

Armenian Perceptions of the Soviet State and The Influence of
Communism on Family

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Introduction:

The destiny of the post-soviet countries following the dissolution of the Soviet Union has long been a subject of interest for historians and scholars. Being integral parts of the Soviet regime, these countries inevitably bear the imprint of once mighty and prominent world power. Even after gaining independence and establishing themselves as sovereign nation-states, their political, economic, and social evolution proceeded with a lingering influence of the Soviet ideology and communist doctrines.

People's perceptions of the state were profoundly affected by their subjection to Soviet control, particularly considering the case of the autonomous Soviet Republics that had been forcibly integrated into the Union. The perspectives of people with strong cultural identities and a variety of ethnic backgrounds on their involvement in a more expansive governmental entity is an intriguing topic for research and analysis. The Soviet citizen, being conscious of their own national identity and at the same time being a member of an enormous empire, had a complex and equivocal conception of the state, which although evolved in response to the changing environment and circumstances, were mainly shaped by the legacies of the Soviet regime.

As a result, the countries' interaction with neighboring fellow republics, people's attitude towards the central Soviet government and the local one, and their subsequent social, political, and economic conduct as citizens of newly independent states carry the enduring influence of the Soviet institutions and ideologies.

Despite extensive research on the aftermath of the Union and its footprint on newly emerged states, the scope of the research was generic and much of it concerned broadly the Union as a whole. Armenia, one of the former member republics of the Union presents a particularly interesting and unique case study. Following centuries of subjugation by various powers, including Tsarists Russia, Armenia achieved independence for a brief period of two years. Armenia endeavored to develop the essential

institutions for an autonomous state, despite significant obstacles, such as war against Turkey, mass starvation, and an acute scarcity of resources. But in 1920, after the Red Army had taken over, Armenia's government was overthrown and replaced with a Soviet one, which resulted in its incorporation into the Soviet Union.

Thus, in the framework of post-Soviet studies, this research will narrow its focus to the Armenian case primarily, while integrating comparative analysis of other Soviet republics. The distinctiveness of Armenia's case lies in that it is geographically remote from Moscow, but its diplomatic as well as social ties with Moscow have endured for many years post-independence. In view of the lack of more thorough study on specific cases, this paper aims to investigate the Armenian case and how it navigated the transition from Soviet governance to independence.

Literature Review:

National versus Soviet Identity

Perhaps the hardest task of an empire is to function in a way that unites the subjugated nations and prevents the emergence of disputes within the country. The task was even harder for the Soviet Union as it had to guarantee that geographically close and culturally different nations share a common living side by side. The threat of secession and separatism, that were viral in their nature, were serious and dangerous vices that could cause the biggest harm to the Soviet Government. It is still a wonder how a number of nations who had distinct religious background and cultural heritage could coexist more or less peacefully for more than seven decades. This was the result of the strong Soviet policy that aimed at eliminating the most visible and salient national characteristics that had the potential of becoming a threat to the future Union.

The Soviet Union faced this issue from the early years of its existence. Former subordinate countries, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkestan shortly gained freedom from Tsarists Russia and confronted the Revolutionary forces that attempted to conquer them and force them to go through the process of Sovietization. It became evident that a major prerequisite for the establishment of a stable state that embraced a number of various nationalities was the elimination of ethnic assertiveness. The explosive and obsessive nature of nationalism was the biggest hazard for the Soviet government on one hand, and the national crises that could have erupted as a result of assimilation of national groups on the other. So, the Soviet Government undertook a different strategy, creating a Soviet Federal structure based upon Lenin's dictum "national in form, socialist in content." (Bremmer, 1993) This strategy bestowed the status of the "Union Republics," to certain nations and gave them the power to legitimately express their national aspirations. Armenia was among them. The main objective of this approach was to alleviate the threat of the nationality variable, which will ultimately be assimilated in favor of a new community based upon class solidarity.

Thus, despite the privileges Armenians were endowed with by the Soviet government due to the status of the Union Republic, Armenians, as well as other nationalities had to be integrated into a larger governmental entity and coexist with other republics under the shelter of the Soviet communist ideology. The idea of nationality, while still somewhat preserved, takes a backseat to the dominant influence of the Soviet government and its communist ideology. Communism serves as the overarching framework that unifies the diverse nationalities within the huge and expansive Union. Armenians were supposed to receive a new identity- they were expected to become Soviet citizens and the bearers of communist ideas. Their state, the tiny territory scattered among the Caucasus mountains turned into the great Soviet state with unimaginably vast borders. The important question here is how did Armenians view the Soviet state and themselves state within the context of the Soviet regime.

To examine the way people perceived the state, we must approach the question by considering the emergence of the Soviet identity as opposed to the Armenian one. Armenians, having centuries long history, were able to preserve their identity while being a prey for various superpowers. Their national self-consciousness was too strong to yield to the Soviet firm resolution to eradicate nationalism completely. However, being a member of a larger state, that acted as a provider and a protector, implied certain concessions, which Armenians, forced by the circumstances, were ready to make. The short independence period which lasted from 1918 to 1920 was marked by severe economic and social hardships, which put the country on the verge of destruction. The Soviet economic policies gave rise to the development of agriculture, initiated the rapid process of industrialization and were deemed a force that saved the country from inevitable downfall. This transition from a completely agrarian and economically backward country to a more or less developed one was the one of the factors that gave legitimacy to the Soviet rule in Armenia. (Dudwik, 1993)

Unifying Nations through Sovietization

Undermining the national and encouraging the ideological instead is not an easy task, especially if there are numerous and divergent nationalities under the roof of the Union. But as it was a necessary step towards the consolidation of the Soviet power and the protection of its territorial integrity, the communists did everything possible to Sovietize the nations and unite them around the Communist ideology. The process was implemented through political discourse particularly. The leaders of the Party started to use the “Sovetsky narod”- Soviet people ideologeme, showing people’s new identity that is acquired through citizenship. In this way, local ethnic groups were repressed through Russification, making them a part of the central state. (Carey and Raciborski, 2004)

Metaphors that compared the state with a family started to circulate by the party rulers and representatives. There are two models of family discourse- the strict and nurturing family. The strict

family requires people to submit to the authorities, to the “parents” and have complete trust in them, meanwhile the parents, the leadership, takes on its undeniable responsibility of protecting its adherents from a harsh and dangerous world outside. The nurturing type, on the contrary, highlights the importance of citizen participation in nurturing their family-state. The Soviet Union was obviously of the strict family model, which implied cognitive influence on member republics of obedience and accountability to the “family union.” (A’Beckett, 2012)

The Soviet Union was presented under the disguise of a family, the members of which were “brother-nations.” However, Russia was perceived as the “big brother,” highlighting its political power and influence, as well as the vastness of its territory. Family metaphors will be analyzed more in detail later in the paper, but for now, it is important to pay attention to the unequal position of the brothers within this big family. Russia was the eldest brother, who took the responsibility to look after his younger siblings. This entailed the imposition of the big brother’s values, ideas, and beliefs. What was called Sovietization was Russification in content. The Soviet State was primarily seen as the natural expansion of the Russian nation, even among Russians; “Sovetsky narod essentially became a variant of russy narod.” (Bremmer, 1993)

In summary, the Soviet authorities tried to undermine and suppress the idea of nationality and promoted communist ideology as the primary component of Soviet identity in an attempt to unite them through a long process of absorption and assimilation. Although, being the bearer of this identity, which was mainly Russian in substance, had an enduring effect on Armenians, overall, the Soviet plan of full integration didn’t succeed.

