



MUSICAL NARRATIVES OF RESISTANCE: ARMENIAN REVOLUTIONARY  
SONGS IN THE ARMENIAN YOUTH FEDERATION OF WASHINGTON, D.C.

by

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## Dedication

To my parents, Sevag and Anna Yaralian.

## Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank members of the AYF Washington, D.C. “Ani” Chapter for welcoming me into their community and for sharing their experiences with me. I have truly enjoyed being part of the chapter and am grateful for newfound friendships. I would also like to thank my advisor, Dr. Siv B. Lie, for her support and thoughtful guidance throughout this entire process. It has been a pleasure to learn from her. I also wish to thank Drs. Alyssa Mathias and Larry Witzleben for their generous feedback. Thank you to my classmates at the University of Maryland, and especially Ilsa Yin and Kajwan Ziaoddini for their friendship and support. I am grateful to my parents, Sevag and Anna Yaralian, for being my #1 supporters, and to my sister Lilia for being with me every step of the way.

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## Introduction

On January 1, 2024, Artsakh ceased to exist. On September 19, 2023, nine months into the blockade of the Lachin Corridor, the only road that connects Artsakh to Armenia, Azerbaijan launched a full-scale attack on Artsakh and reclaimed the rest of the territory that had been Armenian-governed for the past three decades. On September 28<sup>th</sup>, the president of Artsakh, Samvel Shahramanyan, signed a decree to dissolve the Republic of Artsakh by January 1, 2024 (Ebel 2023). While the Azerbaijani government gave assurances that the Armenian population would be allowed to “re-integrate” and live in peace, *Artsakhtsies* (people from Artsakh) did not believe that this would be possible. This resulted in the mass exodus of Armenians from Artsakh to Armenia. The loss of Artsakh is what many Armenians feared but had expected since the beginning of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War on September 27, 2020.

The signing of the decree took place a couple of weeks before Armenian-American singer Karnig Sargissian, who is known for his performances of Armenian revolutionary songs, was set to perform in Bethesda, Maryland. A few months after the concert took place, I spoke with Areni Margossian, a member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Washington, D.C. “Sebouh” Chapter, and asked, with everything that had taken place in Artsakh, why she thought it was important for Armenians of Washington, D.C. to gather and sing Armenian revolutionary songs. She explained:

I know that there was a consideration, like some people were thinking: should we have the Karnig Sargissian concert when something so devastating has

happened? The answer that the *gomideh*<sup>1</sup> came up with, that I agree with, was “absolutely.” The event became a fundraiser for Artsakh, and it wasn’t a *barahantes* [dance party]. You’re not supposed to dance to revolutionary songs anyway. It was very somber and commemorative. It wasn’t joyful, but it was a moment of self-reflection. Yes, we just witnessed one of the most devastating parts of our history, but we were all there together listening to these songs. It’s important not to get overcome by the devastation and to realize that we come from a history of great strength and to remember and channel that. (Areni Margossian, personal communication, 21 January 2024)

Through formal interviews and informal conversations with other youth in Washington, D.C., I have realized that, for many, singing Armenian revolutionary songs does not simply enable youth to become conscious of their collective histories. These songs allow them to internalize the history of their ancestors, thus contributing to their sense of cultural belonging.

This thesis will explore the role of Armenian revolutionary songs among youth in the Armenian diaspora, with a focus on interpretations of this music among members of the Armenian Youth Federation “Ani”<sup>2</sup> Chapter of Washington, D.C. Throughout the thesis, I will demonstrate how these songs have been transformed over the years, especially on the frontlines of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War and during protests led by Armenian youth in D.C. to commemorate the 1915 Armenian genocide. I will explore how these songs are performed, modifications of lyrics, and changes in their meaning that index the contemporaneous events taking place in the homeland.

Although I discuss how the meaning of these songs has been transformed through their usage in different periods of Armenian history, there are core aspects

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<sup>1</sup> Areni is referring to the ARF “Sebouh” *Gomideh*. *Gomideh* translates to committee.

<sup>2</sup> Also known as the “City of 1,001 Churches,” the city of Ani was the capital of medieval Armenia.

that have remained stable over time. For many Armenians in the diaspora, these songs are impactful because of their historical weight and the legacies they hold. They create narratives of Armenian history from over one hundred years ago to the present day, allowing many individuals to imagine themselves as Armenian in both a historical and contemporary sense. This research brings a unique contribution to ethnomusicological conceptions of diaspora studies, politics, intergenerational trauma, conflict and violence, war, protest, and genocide.

### *History of the Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh Dispute*

Nagorno-Karabakh was a predominantly Armenian-populated autonomous region established within the borders of Azerbaijan in 1923 under the former Soviet Union. The area's inhabitants traced their lineage back to the founding of the Armenian Empire in 331 BCE. According to Joseph R. Masih and Robert O. Krikorian, "on February 20, 1988, the Soviet of the People's Deputies of Nagorno-Karabakh officially requested union with Armenia" (Masih and Krikorian 1999, 5). "The City Council of Stepanakert, capital of Nagorno Karabakh, adopted a resolution requesting that Moscow adjust the borders between Armenia and Azerbaijan to make Karabakh part of Armenia" (Libaridian 2004, 206). With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Nagorno-Karabakh, known as Artsakh by its Armenian inhabitants, declared its independence from Azerbaijan in 1992 and aligned itself with Armenia. Azerbaijan declared the region its own, resulting in full-scale fighting. By the end of the First Nagorno-Karabakh War (1988-1994), Armenia gained control of Karabakh, and a Russian-brokered ceasefire ended the war in 1994, leaving Karabakh

independent. However, during the next thirty years continuous violations of the ceasefire ensued with both sides blaming the other. The Four Day War broke out in April of 2016, which up until that point had been the most extreme clash between Azerbaijani and Armenian forces. In 2020, the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War erupted, this time resulting in Azerbaijan regaining most of its lost territory and ending under another Russian-brokered ceasefire with an Azerbaijani victory. On September 19, 2023, Azerbaijani forces launched a military offensive on the Republic of Artsakh. Within two days, Azerbaijan regained full control of Artsakh, leading to the forced exodus of *Artsakhtsies* from the region.<sup>3</sup> The history of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute has been documented by several scholars (see Suny 1993, de Waal 2003, Libaridian 2004).

