rooted in many regards in nationalistic considerations. “[T]he kitchen [...] become[s] [then] another battlefield where defensive and offensive weaponry is elaborated in a field as banal as that constructed along the dimensions of national cuisine” (Tsaturyan, 2015, p.149).

At the same time, it must not be forgotten that *Armenian Cuisine* is an element of the “*structure of feeling*” (Williams, 1983, p.53) of the Soviet Union. One that, in certain regards, appears to have been inherited today without due understanding of the “general organization” (Williams, 1983, p.50) that gave birth to it and its function within said organization. For in the context of Soviet “general organization” (Williams, 1983, p.50), *Armenian Cuisine* was, in many ways, an organizational tool used by what Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser called “Ideological

State Apparatuses” (Mansfield, 2000, p.53) to shape the narrative surrounding Armenian cuisine. This narrative could then also be used to control the rising nationalistic narrative in 1960s Armenia. By way of its symbolic value, cuisine was therefore one amongst many tools in the Soviet repertoire used to unify of the masses in a bid to render their control easier. An approach diametrically opposed to the “divide and rule” idiom of Philip II of Macedon, father to Alexander the Great. Composed in the true “spirit of Soviet politicized publishing practices” (Tsaturyan, 2017, p.3), the credibility of the cookbook was guaranteed by Piruzyan’s reference to specialists, albeit specialists only indirectly related to the field of cuisine. Specialists that in turn sponsored what Foucault calls “impersonal ‘scientific’ truth” (Mansfield, 2000, p.53) to “guarantee the veracity of circulated materials” (Tsaturyan, 2017, p.3). ‘Truth’, which according to Foucault, should always “be met with skepticism and resistance” (Mansfield, 2000, p.53) when in the hands of power. Thus, as traditional cuisine becomes a determinant of selfhood, it also functions to imprison its followers in a set of practices and routines that are determined for, rather than by them. In this, these followers are made into subjects to serve ideology since “[i]deology *needs* subjectivity” (Mansfield, 2000, p.53).

Such imprisonment in determined sets of practices and routines could be said to be at the heart of the inability of many contemporary Armenian chefs to see beyond what is commonly defined as traditional. For it is certainly easier (and more comfortable) to remain within the known rather than explore the unfamiliar. This is not to discredit those restaurateurs who, like Jirair Avanian, owner of the famous *Dolmama* restaurant, or David Yeremyan, owner of the more recent *Sherep* and *Lavash* restaurants, attempt to revise the traditional. However, while Avanian ‘modernized’ a few dishes in the 1990s and has since remained true to those with little innovation in sight, *Lavash* and *Sherep*’s novelty is a novelty of presentation, décor and service more than a novelty of culinary practice. In this, both can be said to have failed to truly revolutionize the field

and have therefore remained, in essence, traditional. To prevent such solidification of the culinary field, “[s]ubjects should be geared towards a [Foucauldian form of] dynamic self-creation, an experimental expansion of the possibilities of subjectivity in open defiance of the modes of being that are being laid down for us constantly in every moment of our day-to-day lives” (Mansfield, 2000, p.63). Culinary subjectivity is not a fixed concept.

### **Limitations and Avenues for Further Research**

In his *Analysis of Culture* (1983), Raymond Williams explains that the “idea of culture rests on a metaphor: the tending of natural growth. And indeed it is on growth, as metaphor and as fact, that the ultimate emphasis must be placed” (p.335). Receptive to the rapid “natural growth” (Williams, 1983, p.335) in cultural demands and expectations of its Armenian consumers, the *Armenian Cuisine* cookbook was able, in its capacity as a successful transmissive tool “[i]n a transitional culture” (Williams, 1983, p.313), to “affect aspects of activity and belief” (Williams, 1983, p.313). A tendency best exemplified in its ability to ignite the rising national sentiment of its time, but also to transmit said sentiment to future generations. For there can be no doubt that today’s beliefs about Armenian cuisine are in large part inherited from Piruzyan’s work.

Today Armenian society is clearly evolving, albeit in an unforeseeable direction, while Armenian cuisine as an element of culture appears to fail to adapt to this growth. In other words, Armenian cuisine is not “tending [to the] “natural growth” (Williams, 1983, p.335) of its parent society. If it is to maintain its communicative strength, Armenian cuisine must break away from its solidified state and learn to adapt to the contemporary needs of its consumers, lest it become an element of an unviable past.

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