Government as a Family Unit

Svetlana Lourie and Armen Davtyan in their essay called “Yerevanian Civilization” provided an ethnological analysis of the population of Yerevan starting from the establishment of the Soviet Union up until its collapse. (Lourie and Davtyan, 2017) The Yerevanian Population of the Soviet period was divided into unites, called “families.” The smallest ones comprised neighborhood inhabitants, meanwhile the largest unites could encompass the population of an entire city or region. The uniqueness of this kind of organization was that these “families” were tight-knit and enclosed, each with its own rules and laws, and interfering into the affairs of other families or violating their rules was highly unacceptable. To avoid conflicts with other family units, there were certain unwritten codes of communication with external communities that were considered inviolable. Armenians extended the notion of family and prescribed it to larger social institutions as well, including the local and central government bodies, as well as the ruling party.

Thus, local authorities and the central government were perceived as certain families, “houses” with whom they had to share a common space of life. Through extensive interviews and comprehensive research conducted among Armenians, Lourie and Davtyan came to the conclusion that although Armenians accepted the central Soviet government as theirs, as something that they were part of, it was at the same perceived as foreign and distant. Therefore, even if most of the Armenians did not share communist ideas, as was stated in the essay, there was nothing left to do but to show respect and reverence to the central government, even if it was mere pretense. This was their way of dealing with a bigger “family” that they belonged to. Even though they couldn’t identify themselves with the Soviets, they were left with no alternative but to reckon with it, as they were determined to coexist. This kind of attitude towards the state was

circumscribed by the weakness of local authorities and the remoteness of the central government. Hence, the residents of Armenia perceived the government leaders and the communist ideology as just “idle chatter and frivolous games.” (Lourie and Davtyan, 2017)

Soviet State as a Provider

Thus, the local government, despite being explicitly given the status of an autonomous republic, was deprived of any kind of freedom; its actions and decisions were wholly under the control of the central Government, under the careful supervision of the Communist Party members. This dependence referred to the state-society relationship as well. The relationship between the state and the societies had notably changed since the 18th century under the influence of the Enlightenment thinkers. Philosophers like Jean-Jacque Rousseau, Voltaire, and John Lock brought forward the concept of social contract. The idea that lay at the foundation of the social contract was that people give up some of their liberties, and get out of the state of nature, and agree on abiding common rules. The government, in turn, has to make and enforce laws and create a safe and secure environment for the economic, commercial, cultural activities of the citizens. (Cartwright, 2024) As a consequence, there is an implicit agreement between the state and the citizens that they are obliged to fulfill certain responsibilities towards each other. The theory of social contract is essential to the concept of democracy and lies at the foundation of democratic institutions and practices. Surprisingly, it was utilized in relations to Soviet governance as well. However, the so-called “Soviet Social Contract” was completely different and unique from the social contract cultivated by Enlightenment thinkers in its terms and conditions and distribution of power between the state and the society. Looking at the substance of this contract and the dynamics of its development will give us significant understanding into how Armenian society was tied to the Soviet government and what were the effects of this kind of contractual relationship.

The ruling political system in the USSR could be described as Welfare-State Authoritarianism, which is inextricably linked to the concept of the Soviet Social Contract. (Connor, 2003) As the Soviet citizens were materially dependent on the state, it was the state's responsibility to provide them with basic goods, opportunity to get an education and not to be unemployed in the future. The Soviet State performed its functions excellently at least until the Perestroika period. People were not afraid of the inflation of prices, as everything had a fixed price which could not be altered; education was free; jobs could be found for everyone. Especially the older generation harbor nostalgic sentiments towards the Soviet State for this particular reason; they justify their fondness of the Soviet system by the availability of free education and healthcare, by the absence of the problem of unemployment. The population, in return for these benefits, had to give its support for the ruling regime. Everything seemed to work based on a contractual agreement between the ruling Party and the citizens. However, considering the fact that the Soviet Union was an Authoritarian State, the power was unequally divided between the parties of the contract, which entailed a number of issues that became fatal for the Union's existence.

One of the biggest issues that put the existence of the contract at stake was the unequal access to information. The citizens of the Soviet Union had almost no means of connection with the outside world, therefore the state was able to win and hold onto popular support for the rule for an extended period of time. This is seen in the movie "We and our Mountains" we have analyzed above. A conversation between two countrymen about geography reveals their lack of knowledge about the world outside the Union and their complete isolation from it. One of them started to talk about Aleppo and then the other one said "Aleppo is in Poland, isn't it?" Their conversation was not about the inadequacy of the Soviet educational system that failed to teach them the capitals of the countries, but it rather showcased that they lived in a frame that was constructed by the Party to ensure that the terms of the

contract are met and that the Party performs its functions dutifully. The isolation of the Soviet public from the outside world gave the regime its uninformed consent.

The situation drastically changed during the rule of Gorbachev and his policies of Perestroika, which gave people access to information about the world outside the USSR. People found out about the backwardness of their country; the low standard of living compared with that of the Western countries. This was a sufficient circumstance for the social contract to cease its functioning. Because the state could no longer provide the people with standards of living which were heightened after the Glasnost policy, people started to require more political freedom instead. Hence, this so-called contract was unequal, first because the parties were given unequal amounts of information (the regime was informed that the quality of life in the West is better). “Mass consent was an uninformed consent,” due to the isolation of the Soviet citizens. (Connor, 2003) Moreover, power was divided unequally between the parties: although there were reciprocal expectations, the regime’s interests always prevailed. The consequence was that the isolated and repressed population that viewed the regime as quasi-legitimate started to question its legitimacy. By the time Gorbachev came to power, neither party was getting what it expected out of the bargain. Both parties were dissatisfied with each other.

To connect the concept with the Armenian context, it should be said that Armenians identified themselves as a part of the Union partially from the contractual perception. Armenians gave their consent to the Communists in exchange for a number of benefits, which included being provided for and having basic necessities ensured. If engaging in a conversation with an elder who experienced life during the Soviet era, the foremost recollection of them would probably be the pricing structures, the accessibility of goods and services. They recall their lives during the Soviet period with the words: “Everything was different then...” They perceived the state as the main provider and were content to be in this kind of an agreement-based relationship with the Soviet State. However, as stated above, after

Gorbachev policies and Perestroika, the perception was re-evaluated. One more thing that deserves to be discussed, is the dependence of the Armenian Soviet Republic, as a separate governmental entity from Moscow. Since the central government was the one regulating all economic and commercial relations, the one who provided the Republic population with its basic needs, Armenia faced significant challenges after gaining independence in terms of leading self-reliant economic affairs. Even now, when Russian-Armenian relations are progressively worsening, Armenia's economic dependence from Russia still remains considerable. (Mgdesyan, 2023) So, it is evident that Armenians' perception of the Soviet State as a provider, which subsequently was transferred into Russia, had shaped its social and economic landscape even after becoming an independent state.