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<sup>3</sup> The Global Conflict Tracker provides a brief chronology of events: <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/nagorno-karabakh-conflict>.



Republic of Armenia

Figure 1. Map of Republic of Armenia. Source: Suny 1993.

*The Armenian Youth Federation and Armenian Revolutionary Federation*

Founded in 1933, the Armenian Youth Federation, commonly referred to as the AYF, is the political youth organization of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), also referred to as the *Dashnaktsutyun*. The AYF Washington, D.C. “Ani” Chapter was founded on February 20, 1942, and is one of the sixty-two AYF chapters worldwide. The *Dashnaktsutyun* is a political party that was established in Tbilisi, Georgia in 1890 and its members support the ideology called

*Hai Tahd*, also commonly referred to as the Armenian Cause. *Hai Tahd* is defined as the pursuit of a free, independent, and united Armenia. In her book *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century*, historian Louise Nalbandian provides a comprehensive study of revolutionary activities among Armenians throughout the nineteenth century (see Nalbandian 1963).

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation was instrumental in the creation of the First Republic of Armenia in 1918, until it became part of the Soviet Union in 1922. As Armenians fled the Ottoman Empire because of the genocide (1915-1923), “the center of gravity for western Armenian life [shifted] away from Istanbul” and Beirut “became the political and intellectual hub of Armenians in the diaspora (Mathias 2021, 53). Ethnomusicologist Sylvia Angelique Alajaji discusses Armenian diasporic life in Lebanon and how singing hymns and Armenian patriotic songs allowed Armenians to embrace their Armenianness. She explains that “many of these efforts were put into place shortly after World War I, when Armenians fleeing the large-scale massacres taking place in the Anatolian villages of the Ottoman Empire began to arrive in significant numbers in Lebanon” (Alajaji 2015, 85). In her article “Exilic Becomings: Post Genocide Armenian Music in Lebanon,” Alajaji refers to Nicola Migliorino’s *(Re)Constructing Armenia in Lebanon and Syria: Ethno-Cultural Diversity and the State in the Aftermath of a Refugee Crisis* and explains:

By 1958, the Armenian community in Lebanon could boast sixty schools; fifty-seven newspapers, periodicals, and dailies; three political parties; and numerous churches and community organizations (Migliorino 2008:69, 116)...this nationalizing mission also manifested itself at the cultural level, most significantly via community choirs that formed shortly after 1915 and

were affiliated either directly or indirectly with the powerful political parties that presided over the community (Alajaji 2013, 241).

The three main Armenian political parties, including the *Dashnaks*,<sup>4</sup> relocated from the Ottoman Empire to Beirut, which, at that time, became the center for identity formation among Armenians in the diaspora. Alajaji explains that songs produced in Lebanon were “vehemently nationalistic” (2015, 90). Armenian choirs played an important role in “the patriotic mobilizations of the political parties through the singing of nationalistic songs (2015, 91). Sung in the Armenian language, these patriotic songs are emblematic of the homeland and its heroes and have expanded throughout the Armenian diaspora in the United States, including the AYPF “Ani” Chapter in Washington, D.C.

My interest in Armenian revolutionary songs began in 2020 when I watched recordings of volunteer soldier and musician Arthur Khachents’ renditions on his Instagram account. When deciding on a topic for my thesis, I knew that I wanted to work on Armenian revolutionary songs and thought that it would be fascinating to explore these songs in relation to the members of the Armenian Youth Federation in Washington, D.C. This thesis is predicated on conceptions of nationality and how Armenian youth in Washington, D.C. maintain their senses of Armenian identity through music. In *Essays on Nationalism*, Carlton J. H. Hayes explains that a nationality is “a group of people who speak either the same language or closely related dialects, who cherish common historical tradition, and who constitute or think they constitute a distinct cultural society” (Hayes 1926, 5). In his book *Nationalism*:

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<sup>4</sup> Members of the *Dashnaktsutyun*.

*A Religion*, he defines nationalism as “a fusion of patriotism with a consciousness of nationality” (Hayes 1960, 2). There is a strong sense of patriotism among members of the Armenian Youth and Armenian Revolutionary Federations with the collective belief that members of these organizations will save Armenia and Artsakh.

### *Studies of Armenian Music and History*

To analyze the transformations of revolutionary songs over time, I draw on scholarship on the history of Armenian revolutionary songs. In *Hay Zhoghovrdakan Razmi Yev Zinvori Erger (Armenian Folk War and Soldiers' Songs)*, A.S. Ghaziyani provides a brief introduction and historical context of *fedayee* songs including “Zartir Lao” (“Awake My Son”), where a mother urges her child to arise and defend his homeland. In *Hayots Tseghaspanutyun Azdetsutiune Erg-Erazhshtutyun Vrah (The Impact of the Armenian Genocide on Music)*, Avo Katerjian provides lyrics and sociopolitical contexts of over two hundred Armenian songs that were influenced by the events of the 1915 Armenian genocide. These songs range from works arranged by priest and ethnomusicologist Komitas Vardapet to contemporary and folk songs produced post-genocide, including “Gini Lits” (“Pour the Wine”), which is about the assassination of Talaat Pasha, one of the key architects of the genocide. As I discuss in Chapter 1, Arthur Khachents and the Adana Project share their own renditions of these songs in response to the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War.

More literature on Armenian revolutionary songs includes Rubina Perroomian’s *Literary Responses to Catastrophe: A Comparison of the Armenian and the Jewish Experience* and her *Asbarez* article, “Heghapokhakan-Fedayakan Ergere

Artatsolkn en Hai Heghapokhakan Dashnkatstutean Ghaparbanutean” (“The Revolutionary Fedayee Songs Reflect the Armenian Revolutionary Ideology”). While the existing scholarship explores Armenian revolutionary songs during the Armenian Revolutionary Movement of the nineteenth century, this thesis provides a unique perspective on these songs in contemporary contexts. I incorporate the scholarship above in dialogue with my interlocutors’ experiences with revolutionary songs to show how the songs are now used by youth in Washington, D.C. during protests; to educate their community members about their collective history; and to maintain their senses of Armenian identity.