Research Question:

Despite the extensive research on Soviet Studies, there are still gaps in terms of analyzing the context of several countries. The Soviet Communist regime, which was marked by totalitarian rule and colonial practices, had a long-lasting impact on Armenia's sociopolitical trajectory following its initial stage of independence. The aim of this research paper is to examine how Armenians perceived the Soviet State and the local government, as well as their own identity as citizens of the Soviet Empire. It seeks to understand how this internalized mindset shaped their attitudes towards these entities. And most importantly, to make connections with independent Armenia, the study will also look at how Armenians' perception of the Soviet State affected their political and social perspectives and behavior after Armenia's attainment of autonomy.

Methodology:

As the aim of this research paper is to investigate the perceptual patterns and attitude of people towards the state, the methodology for conducting the research was mainly qualitative. Data collection about the topic was done by primary source analysis; it helped to acquire background knowledge and general understanding of important concepts and events. Acquisition with the relevant literature was the first stage of the research, which laid the groundwork for proceeding to the more in-depth and specific original research. Original research encompassed textbook analysis, movie analysis, and poster analysis. Each of these methods will be further explained in the subsequent paragraphs.

The textbook that was chosen for analysis is a history textbook intended for the students of Yerevan State University. It was published in 1985 and the editor in chief was M. Nersisyan. The textbook covers the history of the Armenian nation spanning from ancient times to modernity. Given the focus of this research paper on the Soviet period, the chapters telling the historical events of the 20th century were selected for analysis. More specifically, excerpts about the First Armenian Republic, the establishment of the Soviet rule in Armenia, and the mutual responsibilities of the state and the citizen were closely examined. During the analysis of the textbook, particular attention was given to the terminology and language choice used to refer to different entities, that could give insights into how the Soviet state was viewed by Armenians. An emphasis was put on revealing the latent intentions of the author in composing the text, since everything written in the textbook was first supervised and regulated by the central government before its publication.

The movie selected for the analysis of this research paper is the called “We and our Mountains,” a comedy drama that holds an important place in Armenian cinematography and cultural heritage. It was directed by Henrik Malyan in 1969. At first glance it might seem that the events that take place in the movie have nothing to reveal about the Soviet State and people’s relations with it. It tells the story of the villagers who got involved into a fight as a result of misunderstanding. A police officer came to investigate the case from Yerevan. This seemingly domestic and small-scale story in fact sheds light on how ordinary villagers that lived far away from Moscow, the centre of the Union conceived the Soviet State. The police officer is the representative of the state as well as a fellow Armenian, and his interaction with countrymen uncovers their ideas of the Soviet identity and the national one. Thus, their dialogues, particularly those referring to the state and citizenry the main focus of analysis.

The third method employed was poster analysis. The first poster was done by Sergei Artutchian. The year is unknown, but from the context it can be guessed that it was done in the late 80s. The second poster is called "The deadly indifference of the guardian angel." The author is unknown. Both posters were taken from EVN Report. It should be noted that it was difficult and challenging to find Soviet posters specifically designed for Armenia. Most of the propaganda posters were the adapted from original Russian versions. Nonetheless the posters selected for the research are of a later period and rather reflect a satirical view of the Soviet State.

Consequently, through primary source review, history textbook interpretation, movie and poster analysis this study is trying to dig into the perceptions of the Soviet state within the Armenian society. By employing these methods, the paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the notion of state was shaped and evolved among Armenians under the influence of the Soviet regime.

Research and Findings:

Soviet Government's Efforts to Weaken the National Identity

It has been already stated in the Literature Review that the suppression of national assertiveness was the hardest yet one of the most important tasks that the Soviet government had to undertake. However, it had not been yet discussed how the policies regarding the manifestation of national identity were implemented in the Armenian context and what were their influences on the people's attitude. Unification of the nations and the subsequent erosion of national identities was intended to be done through the promotion of the communist ideology instead. The highly devastated conjuncture during the independence period was further used by the Communist Party to make the populace endorse the regime. In the 1985 history textbook for university students, in the chapter dedicated to the history of Armenia in 1918-1920, the newly formed independent country was referred to as a bourgeois state. (Nersisyan, 1985) The textbook, without acknowledging the circumstances in which Armenia found itself upon declaring independence, harshly criticized and accused the Dashnak party for being impotent to solve the issues that faced the country. It is evident that the aim of the text was to dismiss and to downplay the importance of national identity by shifting the focus towards the antagonism between capitalism and communism emphasizing the superiority of the ideology over nationality. Furthermore, along with the enforcement of communist ideas, the process of cultural and linguistic Russification took place throughout all the territory of the Union. Armenians held Russian poets and musicians in the highest regard as representatives of advanced civilization; Russian schools and educational institutions were considered prestigious and esteemed, and people who communicated in Russian in their everyday lives were considered intelligent people. Thus, although Armenia's big brother could not completely get rid of the Armenian ethnic assertiveness, he was able to bequeath his linguistic and cultural heritage, which had a lasting influence on Russian-Armenian relations.

Boundaries Erased between the Soviet State and Citizens

Another interesting thing that should be noted is the omnipresence of the Communist Party and the Soviet Government in the lives of the citizens and its effect on the relations between them. As stated above, Armenia, as well as fourteen other Union Republics bordering foreign countries and ethnically homogeneous were entitled certain privileges such as exercising their right to preserve their ethnic identity, as well as to succeed from the Union. The latent purpose of this policy was to make the integration of the republics easier and bearable for them. However, the republics factually did not have any autonomy. The local government was completely subjected to the central one. All decisions had to be made only with Moscow's approval. An Armenian citizen, who had the opportunity to witness the last decades of the Union's existence says that even the most insignificant administrative decisions were to be made after getting Moscow's permission. The locals couldn't even build a small monument in their neighborhood without first obtaining permission from the central authorities. Overall, the member republics were fully integrated into the centralized soviet system, with no room for practicing their de cure autonomy, as political, social, economic, and even cultural decisions were governed and regulated by the Party organizations.

The centralized regulation of the republic was not limited to the functions of the government but also included supervision of the citizen conduct and behavior. Putting aside the most prominent practices of the party that affected lives of citizens, such as the indoctrination of the Communist ideology through education, its coercion, and mass surveillance, The Party made all efforts to penetrate into citizen's private life, to control their behavior, and make them as obedient to the Party as possible. This is shown in the attempts of the Party to create an image of

the ideal Soviet citizen and to cast out everyone who did not correspond to the criteria of the Soviet citizen. It included the social ills, which were considered typical to capitalist societies. During the Soviet period they were not acknowledged at all; they treated the social ills as though they were not there. (Kassof, 1968)

The Communist government considered its primary responsibility to oversee individual's behavior, and to become the main nurturer of their personality. The history textbook that has already been mentioned once, included a paragraph which said that the official bodies' are responsible for making sure that the citizens are doing their work dutifully and that they refrain themselves from any kind of action that is against the rules: "The main goal of party organizations is to contribute to the strengthening of labor discipline, increasing the responsibility of all workers for the work undertaken, implementation of measures to fight against the negative phenomena appearing in our lives." (Nersisyan, 1985) In this way, the Communist regime blurred the distinction between the society, individuals and the state by penetrating and regulating all aspects of public and private life.