### Music and Diaspora

Scholarship on music and diaspora in ethnomusicology is also essential in my exploration of the relationship between Armenian revolutionary songs and diasporic Armenian identity of members of the Washington, D.C. “Ani” Chapter. In “Music, Ritual, and Diasporic Identity: A Case Study of the Armenian Apostolic Church,” ethnomusicologist Jonathan McCollum associates the Armenian cultural identity of his interlocutors in Washington, D.C. with Armenian liturgical music (McCollum 2004, 276). Professor of Family and Consumer Sciences Ani Yazedjian discusses the religious and political differences that contribute to Armenian diasporic identity and how this has been reflected in genocide commemorations among Armenians in Chicago and Cairo. She explains that joint commemorations among the different churches in Chicago have for the most part been unsuccessful (Yazedjian 2004, 48). There are two Armenian churches in or near Washington, D.C.: Soorp Khatch

Armenian Apostolic Church, which is associated with the *Dashnaksutyun*, and St. Mary Armenian Apostolic Church. My interlocutors have lightly touched upon the schism between the two churches and the “inactivity” between the two, which reflects the current divide among Armenians in Armenia and the diaspora.

Scholarship by ethnomusicologists Alyssa Mathias, Donna Buchanan, and Sylvia Angelique Alajaji on Armenian music provides insight into commemorations of the genocide by Armenians in Turkey, Bulgaria, and the United States. (Mathias 2015, 2021; Buchanan 2017; Alajaji 2015). Donna Buchanan discusses the centennial commemoration of the Armenian genocide among the Armenian diaspora in Bulgaria. While I focus on the presence of Armenian revolutionary songs in the AYP-led commemoration in Washington, D.C., Buchanan discusses the inclusion of the Armenian national anthem and works featuring the *duduk*, which she refers to as “a sonic index of Armenia’s traumatic past” (Buchanan 2018, 152). Mathias explores the centennial commemoration of the Armenian genocide in Istanbul led by protesters of Armenian and non-Armenian heritage.

In “Songs for the Next Hundred Years: Sounding Armenian Futures in an Era of Transnational Development,” Mathias asks: “what role does music play in the ways that Armenians imagine their individual and collective futures when the country’s economic stability, political sovereignty, and regional security are at stake?” (Mathias 2021, 2). Especially during times of uncertainty in the homeland, AYPers figuratively envision themselves as Armenian revolutionary figures, and the collective patriotism that sets this in motion is through these songs that many members learn as children.

Sylvia Angelique Alajaji explores music and its contribution to conceptions of “home” among diasporic communities in New York, California, and Lebanon (Alajaji 2015). In her discussion of the Armenian community in Lebanon, she explains that singing patriotic songs generates a sense of collectivity among Armenians. I build upon this as I explore how singing patriotic songs generates a sense of collectivity among youth in Washington, D.C. and instills within them a sense of patriotism for their homeland.

Work by ethnomusicologists Kay Kaufman Shelemay and Thomas Turino on music and diaspora have also been relevant to my analyses on music and protest in Washington, D.C. I incorporate Shelemay’s discussion of musical communities created through processes of descent and dissent to support my investigation of the role music plays in community formation among Armenian youth in the diaspora (Shelemay 2011). Turino’s work on music and protest informs my analysis of AYP-led protests in Washington, D.C and identity formation among Armenian youth in the diaspora. I explore how music creates a sense of collective unity among protesters and incorporate his participatory framework to explain how singing Armenian revolutionary songs in unity achieves this (Turino 2004, 2008). My research builds on scholarship of diaspora studies, protest, and genocide commemoration through the lens of Armenian youth in Washington, D.C.

## Methods

As someone who was raised in Los Angeles, home to the largest Armenian community in the United States, I have always been immersed in Armenian language and culture. When my sister Lilia and I moved to Washington, D.C. in August 2022, we wanted to continue to immerse ourselves in the Armenian community. We visited Soorp Khatch Armenian Apostolic Church in Bethesda, Maryland, hoping there would be youth members from the community. This is where we met Galy Jackmajian, one of my interlocutors, who encouraged us to join the Armenian Youth Federation “Ani” Chapter in Washington, D.C. We began to attend meetings and eventually became members of the chapter in March of 2023. The process of being sworn into the organization involves attending at least three general meetings, followed by an extensive 3-hour Zoom workshop educating prospective AYFers about the history of the organization and its mission. During this process as a prospective AYFer, I learned that the organization has its own Armenian revolutionary songbook, which has manifested itself in many of my experiences with chapter members. The songbook contains lyrics, translations, transliterations, and historical contexts of Armenian revolutionary songs, and serves as a textbook that discusses Armenia’s geography, Artsakh, and the history of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and the Armenian Youth Federation.

Even though my interlocutors and I share commonalities in our Armenian diasporic identities, our abilities to interact with one another in the Armenian language, and our shared Armenian patriotism, I was unaware of the political views that are fundamental to the Armenian Youth Federation when I first began this

research. Growing up, I was never part of the AYF and only through my fieldwork have I started to learn about the AYF and ARF's ideology.

This research draws on approximately ten months of ethnographic fieldwork with the AYF Washington, D.C. "Ani" Chapter, which started as a project I began in a field methods seminar under my advisor, Dr. Siv B. Lie. There are 41 active members in the AYF "Ani" Senior Chapter.<sup>5</sup> I conducted participant observation by attending monthly meetings at Soorp Khatch, the primary venue for AYF meetings and social gatherings. I observed how members integrated music into their meetings, organized and led upcoming protests, and became immersed in Armenian history and culture through interacting with each other and through the delivery of "educationals." "Educationals" are lecture presentations prepared and led by one to two members at each meeting and have included topics involving Armenian *taraz*, or traditional costume; Armenophobia; and Armenian freedom fighters known as *fedayees*.<sup>6</sup> I conducted six formal and informal interviews with members of the chapter via Zoom or at Soorp Khatch after the AYF meetings.

I also participated in the protests the organization planned in D.C. to experience firsthand how they use revolutionary songs to further their political agendas. These included the Sumgait-Baku protest in February 2023 observing the

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<sup>5</sup> The AYF chapters are divided into two groups: AYF Seniors and AYF Juniors. I have been working with the AYF "Ani" members who are seniors and are between the ages eighteen and twenty-six (twenty-eight if they are members of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) or the Armenian Relief Society (ARS)). One can join the ARF at any point after they turn eighteen. Many members of the AYF are also members of the ARF and it is encouraged for AYFers to join before their twenty-sixth birthday. The AYF "Sevan" Junior Chapter consists of members who are between the ages ten and sixteen.