Soviet State as a Representative

Taking into account the tumultuous and anarchic nature of world affairs in the 20th century, it is not difficult to guess what could have been the lot of small nations that lacked military strength and solid economic progress. The First Armenian Republic was among the states that found themselves being drained and exhausted to endure the catastrophic havoc of the 20th century. Armenians, amidst the aftermath of the genocide, the economic turmoil, and the looming Turkish invasion, were taken under the wing of the young Soviet Union. Although having salient national identity, Armenians had to become a part of the Soviet Union, adhere to

its strict rules and regulations, to be able to receive the privilege of being represented by and aligned by a word superpower.

Every Armenian knows “We and Our Mountains” movie directed by Henrik Malyan in 1969. This comedy-drama provides valuable insights into Armenians’ perception of the Soviet State and their own country. The movie tells us the story of four villagers who got into a fight after accidentally slaughtering their comrade's sheep for a communal meal. To investigate the conflict and punish the culprits a police officer comes to their village from the capital. The relationship between the villagers and the police officer is of particular interest as it sheds light on the idea of the foreignness of the Soviet State as opposed to the concept of “Armenianness.” In the movie, one of the villagers referred to the police officer as “the state” highlighting the officer’s role as the representative of the governmental authorities. Thus, the police officer, being the embodiment of the state, comes into interaction with ordinary Armenians who were also citizens of the Soviet Union.

The villagers' attitude towards the officer changed based on the role that he assumed, whether he was acting as a police officer or as an ordinary Armenian man. Whenever he asked questions about the accident and tried to investigate it, villagers were hostile and protective, and replied to the officer’s questions by saying “that’s none of your business. We ate the sheep of our friend; you don’t have the right to intervene.” But when the police officer acted as an ordinary Armenian citizen, their attitude was extremely respectful and polite. In one of the scenes where they were required to see the officer, a villager remarked: “Let’s not make the officer wait. He must be tired; he came from the city.” The villagers’ shifting attitude towards the police officer indicates Armenians’ perceptual distinction between the Armenian and the Soviet.

Another thing from the movie that provides an important perspective on the state-citizen relations is the use of the word “state.” While referring to Armenia, words like “homeland” and “country” are preferred over the word “state.” Meanwhile, in the movie, the word state, often used by the villagers denoted the Soviet Union, which shows that they did not recognize the Union as a homeland, but rather as something distant and foreign. Especially the countrymen, who were isolated from urban life had an alienated perception of the state. Although it was evident that they did not share patriotic feelings towards the Soviet Union, they were surprisingly concerned about the state budget, how the state distributed the money, and whether it could provide for the citizens. This shows the contractual nature of the relationship between the Soviet State and the Armenians. After the meal, a conversation unfolded between two men about the general affairs of the world. One of them asked: “How many countries are there in the world?” His interlocutor answered “Us (referring to the Soviet Union)” and then named a few other countries. His answer was followed by another question: “We are the most powerful one, aren’t we?” “No, it’s Germany.” In this way, even though they did not view the Soviet Union as their homeland, they were glad to be a part of it. They realized the importance of being represented by a bigger power and identified themselves with the Soviet State whenever they were encountered by the outside world.

Despite the lack of patriotic sentiments towards the Soviet Union and the dichotomy between the Soviet and Armenian identities, Armenians realized the need to be aligned with a bigger power and be represented by it. However, Armenians grew more critical about the representative role of the Union towards the end of the century. The poster below (pic. 1), completed by Sergei Artuchyan, depicts the relationship between the Soviet Government and the Armenians in an ironic manner. At the center of the poster, we see a man lying on “The

Capital” by Karl Marx, which symbolizes the rule of the Communists. At the end, the inscription, which is from a song by 18 century Armenian songwriter Sayat Nova, says: “I will sit down, you will throw a shadow on me- in the desert you are a shelter for me.” The poster illustrates the patronage and the control of the Soviet Union and its consequences- an idle and lazy society which the person lying on the book embodies. The roof is composed of a book and pens and seems fragile and unreliable. On the front, the poster reads “Long live...” probably referring to the Communist Party. The first impression that we get from the poster is that of irony. It is trying to mock the Soviets, and highlight the over-reliance of Armenians on being under the patronage of the Union. The poster shows Armenian’s complacency under the Soviet patronage alongside with the societal corruption that can step from this dependence.



Pic 1. Sergei Artuschan, EVN Report, year unknown.

Soviet State as a Protector

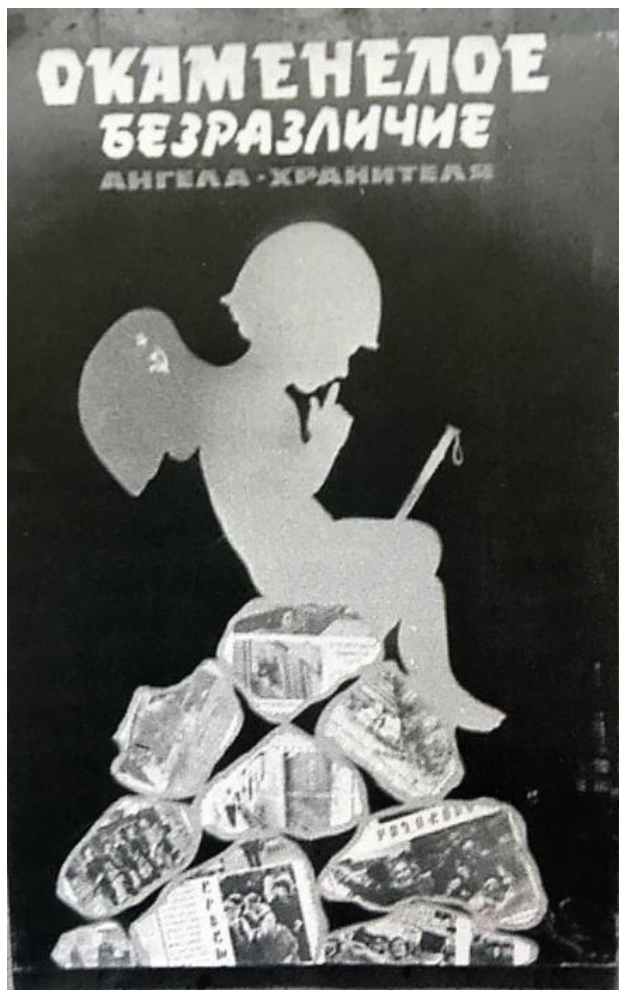
Considering Armenia's geopolitical plight, it is only natural that Armenians always relied on external powers to ensure their safety from neighboring adversaries. Russia has been the most prominent power that Armenia linked itself with for ages. Particularly after being integrated into the Soviet Union, the bond of the protector and the protege deepened even more. Armenians viewed Russians as their guardians, who would protect them from invaders and punish the attackers. In a word, Armenians expected Russia to act as the Big Brother. Again, the metaphor of the family plays a significant role in understanding the way Armenians saw the Union state, therefore a brief analysis of metaphors is necessary.

Metaphors are an important determinant in national discourse as "they are used as cognitive tools: people think in metaphors and conceptualize reality via metaphors." (Saric, 2015) People often try to internalize more complex and abstract ideas by comparing them to the familiar and tangible ones. Personification of countries is one of the most widely used cognitive strategies employed. It involves attributing human characteristics and roles to countries, which aims at creating a stronger emotional connection with otherwise abstract and obscure entities. That is why participant easily become emotionally attached to nations and this attachment precisely creates a nation's reality. (Saric, 2015) As discussed above, the Soviet government had widely used family metaphors to make the nations of the republics more emotionally tied to the Soviet Government. "Brother nations" was a commonly used expression in the Soviet Union, and Russia inherited the habit of using it. This metaphor recently received a negative connotation for implying the idea of Russia's expansionist efforts. Under the guise of Big Brother Russia tries to intervene into the internal affairs of the Soviet successor states. Russia realizes with

difficulty that the USSR ceased to exist a long time ago and that post-Communist states are not its sisters and brothers but independent and self-sufficient states. (A'Becket, 2012)

Another interesting thing is the distinction between the Soviet Government and Soviet Russia in relation to Armenia in the 1985 history textbook for university students. One of the chapters was discussing humanitarian, economic, and social aid to the devastated people of the First Armenian Republic. And surprisingly instead of naming the ruling regime and referring to the agent as the Soviet Government or the Communist Party, the textbook constantly highlighted Soviet Russia as the executor. This created a “perfect” image of Russians, who are always ready to help, which after going through a number of challenges, eventually preserved in the perceptions of the Armenians.

However, Armenians' attitude towards the Russians, and consequently towards the Soviet State changed drastically after the events that took place in Soviet Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh. Following the conflict, the first thing that Armenians expected was their Big Brother's, Russia's assistance, which never they never received. The situation made Armenians re-examine the privileges that they endowed Russians with. The image of an ideal brother was broken, and Armenians could not trust Russia again. This is shown in the second poster below, which is titled “The deadly indifference of the guardian angel.” The Armenian's guardian angel turned completely indifferent towards the atrocities that were going on their land. This shift in perception led Armenians to reevaluate their relationship with Russia, as the perceived indifference during the conflict shattered their trust in their former ally.



Pic 2. "The deadly indifference of the guardian angel." EVN Report. Author unknown

The Soviet Legacies

Imperial legacies and the institutional norms of the Soviet Union were the compass which was then used by post-communist states. The way people perceived the Soviet State profoundly influenced their subsequent political, social, and economic trajectory. Poorly protected human and civil rights, tendency to adopt an autocratic regime upon gaining independence, distortion of the legal system, absence of the separation of power, corruption are all included in the Soviet legacy that was transferred to post-communist countries after its dissolution (Carey and Raciborski, 2004) Additionally, it is

important to highlight that Post-Communist countries faced the problem of state building during the transition period following the collapse of communism. The peculiarity of post-communist state-formation is that the state was not built anew, from scratch, and the pace of the process compared with their Western countries was characterized with unprecedented rapidity. (Grzymala-Busse et al, 2002) This suggests that people's perspectives on the state still carried the traces of its Soviet predecessor. The anarchy ensuing the collapse of the union, mass turmoil, unprecedented rate of crime was the result of the blurred state boundaries; confusion prevailed as people were trying to understand where the Soviet state finished and the Armenian one began.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the complex relationship between the Armenians and the Soviet State reveals a complicated interplay of obeying under the pressure, adapting, and eventually resisting. The resilience was demonstrated in Armenians' cautious approval and acceptance of the Soviet government, while still strongly preserving the elements of Armenian identity. The Soviet State, perceived as a protector, representative, and a provider played a major role in shaping the sociopolitical development of Armenia. In addition to elucidating their experiences within the Soviet Union, an understanding of the subtleties of Armenians' perspectives of the Soviet state offers important insights into the complexity of post-Soviet transitions and nation-building processes.

Introduction:

The Soviet Union, as well as its Communist ideology, has had a lot of influence on many different aspects of people's lives, including but not limited to social, political, cultural, and personal lives. One of the aspects that will be examined in this part of the paper is the influence of Communism on family structures and people's perception of family. Even though families may seem unimportant or not so influential to the political or economic side of the government, families are fundamental to society and have a significant influence on its stability, values, and organizational system. Of course, families are essential in interpersonal interactions, but they also play a significant role in the state's social, economic, and political dynamics. States have always understood and taken advantage of the potential of family ties to achieve national objectives and maintain and promote cultural and social unity. Family and state have an interdependent relationship that goes beyond simple governance and involves a complex interplay of shared identities, ideals, and mutual obligations. The family is the basic unit of society, representing its members' beliefs, customs, values, traditions, and goals. Strong family relationships bring a sense of unity and belonging that goes beyond personal interests, adding to the social values of the society. At the same time, in the context of the state, families are the main socializing force in the state, passing down civic virtues, traditions, ideologies, and cultural and moral values to the next generation. Therefore, the resilience and general well-being of the state are directly impacted by the stability and unity of families.

It is also important to mention that families play a crucial role in the state's demographic and economic stability as well. Families are the primary unit of reproduction, they contribute to population growth, labor force participation, and human capital development. Therefore, healthy family structures mean a healthy, productive, and resilient workforce, which in its turn is

essential for economic growth and prosperity. Additionally, families contribute to the redistribution of resources and social welfare, provide care and support for vulnerable members, and alleviate the burden on state institutions.

Having said all of this, it is important to look deeper into the influences that have the potential to change family structures and dynamics. In the context of Soviet Union and post-Soviet Union societies, Communism played a big role in shaping our views on politics and economy as well as on family structure and dynamics. Therefore, this research will concentrate on the influence of Communism on family structures, women's role in society, marriage, childcare, its failure, and specifically, how it was perceived and dealt with in Soviet Armenia. Given the lack of a more thorough study on specifically Armenia, this paper aims to investigate the Armenian case of how Communism influenced family structures in Soviet Armenia.

Literature Review:

Marxist Ideology and The Structure of the Family:

Both works of Kollontai (1920), and Costa-i-Font, J., & Nicińska, A. (2023) offer a Marxist ideological analysis regarding the family under Soviet communism. Kollontai's work is divided into four sections: (1) Communism and the Family, (2) Women's Role in Production: Its Effect upon the Family, (3) Housework Ceases to be Necessary, and (4) The State is Responsible for the upbringing of children. He discusses how the traditional nuclear family was changing and collapsing under capitalism and the rise of communism and why housework was no longer profitable or beneficial for the state.

Costa-i-Font and Nicińska's research investigates the demand for family insurance under Soviet communism and analyzes the impact of family insurance on family support networks in

Communist countries. It offers a more profound understanding of the connection between Marxist principles and social welfare systems.

Sociological Analysis:

Fairchild (1937) and Mudd (1948) give a sociological perspective on the Soviet Union family structures and dynamics. Fairchild concentrates and analyses the crucial effects of state interventions on family roles and relationships. More specifically, the impact of Soviet policies, regulations, and ideology imposed upon families. She writes about changes (that includes changes that happened due to legislations) in marriage, divorce, childcare, gender roles, abortion rights and more.

Mudd examines the shifts in family dynamics and changes in traditional family structures that occurred after World War II. Mudd examines the changes in family structures through Soviet-imposed policies, socially accepted norms, and more. Mudd also writes about marriage, divorce, childcare, gender roles, housework, etc.

Historical and Anthropological Examination of Family Structures in Armenia:

These Papers examine the structure of families, kinships, norms, and values of Soviet Armenia. Matossian and Kilbourne (1962) examine the family from a historical perspective, showing how Soviet policies and communism were received by people in Armenia and how it influenced them.