<sup>6</sup> Originally an Arabic term meaning "those who sacrifice." Also spelled *fedayi*.

35th anniversary of Azerbaijan's massacres of Armenians in Sumgait,<sup>7</sup> as well as the protest commemorating the 108th anniversary of the Armenian genocide on April 24, 2023. The latter protest will be further explored in Chapter 3.

I also used virtual ethnographic methods for this research, which are exhibited primarily in Chapter 1. On the frontlines of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War, musician and volunteer soldier Arthur Khachents posted impromptu performances of Armenian revolutionary songs on his personal Instagram account (@khachents). As part of this virtual research, I analyze both these videos and the comments section of Khachents' Instagram posts. I also explore covers of revolutionary songs by the Adana Project posted on their YouTube channel.

I include translations of revolutionary songs from the *AYF Camp Songbook: Camper Handbook*. All other translations from Armenian to English are my own. When writing in my own voice, I follow the Library of Congress (LOC) romanization system for Armenian. I use Eastern Armenian transliteration, unless working with direct quotes of Western Armenian. For example, when providing the transliteration of Դաշնակցություն, I would follow the LOC transliteration, *Dashnaktsutyun*. When following the transliteration from the AYF songbook or quoting a Western-Armenian speaking interlocutor, I spell Դաշնակցություն as *Tashnagtsootyoun*.

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<sup>7</sup> An *Armenian Weekly* article covered this protest: <https://armenianweekly.com/2023/02/27/ayf-leads-washington-dc-protest-demanding-justice-for-sumgait-and-baku-pogroms-immediate-end-to-azerbajans-artsakh-blockade/>.

## Chapter Outlines

In Chapter 1, I provide the historical context of Armenian revolutionary songs and explore how two notable songs, “Gini Lits” (“Pour the Wine”) and “Zartir Lao” (“Awake My Son”), were transformed during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War, both on the frontlines and through covers posted on YouTube. To examine how patriotic songs were repurposed to instill solidarity among many Armenians in the country and the diaspora during this time, I explore covers of “Gini Lits” and “Zartir Lao” by Arthur Khachents and the Adana Project, a symphonic metal band. I show that through their dissemination and uptake on social media, these renditions transcended geographical boundaries and gave diasporic Armenians a glimpse into the events unfolding in the homeland during the war in 2020. I argue that the alterations in lyrics to reference contemporary events and changes in how these prominent revolutionary songs are performed further enable the development of ethnonational identity among Armenians in the diaspora.

In Chapter 2, I introduce the Armenian Youth Federation Washington, D.C. “Ani” Chapter. I provide an overview of monthly AYF meetings and discuss the role of the AYF and ARF anthems and the national anthems of Armenia and Artsakh. I also examine AYF Senior Seminar, which takes place annually at Camp Haiastan in Franklin, Massachusetts. This year’s Senior Seminar was held just one day after an unexpected end of the Artsakh blockade, which led to the loss of Artsakh to Azerbaijan and the displacement of over 100,000 *Artsakhtsies*. By examining these activities of the organization that have taken place during current upheaval in Armenia and Artsakh, I show that music becomes a lens to understand how members

become committed to the cause of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. I explore the role of Armenian revolutionary songs as they relate to the AYF's mission to promote patriotism and solidarity among its members, educate them about the history of their homeland, and reinforce their Armenian identity. By singing patriotic songs with *ungers* (comrades) and understanding the historical and sociopolitical contexts of these songs, my interlocutors become aware of their own roles as Armenians in the diaspora.

In Chapter 3, I discuss AYF-organized protests in Washington, D.C. and focus on the protest in commemoration of the 108<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1915 Armenian genocide on April 24, 2023. I explore how the AYFers sing Armenian revolutionary songs to raise awareness of the Artsakh blockade and respond to Turkish and Azerbaijani counter-protesters. It is important to note that the commemoration of the genocide discussed in this thesis took place during Azerbaijan's 9-month blockade of the Lachin Corridor, the only road connecting Artsakh to Armenia, leaving the Armenians of Artsakh without food, water, or medical supplies. This chapter explores how the AYF "Ani" members embrace the Armenian Revolutionary Federation's ideology by learning and singing Armenian revolutionary songs while passing down their knowledge to the organization's younger generation to cultivate future leaders who will continue to uphold the ideology of *Hai Tahd*. I argue that, while they carry out protests in Washington, D.C. to raise awareness among the general public about the Armenian genocide and the Artsakh blockade, members chant and sing songs in Armenian to further the goals of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation in their own community and to rally more Armenians to their cause.

## Chapter 1: The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War and Armenian Revolutionary Songs

Numerous patriotic songs have been composed by Armenians during the Armenian Revolutionary Movement beginning in the late 1800s by and about the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) freedom fighters known as *fedayees*. The *fedayees* were civilian militia formed by villagers throughout the Ottoman Empire during the period of the late 1880s to 1920 to protect the Armenian population during the Hamidian massacres of 1894 to 1896 and the Armenian genocide of 1915. Using the cover of mountainous regions throughout Anatolia, the *fedayees* used guerilla tactics to descend on the enemy and disrupt Ottoman aggression against the Armenian population. Armenians in the Ottoman Empire coped with their shared misery through “the echoes of popular songs, anonymous folktales dedicated to a valiant act of resistance or commemorating the martyrdom of a hero” (Peroomian 1993, 72). In *Hay Zhoghovrdakan Razmi Yev Zinvori Erger (Armenian Folk War and Soldiers’ Songs)*, A.S. Ghaziyani indicates that the composers of these songs stood alongside the liberation movement. Most often, they were not professional musicians; they were unknown troubadours and songwriters. “The purpose of these songs was to raise the people to their feet, to call them on to revolt and shake off the yoke of the dictator” (Ghaziyani 1989, 29). In different contexts that I will explore in this chapter and the rest of my thesis, for many native and diasporic Armenians, the purpose of these songs remains the same in motivating the people to take action.