Platz (2000) examines the Armenian identity from an anthropological perspective. It also looks at the interplay of state ideologies, accepted norms, traditions, and cultural identity. Platz also demonstrates how, in soviet Armenia, kinship interfered with socio-political narratives and situations.

Research Question:

Armenia, being a small country in the Caucasus, is quite understudied. Even when it comes to Soviet Armenia, the information that we have still needs to be analyzed to have a better understanding of our past and even our present. This research paper aims to examine specifically how soviet Communism changed people's perception of family and its structure, to understand what new legislations affected people, what they were about, and, more importantly, what were some of the underlying reasons for which Communism failed to reach its goal of a family losing its meaning in Soviet Armenia.

Methodology:

The methodology for conducting the research was mainly qualitative. Primary sources and interviews were used to understand the topic and collect data for further analysis. Original research includes an analysis of 2 propaganda posters and seven interviews.

The first propaganda poster, which was created in 1920, was taken from the website of the International Museum of Women. The second propaganda poster was created seven years later, in 1927, and taken from the Saint Petersburg City Museum webpage. Unfortunately, the authors of both of the posters are unknown.

The seven interviews were done with my grandparents and older neighbors. The purpose of taking interviews with my grandparents and neighbors was to get honest answers from simple people who lived during the Soviet Union. The oldest participant in the interview is 80, and the youngest is 68. The questions were simple about their memories of how people treated each other, the role of the family, etc.

Research and Findings:

Women and Communism

Throughout centuries, the structure of the family, in general, has changed many times, going from the standard model of a joint family where the mother is the head of the family that consists of her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, who lived and worked all together, to the patriarchal nuclear family where the head of the family is the father whose will is the law for all the other members that includes him, the mother and the children (Kollontai, 1920). Apart from culturally accepted norms and beliefs, a significant influence on these changes has been the political systems (such as capitalism) and ideologies promoted by the state. During the existence of the Soviet Union, many different family-related regulations, laws, statutes, and policies were adopted that significantly contributed to changing and modifying family structures. “Bolshevist iconoclasm handled with equal vigor and antagonism the Czarist government, capitalist economy, the Greek Orthodox Church, and the authoritative family” (Fairchild, 1937, p. 619). Like all other institutions of the Soviet Union, the Soviet family went through a revolution of its own that started not long after the Revolution and Civil War by deinstitutionalizing the family. On December 19 and 20, 1917, decrees were signed by Lenin called “The Dissolution of Marriage” and “Civil Marriage, Children and Registration,” which dissolved the “Czarist code which had given headship to the husband, including not only citizenship, nationality, residence and name but power of decision in all matters of family concern, the education of children, as well as control of property. In its place, the new law put equality of husband and wife, separation of property, and mutual responsibility of each for support of the other and of children. Marriage and divorce were made free by the simple process of registration, with divorce available upon the wish of only one party” (Fairchild, 1937, p. 620). These new laws, along with the Soviet Union’s communist ideology that promoted all its citizens, including women, to work liberated women. Women were given equal rights to men in all

spheres of economic, state, cultural, social, and political life. “Economic independence of women...increases steadily. In 1935, 33 percent of all employed persons were women, and over 65 percent of the able-bodied women of working age were employed outside the home. Equal pay for equal work has not yet given them equality of earnings with men, but the increase of women’s skill and experience moves them steadily upward in earning power and economic responsibility” (Fairchild, 1937, p.624). The point of these changes was to liberate women and ensure they can find support in the collective and society, not from the individual man. It was this female liberation, protection by the state, and the spread of female labor that played a crucial role in the change (some may even say radical change) of Soviet family life.

Previously, women did all the housework and more. They were busy cooking, cleaning, sewing/creating clothes and garments, knitting stockings, making candles, preparing pickles, jams, and more. All of this work was necessary and beneficial not only for the family but also for the state and its national economy since women also produced such things as cloth, thread, butter, etc., which had value as commodities that could be sold on the market. “The interests of the whole nation were involved, for the more work the woman and the other members of the family put into making cloth, leather, and wool (the surplus of which was sold in the neighboring market), the greater the economic prosperity of the country as a whole” (Kollontai, 1920). However, capitalism brought radical changes since everything that the women in the family formerly produced was now manufactured on a mass scale in workshops and factories. Women no longer had time to take care of everything since they started working in different factories. The communist ideology not only promoted and pushed people to work but also provided women with everything possible to help them work outside their homes.

In addition, a family could no longer be sustained with only one partner’s salary. Therefore, the housework became a waste of time, which meant a waste of money. The household chores became

unproductive and useless not only for the family but for the community as a whole. That is when the collective housekeeping started to emerge and develop. Communal kitchens, central laundries, and public restaurants were organized. These were times when, even under capitalism, in great cities of Europe, such establishments started to appear more and more. But, under capitalism, only rich people were able to afford those establishments, whereas, under communism, everyone was able to eat in the communal kitchens and dining rooms since their purpose was to free people, especially women, from “domestic slavery” or take the “burden” away from real, true communist, Soviet women to help them to work outside of their homes. “It is not surprising, therefore, that family ties should loosen and the family begin to fall apart. The circumstances that held the family together no longer exist. The family is ceasing to be necessary either to its members or to the nation as a whole.” The new laws with the communist ideology of “everyone should work” “resulted in a very considerable amount of family disorganization in early years, even where war and famine had not already produced a similar result” (Fairchild, 1937, p.622). The family became just a primary economic unit of society and the supporter and educator of young children.

Children and Childcare

If communism was considered the bright future of all mankind, then children were considered the bright future of communism. Their care and upbringing had always been a top priority of the Soviet Union. The purpose of the Soviet laws regarding family and marriage was always about maximum personal freedom in family and sex relations, consonant with the stability of reproduction and child care. According to the decrees signed by Lenin on December 19 and 20, 1917, children born out of wedlock or via simple cohabitation now had the same rights to parental assistance, care, and support as those born in a legally recognized marriage, as the illegitimacy of children was abolished. The parents were obligated to support equally for all children, whether born in marriage or not, and all children had equal

rights of inheritance. Even after ten years, when on January 1st of 1927, a “New Code of Laws on Marriage, the Family and Wardship” was adopted, the freedom of relationships was still left the same and considered as a matter of private concern and the only thing that this new code changed was eliminating loopholes for interpretation to “protect the interest of the mother and especially of the children, and placing the spouses on an equal footing in respect to property and the education of the children... The law was explicit regarding the obligation for the care of children. This, indeed, was and is the primary purpose of marriage regulations in the Soviet Union. Responsibility belonged to both parents and was divided equally, although subject to their own agreement. In case of divorce, lacking an agreement, the court has awarded the child to the parent it has adjudged most capable of its education and support” (Fairchild, 1937, p.621). Even in some parts of the Soviet Union, in the event that the child’s paternity was uncertain, collective paternity could have been pronounced, in which case all potential fathers shared in support.

Just like in the case of creating all the necessary conditions to liberate women from housework to help them concentrate on working outside of their homes, the same thing was done to help them with childcare and pregnancy. The child and the whole family’s physical needs were cared for by creating public restaurants, delicatessen services, public laundries, factory kitchens, and even public baths. Even in this aspect of life, the state came to replace the family and took nearly all the responsibility (apart from some financial support) of raising children that previously was fully on the parents. Starting with pregnancy, there were many consultation centers for mother’s and child’s care, maternity hospitals, mother and child clinics, and more just to help women have an easier pregnancy, childbirth, and care of the infant. For children a little bit older there were many nurseries and kindergartens that took care of children during working hours. “Official data show 60 percent of the young children of working mothers in key industries accommodated in nurseries in 1932. The resources were expected to accommodate all

the young children of these women in 1937. In 1932, over 600,000 permanent places in creches were available in town and country, and over 5,000,000 seasonal ones were set up in the country. The second Five-Year Plan proposed to double the numbers before 1937” (Fairchild, 1937, p.626).

The state also took responsibility for the children’s education. Children could start getting public education at preschools as early as four. “These institutions for preschool care were open to all children, with preference given to children of working mothers... Approximately 45 per cent of all children were cared for in 1941 in seasonal or other nurseries in the rural districts and more in the cities... These nurseries and kindergartens served three or four carefully balanced meals per day to all children in addition to furnishing complete health care. They attempted to condition the children to’ kindness, security, and group solidarity” (Mudd, 1948, p.7). Not only was public school education free, but higher education was tuition-free, and the state provided students with extensive government stipends as well.

In addition to these, there were many public spaces created for everyone, but especially for children, that included parks, playgrounds, libraries, and theaters of all kinds. These places hosted recreational and cultural events as well as communal functions. Programs run by the Communist Party, such as those for Young Pioneers and Komsomols, provide entertainment for young people of all ages. One of the fundamental aspects of the Soviet Union’s communist ideology was the importance of education, upbringing, and social education for the future generation. In all of the facilities that children attended, such as kindergartens, Young Pioneers, Komsomols, playgrounds, gardens, etc., children spent time under the supervision of qualified educators who taught them the values of the ‘ideal future communist.’ The state took responsibility for raising the children nearly from the time they were conceived. The ideology was that children didn’t belong to anyone “the worker-mother must learn not to differentiate between yours and mine; she must remember that there are only our children, the children of Russia’s communist workers ... and women should not be afraid of having children. Society needs

more workers and rejoices at the birth of every child. You do not have to worry about the future of your child; your child will know neither hunger nor cold. Communist society takes care of every child and guarantees both him and his mother material and moral support. Society will feed, bring up, and educate the child” (Kollontai, 1920).

All of these changed the structure of the family fundamentally from a paternalistic, authoritative family to one with a high degree of individualization. “Dependence upon such units of social organization as family, church or voluntary society had been in some measure transferred to government” (Fairchild, 1937, p.628). Family was no longer a necessity. The domestic economy stopped being profitable for the state, and all those ties and housework became a distraction for workers who were doing more useful, productive, and, for the individual, more profitable labor since it was a necessity for a person to work.

Communism Failed to Destroy the Family

This, the ‘disappearance’ of the family or abolishment of the traditional family, was one of the main aims of Soviet communism. However, despite the expectations that communism would weaken family ties, it often actually strengthened families. According to research, individuals (especially women and in regions with distinct cultural backgrounds) exposed to communism were more likely to prefer family support for both financial and non-financial reasons when needed (Costa-i-Font & Nicińska, 2023). One of the reasons for this was the collapse of trust in public institutions under communism, which made people seek support from their family networks. “Consistent with Fukuyama’s (1996) ‘paradox of family values’, whereby low-trust societies are characterised by large families exhibiting strong internal ties. Consistent with this, we confirm that the probability of agreeing with the statement that “most people can be trusted” declined on average by 11% (19%) due to exposure to communism” (Costa-i-Font & Nicińska, 2023). This deepened the reliance on familial support and emphasized the

significance of kinship ties in communist societies. In addition to weakening trust in government institutions, Soviet communism strengthened preferences for family support by abolishing wealth accumulation. “That is, the Soviet communist regime increased not only preferences for social insurance (Alesina and Fuchs-Schündeln 2007) but the demand for family support (insurance), suggesting that family structures are very much endogenous to political regimes” (Costa-i-Font & Nicińska, 2023). Despite variations in the intensity of these effects (and specific to the culture/region reasons), across different regions, overall, people chose family structures as a source of social stability and support in the face of political and economic uncertainty.

Propaganda Posters

One of the most widely used propaganda tools in the Soviet Union, especially in Soviet Russia, was propaganda posters. The liberation of women, the “call” for women to enter the workforce, the role of family, even the ideal soviet woman, and so much more could be found on posters made during communist Soviet Russia.



(Fig. 3) (What the October Revolution Gave Worker and Peasant Women, October 1920, international museum of women)

One of the first posters about women in the workforce is called (fig. 3) “What the October Revolution Gave Worker and Peasant Women” and was created in October 1920. The poster depicts a working woman in a blacksmith’s apron, with a hammer in her left hand and a sickle on the ground at her feet. With her right hand, she is pointing towards different buildings marked as maternity home, home for mother and child, library, kindergarten, women workers; club and so on. This answers the question of what the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks, have given people. In addition to this, just like the majority of Soviet Union posters about women in the workforce (and children), it has a huge bright sun on the background that illustrates the Soviet Communism “famous” phrase that “Communism is the bright future of mankind.”

This is also a very interesting poster since it is one of the earliest posters depicting a woman in a blacksmith’s apron as a blacksmith or blacksmith’s helper. Women weren’t usually involved in blacksmithing, and even though after the start of World War 1, they had to step in and do all kinds of jobs that men did previously, they still weren’t depicted in any posters as working women predominantly male and considered jobs. This, of course, can be interpreted as showing that women are strong and independent.

However, when we go a bit deeper, it is important to mention that the blacksmith plays a very interesting role in Slavic folklore. There was even a song written about the incredible powers of the blacksmith, which was sung after the revolution. According to the folklore, blacksmiths have incredible, sacred powers. Therefore, if we look at this

poster from a symbolic perspective, those symbols usually associated with men can now be associated with a Bolshevik woman, making them more significant, strong, independent, and even heroic to a certain extent.



Fig. 4) Let's liberate women from kitchen slavery to work in socialist industry. Let's organize our communal kitchen. 1927, The City Museum, Saint Petersburg

Another propaganda poster for the liberation of women says (Fig. 4), “Let’s liberate women from kitchen servitude/slavery to work in the socialist industry. Let’s organize our communal kitchen,” and it was created in 1927. This is another that not only aims at liberating women, sowing people that housework is something useless to a certain extent, even humiliating and degrading since housework is compared to slavery, but it also, in a way, affects the perception of the family. The upper left part of the poster shows a family of three.

However, even from how they are depicted, we can say they are very separate individuals. The usual love, connectedness, and unity that can be seen in nearly any depiction of family is lacking in here.

There are many more posters that are usually in bright colors, indicating that communism is the right answer for a bright future. Women are usually depicted as workers or workers and mothers at the same time, showing that it is possible to do both, and not only possible but also plausible and of course, the state will always help raise the baby.

There were also many educational posters that helped spread information about how to care for an infant. Although marriage and family were generally deemed unnecessary, children were always very welcomed and protected. Even in the posters, children are always depicted happy and in bright colors since they were the children of communism.