Armenian revolutionary songs that glorified battles and memorialized heroes are reminders of past conflicts that helped promote morale among the soldiers and

instill patriotism among the population. Ghaziyan underscores the relevance of Armenian war songs and their adaptability be used in different contexts. He discusses songs that were first composed during or in dedication to past events in Armenian history that have become “forgotten” until similar situations take place where the songs see a resurgence (1989, 7). Many of the *fedayee* songs saw a resurgence during the events that led up to the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War. Ethnomusicologist Alyssa Mathias discusses the type of music that was sung after the Four-Day War in 2016.

She explains:

On Armenian television, patriotic music videos played on repeat, portraying the selflessness of Armenian soldiers and celebrating the vitality of Karabakh Armenians. Less than three weeks after the April 2016 ceasefire, at an annual Dashnaktsutyun march commemorating the Armenian Genocide, youth carried torches from the city center to the *Tsitsernakaberd* genocide memorial complex, singing songs that drew parallels between the violence of 1915, the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, and the Four Day War (Mathias 2021, 151).

Natalie Kamajian, Ph.D. candidate in Culture and Performance at UCLA, highlights the revitalization of revolutionary songs during the war in 2020:

During this second Karabakh war, with the first war still active in Armenian national memory, there was a revival of Armenian revolutionary songs and dances on the frontlines which memorialized the national and historical struggle against Turks. The image of the “*fedayi*” or freedom fighter was also revived as a threat of Turkish aggression continues to be a through-line in Armenian collective memory (Kamajian 2022, 55-56).

This chapter will serve as an introduction to two revolutionary songs, “Zartir Lao” (“Awake My Son”) and “Gini Lits” (“Pour the Wine”), that saw a resurgence during the war, and explore how the performers who revitalized the songs emblemized modern-day *fedayees*. I argue that the patriotic songs repurposed to address the current conflicts in 2020 became relevant for many Armenians of today’s native and diasporan audience and thus had the power to bridge geographical boundaries and

contribute to the creation of ethnonational identity among Armenians in the diaspora. I analyze two versions of “Zartir Lao,” identified as a lullaby in the Armenian lullaby tradition but used to alert the people of impending dangers, and “Gini Lits,” a song referencing the assassination of Talaat Pasha, the principal architect of the Armenian genocide. I will discuss covers of these revolutionary songs by a soldier at the frontlines in 2020, Arthur Khachents, and by the symphonic metal band, the Adana Project. I discuss the history of the songs in their sociopolitical contexts and compare how the artists stylized them musically and lyrically for today’s Armenian audiences.

#### Arthur Khachents’ Rendition of “Zartir Lao”

Little is known about the origin of “Zartir Lao” other than that it was composed during the 1890s by an Armenian troubadour named Khachatur Gevorkyan, also known as Farhat. This song is also known as “Araboyi Erg” (“Arabo’s Song”), “Kaj Araboyi Erg” (“The Song of Brave Arabo”), or “Mshetsu Erg” (“The Song of the Mshetsi”). The setting of “Zartir Lao” is the region of Mush, which at the time was part of historic Armenia. Ghaziyan provides a brief background of the song:

The composer of the original version of the song is Farhat. The hero of the song, Arabo, was a famous *fedayee* and had a powerful group...In 1893, while returning from the Caucasus, Arabo was suddenly surrounded with his group in the Gyalerash ravine of Bulanikh. In an unequal fight, everyone dies (1989, 34).

Lusine Sahakyan, musicologist and professor at Komitas State Conservatory, states that “Zartir Lao” and other songs like it are a type of lullaby practiced by Armenians and only a few other ethnic minorities (Lusine Sahakyan, personal communication, 6

November 2021). This is not typical of lullabies in Western culture, where they are considered to be “songs associated with children going to bed” (Hawes 1974, 141).

However, like more typical lullabies, it is a song sung by a mother to her child. In the *Dictionary of Folklore Mythology and Legend* Theresa C. Brakeley explains that a lullaby is:

A type of song sung by mothers and nurses the world over to coax their babies to sleep; a cradle song... The simplest form, merely a humming or a repetition of monotonous and soothing sounds, often accompanied by a gentle rocking of the child in the arms or in its bed or carrier (Brakeley 1950, 653).

Brakeley identifies different themes in lullabies including associations with evening prayers, motherly admiration towards a child, bribes for good behavior, songs that tell stories, and even those that include threats to convince a child to go to sleep. Brakeley concludes that:

Practically any kind of song can and does serve as a lullaby. Perhaps the mothers, realizing that the words cannot be understood, feel no need to censor their singing and make use of the blood-curdling as well as the soothing in their selection according to their knowledge. In any case, lullabies are perhaps the most likely to survive of any type of folksong, for as long as babies cry and the voice of the mother will quiet them, such tunes and words will be handed down or continue to come into being (1950, 654).

In “Folksongs and Function: Some Thoughts on the American Lullaby,” musician and folklorist Bess Lomax Hawes describes her findings in the lullaby section of the folklore archives at UC Berkeley, specifically the fact that “slightly over half the songs included had texts that did not mention going to sleep at all” (Hawes 1974, 141). Rebekah Pryor explains that “cycling between expressions of comfort, lament, and joyful hope, lullabies have long expressed sounds and stories of the human condition” (Pryor 2020, 2). Lullabies can also depict political circumstances. Ethnomusicologist Melissa Bilal’s research on the relationship

between memory and lullabies sung by Armenian women in Istanbul conveyed themes of displacement and sorrow after the Armenian genocide (Bilal 2019). In “The Analysis of Awakening Lullaby,” Seyed Ahmad Parsa, Professor of Persian Language and Literature, and Shahrbanou Hossienpanahi, Ph.D. Candidate of Persian Language and Literature, discuss *awakening lullabies* that are sung for the purpose of political awakening and that reflect revolutionary periods and nationalist trends (Parsa and Hossienpanahi 2023, 2).

According to Sahakyan, in the Armenian lullaby, or cradle song, tradition, this type of lullaby is not meant to put children to sleep, but to awaken them to the danger from the surrounding enemy (Sahakyan, 6 November 2021). Ghaziyani also explains how “Zartir Lao” is considered a lullaby in the Armenian lullaby tradition. He explains:

Arabo’s song is created like traditional lullabies, only with the opposite purpose: to wake up, to stand up on one’s feet, to have the son ready to bear arms. At the center of the lullaby, the protagonist is the mother. She is telling her son of Armenia’s miserable situation and suggests that her son bears arms. She rebukes him because he lives with empty hopes that there will be no war. The mother beseeches her son and asks him to become a soldier like Arabo for the liberation of their homeland. (1989, 34).

In the Armenian lullaby tradition, there are different types of lullabies that are sung to lull children to sleep. Since Armenia has consistently been under attack, this has grown from the tradition of a typical lullaby meant to sooth children, to lullabies that are intended to wake them up because of the threat of war.

Ghaziyani also explains that “Zartir Lao” has numerous variations that have been shared among the people and continue to be sung. The lyrics of the song have since taken on several variations. The translation of the lyrics appears below:<sup>8</sup>

Mobs of soldiers have gathered,  
Surrounding the plains of Moush.  
The Sultan wants to destroy us,  
Awake, my son, I would die for you.

The poor Moushetsee died crying,<sup>9</sup>  
Died walking from foreign lands,  
Died paying taxes to the Turk,  
Awake, my son, I would die for you.

What shall I say to curse the Turk soldier,  
Who killed chief Arapo  
And left our hopes in the cradle,  
Awake, my son, I would die for you.

While these lyrics might seem harsh for a lullaby, for Armenians, the reference “to hopes in the cradle” represents the hope for freedom and a mother’s willingness to die to protect her child, so that they may live to carry on the fight. According to Sahakyan, “Zartir Lao” and other songs like it have characteristics more akin to a march or call to battle. These songs are meant to alert both adolescents and adults to impending danger and are sung emphatically and loudly, the cadence distinct and forceful with the intended effect of calling up the listener to stand in defense of their homeland. “Zartir Lao” is repetitive, melodically simple, and has a steady rhythm like many other lullabies. The most important sentiment in the chorus, “Awake, my son, I would die for you,” is directed to all Armenians to defend the homeland. These types

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<sup>8</sup> Translation can be found in the Armenian Youth Federation’s *AYF Camp Songbook: Camper Handbook*.

<sup>9</sup> *Mshetsi (Moushetsee)* refers to a person from Mush, in this case, the hero of the song, Arabo, who was a *fedayee* leader killed during the battle at Mush.

of songs are sympathetic to and passionate about the cause of the *fedayee* resistance and are meant to unify Armenians under the common cause of their cultural survival.

Sahakyan also told me that singing the songs aloud served a practical purpose. The *fedayees* were generally organized in small troops or platoons numbering anywhere from two or three men, and in some cases women, to about twenty to twenty-five individuals. Their bivouacs were scattered throughout mountainous areas and these songs were sung loudly to be heard by nearby encampments with the desired effect being to promote brotherhood, raise morale and invigorate their courage against the common foe. These themes are common in many of the patriotic songs representing the Armenian Revolutionary Movement, making them relevant and meaningful to many Armenians today. These songs originally sung by Armenian freedom fighters have become commonplace and are often taught to schoolchildren in Armenia and the diaspora to be sung at cultural events and annual commemorations of the genocide.

Fifteen days after the ceasefire on November 9, 2020, “Zartir Lao” resurfaced again in a selfie video posted on Instagram of a soldier on patrol in the mountains of Artsakh.<sup>10</sup> In the video, Arthur Khachents, a volunteer private in the army and a singer, composer and poet in civilian life, rephrases the song to reflect the current conflict. Khachents, who is from the small town of Hadrut in Artsakh, grew up hearing and singing the *fedayee* patriotic songs like so many others who have endured artillery shelling and cross-border skirmishes with Azerbaijan’s army. The caption of Khachents’ Instagram post is translated below:

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<sup>10</sup> The video is available on Instagram here: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CH91J02BUAO/>.

An ancient country with wounds that are still with us,  
I'll embrace your pain again with songs,  
The boys are gone, many have fallen,  
Because we didn't have a strong Armenia.

Khachents' belief that "we didn't have a strong Armenia" may imply the growing dissatisfaction that was felt towards the Armenian government at that time.

In his version of "Zartir Lao," Khatchents alters the lyrics to fit the song to the contemporaneous situation in his home region of Artsakh. Although the war in 2020 was ultimately between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Turkey provided Azerbaijan with military aid and Turkish President Erdoğan has voiced his support for Azerbaijan. This is one of the reasons that Armenians continue to feel oppressed by Turks, which is why Khachents refers to Turkish soldiers in his rendition of "Zartir Lao." The lyrics appear below:

Violent mobs of soldiers have gathered,  
Surrounding the fortress of Armenia  
Violent mobs of soldiers have gathered,  
Have come to tear Artsakh apart.

The Sultan wants to wipe us out.  
Awake, my son, I would die for you.

How do I curse the Turkish soldier?  
Who killed our brave soldier?  
How do I curse the Turkish soldier?  
Who killed our Armenian soldier?

The Sultan wants to wipe us out.  
Awake, my son, I would die for you.

The poor Artsakhtsi died crying,  
Wandering through poor foreign homes.  
The Artsakhtsi is not poor,  
Who does not want to live in foreign homes.

And left our hopes in the cradle.  
Awake, my son, I would die for you.

In his rendition, Khatchents' substitutions for *Mshetsi* with *Artsakhtsi* are evident. In the video, he appears to sing with the sincerity of a person who is keenly aware that he is now displaced from the land where he was raised. The listener of the song hears the anguish of his loss as his voice quavers and is made to feel that his loss is a loss for all Armenians. In many conversations, my interlocutors of the Armenian Youth Federation Washington, D.C. "Ani" Chapter mirrored this sentiment and expressed their belief that, after the genocide, the 2020 Artsakh War was one of the darkest pages in Armenia's history.