The Armenian Case

All of the laws related to family, marriage, divorce, and more, stated in the earlier part of the paper, were also adopted in Soviet Armenia. The emancipation and liberation of women and involving them in the workforce, politics, and more was a policy that Soviet Russia wanted to implement not only in Russia but also around the whole Soviet Union, including Soviet Armenia. “They also sought to “emancipate” Armenian women

by educating them, encouraging them to take jobs outside the home, and by drawing them into the arena of public life” (Matossian & Kilbourne, 1962, p. 66). The Communist Party sponsored and established numerous institutions as well as groups for people, especially women of all ages, in order to promote communist ideologies and fight old customs that went against communist ideologies. An example of such an institution, which was also the first of its type, was “The Women’s Division of the Communist Party (Zhenotdel, known in Armenia as Kinbazhin). The Kinbazhin organizers enlisted as aides delegatki, women elected by their fellow women workers on the job, or in villages. The meeting of delegates, or delegatskie sobranie, was the official representative body of women, as women... Kinbazhin sought to indoctrinate women with Communist principles, to enroll them in the party, to train them for government service, and to help them advance on the job... Kinbazhin assisted in the prosecution of cases concerning the establishment of paternity, alimony claims, and the non-support of children. It gave aid to abandoned women and children. It established nurseries and playgrounds to care for the children of working mothers, as well as public dining rooms and cooperative workshops to give employment to women and girls who had come into Erevan from the countryside, in order to save them ‘from falling into a dishonorable way of life’” (Matossian & Kilbourne, 1962, p. 66). Kinbazhin was later replaced by the Commission for the Improvement of the Way of Life of Women (in Armenian Kanants Kentsaghe Barelavogh Hantznazhoghove or K.K.B.H), which had similar functions to Kinbazhin.

For younger people, there were the Komsomol, Pioneerers, Octobrist organizations, and more, the purpose of all of which was to promote communist ideologies and (as already mentioned above) to fight old customs that went against communist ideologies. In order to achieve this goal of eliminating customs and traditions that went against communist ideologies, different means were implemented. For example, “certain traditional practices, such as arranged marriages, they attacked with legislation” (Matossian & Kilbourne, 1962, p. 66). Because of legislation created against certain traditions, people were accused of committing “traditional crimes,” and the punishment for this ranged from having to pay fines to even being sentenced to two years.

However, even though there was a struggle between the new way of life and the old way, communist ideology didn't succeed in eliminating the family's importance in Soviet Armenia. “The family and the home have been sometimes considered a locus of “resistance” against the Soviet state, particularly with respect to ethnic minorities; where structural, binary oppositions have characterized the relationship between the home and the state, such as public/private; formal/informal; official/unofficial; traditional/modern national/soviet;” (Platz, 2000, p.30). From the very beginning, the traditional family in Soviet Armenia became one of the biggest factors for conservative resistance to the new Communist regime. “The effects of Soviet policies on Armenian family customs and on the position of Armenian women were thus rather limited. One visitor to Soviet Armenia in the early Thirties stated, “In Armenia... old forms of marriage and family life still

prevail.” Another visitor declared, “Men and women have equal rights before the law, but the Armenian traditional way of life continues inside the family.” The relatively low divorce rate, the continuance of ethnic endogamy, the prevalence of secret abortion, and the persistence of “traditional crimes” also serve as evidence of the continuity of traditional Armenian culture” (Matossian & Kilbourne, 1962, p. 73).

When it comes to Soviet Armenia, it is important to mention that when Armenia became part of the Soviet Union, there were many genocide refugees, people lived in poverty, and there was a huge problem with national security since Armenia was under constant attacks. Therefore, while talking about Soviet Armenian’s beliefs, perception, etc., it is also very important to keep in mind that people went through something very horrific and traumatic and had to think about survival and preservation of identity for at least the last decade. Already at the beginning, there was a lot of resistance towards Soviet Communism ideology. “The Turkish Armenian refugees, who constituted about one-fourth of the population of Soviet Armenia, were particularly unamenable to soviet influence. An emigre reports that the refugees in the Alagiaz area were almost all anti-Soviet... It was reported in 1929 that the refugees had a “deep sense of private property,” which ran counter to the principles of the soviet regime” (Matossian & Kilbourne, 1962, p.61). Moreover, talks about the Armenian Genocide were forbidden in the Soviet Union, which meant that people had a higher chance of growing more resentful towards the Soviet Union for its dismissal of Armenians’ past. In addition to, the Soviet’s

dismissal of the history combined with “Soviet favoritism toward the Turks in land distribution made it especially difficult for the Armenian refugees to accept the soviet regime” (Matossian & Kilbourne, 1962, p.61).

Another factor that played a huge role in the preservation of the Armenian identity and its traditions, customs, and norms that included the importance of family was the unity of people that came not only from their shared horrific past that reinforced the need to preserve Armenian identity and traditions but also because for survival during hard times, communities and kin relationships were essential. Even after joining the Soviet Union, life for the Soviet Armenians was still full of challenges. For example, at the end of the 1920s, the influx of population from the villages into the capital and other big cities was so high that it caused a severe housing shortage, and “no one in Erevan had the legal right to more than two square meters of living space - the same amount as was allowed for churchyard graves... At the end of 1926, only 5% of all urban inhabitants had access to running water at home and only 24.4% had electricity at home” (Matossian & Kilbourne, 1962, p.61). Even if we skip those first years, the final years of the Soviet Union and the beginning of post-soviet Armenia are more commonly known and referred to as dark and cold years (in Armenian *mut u curt tariner*). People didn't have access or had limited access (a couple of hours a day) to electricity and water. During the interview with my grandparents and some of their friends (born in 1940-1950), they told me that the family that included not only the immediate but also the extended family was one of the most, if

not the most important thing during those years. Kinship helped people to survive.

Everyone helped each other. Family members and neighbors would come together and eat together; during cold months, people would get together in the homes of those who had wood (to burn) to get warm.

Furthermore, something that can be heard often in conversations about those dark and cold years is that people would often steal electricity. To answer the question of whether people stole electricity from their neighbors, all of those I interviewed (7 people) immediately rejected it with a sort of disbelief and said that neighbors shared even the electricity that was stolen from the state (different factories).

The resistance towards the Soviet Union and communist ideology was so strong that people would associate the term “state” (provided by the state or made of the state. In Armenian petakan) as something “not private, official or even bad” (Platz, 2000, p.32).

People also started saying that there was the “Armenian way” of doing things, which meant it was the opposite of the “Soviet Union way.” The “Armenian way” of doing things is an expression that is still widely popular even today. It is usually used to describe doing something or achieving something with the help of kin (for example, finding a job with the help of a relative), which directly went against Soviet Communism’s “desire” to take away loyalty and connection in families and put them into the state. Additionally, the term “Armenian way” was also perceived as the better, more

right way of doing things, which again points to the domination of the family over the state.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, Communism had a huge impact on the family structures and the way people perceive family. The research on Soviet communism's influence on family dynamics in Armenia reveals a complex interplay of ideological, socio-economic, cultural, historical and even circumstantial factors. Family lives and the influence of Soviet Union on Armenia still needs to be understood better because even today we can see the influences it has left on our family structures and perceptions.

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