In "Ukrainians Fill Streets with Music, Echoing Past War Zones," Javier C. Hernández, culture reporter for the *New York Times*, explains that "impromptu performances by ordinary citizens have been a feature of many modern conflicts, in the Balkans, Syria and elsewhere. In the social media age, they have become an important way for artists in war zones to build a sense of community and bring attention to suffering" (Hernández 2022). In all of Khachents' Instagram videos of patriotic songs, he assumed the role of the artist-citizen and used his passion and talent to bolster the morale of his brothers in arms and engage Armenians nationally and abroad to lift their spirits and impart the courage and strength the songs are meant to induce. Abby Anderton, Associate Professor of Music at Baruch College, explains that artists "can use Instagram and social media platforms to involve people who might be geographically distant in their very real struggle" (Hernández 2022). Khatchents broadened his role from musician to documentary filmmaker, using both live stream and recorded video to report on the current situation of the war as it

unfolded. Khatchents' audience had reached several hundred thousand, and he was instrumental in ensuring the spread of the slogan «հաղթելու ենք!» (“We will triumph!”). The slogan spread to members of the diaspora, many of whom seemed to embrace it enthusiastically, becoming co-combatants in spirit. For many Armenians, “Zartir Lao” acts as a major emblem of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War, not because it is known as a patriotic song originally from the Armenian Revolutionary Movement, but because Khachents tailored it to the events happening at the time. However, Khachents' performance of “Gini Lits” on the frontlines is what brought him recognition as an emblem of hope during the war.

*Arthur Khachents' Rendition of “Gini Lits” on the Frontlines of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War*

“Gini Lits” is another revolutionary song of the 1920s that was revived on the frontlines of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War. Although I have been told by many that there is no known composer attributed to the song or information about where the song originated, in *Hayots Tseghaspanutyun Azdetsutiune Erg-Erazhshtutyun Vrah (The Impact of the Armenian Genocide on Music)* Avo Katerjian indicates that *Aintabtsi*<sup>11</sup> Hagop Mertkhanian composed “Gini Lits.” Katerjian points out that he interviewed Mertkhanian's son, Serop Mertkhanian, who explained that his father told him that he was the composer and lyricist of “Gini Lits” (Katerjian 2010, 166-167). I have also been told by some Armenians that it is also speculated that “Gini

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<sup>11</sup> *Aintabtsi* refers to someone from Aintab. In modern-day Turkey, now Gaziantep.

Lits” was composed by prominent composer and conductor Barsegh Kanachyan. That said, throughout the course of my research, I never came across any clear evidence confirming that Kanachyan composed this song.

“Gini Lits,” which translates to “Pour the Wine,” was composed in response to the assassination of Talaat Pasha, a convicted war criminal and one of the three Ottoman leaders who orchestrated the 1915 Armenian Genocide. At the end of World War I, when the Allied Armies entered Constantinople, Talaat was condemned to death by an Ottoman military tribunal but fled the country and was granted asylum in Germany. There, he was executed on a public street in Berlin on March 15, 1921, by another freedom fighter or *fedayee*, Soghomon Tehlirian. Tehlirian was a member of Operation Nemesis, a group of Armenian freedom fighters who planned formal acts of revenge on the perpetrators of the genocide. Tehlirian was given the assignment to assassinate Talaat with explicit orders that he was not to leave the scene after the murder and that he had to submit to arrest. The leaders of Operation Nemesis saw the murder trial as a way of garnering international recognition of the genocide. Tehlirian was tried and acquitted of his crime by the German courts.<sup>12</sup> News of the assassination was immediately received by the Armenian population with great elation. Below is a translation of “Gini Lits”:<sup>13</sup>

The world shuddered in fear of the Armenians,  
The Turkish throne had fallen to the floor,  
Let me tell you the story of Talaat’s death.

Pour the wine, dear friend, pour the wine,

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<sup>12</sup> The full account and planning behind the assassination are detailed Eric Bogosian’s *Operation Nemesis: The Assassination Plot That Avenged the Armenian Genocide*, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Translation can be found in the Armenian Youth Federation’s *AYF Camp Songbook: Camper Handbook*.

Cheers to the drinkers, cheers, cheers to the drinkers.

The Tashnagtsootyoun had a meeting,  
They decided upon the death of Talaat,  
Tehlirian became very lucky.

Pour the wine, dear friend, pour the wine,  
Cheers to the drinkers, cheers, cheers to the drinkers.

Talaat Pasha fled to Berlin,  
Tehlirian caught up behind him,  
He shot him in the forehead and laid him on the floor.

Pour the wine, dear friend, pour the wine,  
Cheers to the drinkers, cheers, cheers to the drinkers.

They put Talaat Pasha in the ground,  
They delivered the news to his mother,  
Long live the Tashnag volunteers!

Pour the wine, dear friend, pour the wine,  
Cheers to the drinkers, cheers, cheers to the drinkers.

Your memory will always be glorious,  
Let the light fall upon your grave, Kristapor,  
May 28<sup>th</sup>, we celebrate you.

Pour the wine, dear friend, pour the wine,  
Cheers to the drinkers, cheers, cheers to the drinkers.

I will drink and toast to you,  
You will drink and toast to me,  
We all drink and toast to the Tashnagtsootyoun.

Pour the wine, dear friend, pour the wine,  
Cheers to the drinkers, cheers, cheers to the drinkers.

Again, in this version below, Khatchents takes liberties with the original lyrics and while he retains references to Talaat in the first two lines, the remaining lyrics are altered to reflect his own personal involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh War. His interpretation is translated below:

They sent the dog, Talaat, to his grave,  
And sent word of his death to his whore mother,  
Hurrah Armenian volunteer!

Pour the wine, dear friend, pour the wine,  
Health to the one drinking.

Hurrah Armenian volunteer!

Pour the wine, dear friend, pour the wine, pour, pour,  
Health to the one drinking.

My father and mother gave birth to me,  
And swaddled me in the tri-colored flag,<sup>14</sup>  
They gave me as a gift to all Armenians.

Pour the wine, dear friend, pour the wine,  
Health to the one drinking.

Health to the one drinking, a thousand toasts to your health.

For numerous reasons, I believe that his cover of “Gini Lits” seemed to have emotionally reached more viewers from Armenia and the diaspora than his cover of “Zaritr Lao.” As of March 25, 2024, the rendition of “Gini Lits” had almost 145,000 more views than “Zartir Lao.” Perhaps this is because the recording took place as the war was raging, or maybe because Khachents and the soldiers walking alongside him seemed to be in high spirits as he sang “Gini Lits.”

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<sup>14</sup> Tri-colored flag refers to the Armenia’s red, blue, and orange national flag.



Figure 2. Screenshot taken from video posted on Khachents' Instagram account, @khachents.

Especially with Armenians in the diaspora, he quickly became an emblem of courage not only to his comrades fighting on the frontlines, but also as an emblem of hope for Armenians who were following the war from other areas throughout the world. In the comments section of the Instagram post, someone writes:

This video is sad. I've watched it so many times during the war. I was in Armenia and every time I was losing hope I would watch it. Peace on our soldiers, peace on those who are still detained by the very racist government of Azerbaijan.

Khachents thanked the individual for their comment, and they replied: “dzes shnorhakalutyun vor paterazmi jamanak karoxaceleq mez uj tal” (“thank you for giving us strength during the war”). Other comments included “the diaspora loves you,” and someone even expressed that they “would be coming from the USA to meet [Khachents] and thank [him] in person.” Some expressed their relief in knowing that Khachents was safe:

Thank God you're alright! For weeks, I wondered and hoped you were safe. Your video gave a lot of us some hope and we were so proud of your bravery.

Khachents' rendition of "Gini Lits" enabled diasporan Armenians to become more emotionally involved with the war and gave them a glimpse into the events taking place on the front lines through music rooted in the patriotism for their homeland.<sup>15</sup>

As a result of Khachents' growing popularity, he was invited to contribute to the soundtrack of filmmaker Emile Ghessen's Nagorno-Karabakh war documentary, *45 Days: The Fight for a Nation*. The movie screened in the United States from September through October of 2021, and Khachents assisted in its promotion by performing "Gini Lits" and other patriotic songs at several US venues. I invited Khachents to speak and perform at UCLA in October 2021, and had the opportunity to lead a public Q&A session with him during the event. When asked about the significance of his choice to sing "Gini Lits" on the frontlines of the war, Khachents told me that he was not part of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation political party and did not sing "Gini Lits" to show support for any specific political party. He expressed that his main goal was to "lift the morale of the men fighting alongside him." He continued that the songs allowed many of the soldiers to release their most personal emotions because they knew they were "fighting a war against a country that had countless military advantages and that they were aware of their impending defeat" (Arthur Khachents, 26 October 2021). Khachents explained that with "Gini Lits," he achieved his purpose in motivating the soldiers, because as he states in the caption for his Instagram post, "in situations of war, lifting the fighting spirit with a

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<sup>15</sup> The video is available on Instagram here: [https://www.instagram.com/p/CGA10j\\_hlUk/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CGA10j_hlUk/).

song is oftentimes necessary.” While his goal was to lift the spirits of those fighting alongside him, Khachents made a larger impact for Armenians following the war via social media by giving them a glimpse into the frontlines through his videos and becoming an emblem of hope during times of conflict and uncertainty.

### *The Adana Project’s Rendition of “Gini Lits”*

The Adana Project,<sup>16</sup> an Armenian symphonic metal band, also repurposed “Gini Lits” in a YouTube music video on April 2, 2019.<sup>17</sup> The band comprises Aris Karamian (drums), Mane Tonoyan (vocals), Arin Karamian (keyboard), Roman Mnatsakanyan (guitar), Patrick Avetissian (guitar), and Kegham Ghazarian (bass). Unlike Arthur Khachents, the Adana Project does not modify the song’s lyrics. Stylistically, the group creates a fusion of heavy metal and Armenian folk elements by combining traditional Armenian instruments including the *duduk*, *shvi*, and *kopal*<sup>18</sup> with rock instruments. While Khachents’ singular voice in the battlefields of Artsakh has a bold and empowering effect in its own context, because of the heavy-metal approach in their reinterpretation, the Adana Project’s cover of “Gini Lits” has the potential to draw in a more diverse range of audiences of the well-known *fedayee* song.

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<sup>16</sup> For more information about the Adana Project see: <https://adanaproject.wixsite.com/website>.

<sup>17</sup> The video is available on YouTube here: [https://youtu.be/I\\_bT\\_Qn7xYM](https://youtu.be/I_bT_Qn7xYM).

<sup>18</sup> The *duduk* and *shvi* are both traditional Armenian woodwind instruments and the *kopal* is a percussion instrument.



Figure 3. Screenshot taken from the Adana Project's YouTube video of "Gini Lits."

In the video, the band members appear clad in leather outfits, head-banging to the beat of the music. The musician playing the Armenian instruments is the exception, appearing in military camouflage and remaining composed throughout the entire performance as if assuming the persona of an Armenian freedom fighter. Mane Tonoyan, the lead singer, is seen in brief flashes transitioning her clothing from a black leather jacket until the end where she stands in a camouflage t-shirt waving the Armenian flag. But the lead singer's conversion from artist to *fedayee* has further appeal in that it reflects a gendered aspect of *fedayee* history. During the Hamidian massacres, many women took on the role of *fedayees* and helped to protect their communities from massacre. Tonoyan's voice and visual appearance make it clear that she is a leader, and she gesturally exemplifies the resilient fighting spirit of Armenian *fedayee* women, pumping her arms with stoic strength and standing indomitably with the Armenian flag in hand.

### The Adana Project's Rendition of "Zartir Lao"

Only a few days after the 2020 war broke out, the Adana Project released their rendition of "Zartir Lao."<sup>19</sup> Unlike Khatchents' more subdued a cappella performance, the cover by Adana Project evolves beyond the established tradition. Through its use of heavy metal riffs, hooks, and driving percussion, the band blasts out the song in a rapid-fire tempo and synchronizes the music to the visuals of artillery and gunfire that *awakens* the audience through startling images of war. Performing "Zartir Lao" in true metal fashion, this rendition heeds the song's purpose to call the listener to action and succeeds in expanding the audience to a more diverse audience through social media.



Figure 4. Screenshot taken from the Adana Project's YouTube video of "Zartir Lao."

In their performance of "Zartir Lao," the band more visually identifies as *fedayees*. The group's suggested identification as part of a civilian militia occurred at a very critical time in Armenia in which the country was engaged in a full-scale war and when the population needed to be alerted to the urgent defense of their country.

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<sup>19</sup> The video is available on YouTube here: <https://youtu.be/3DFJEGLS158?feature=shared>.

In the video, the Adana Project performs in front of a backdrop of an enormous Armenian flag and with the entire group donning camouflage clothing and adorned with camouflage face paint. This video is more overtly political than the video for “Gini Lits”: it includes images of war and destruction and spotlights political and military figures including the leaders of Armenia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan.

### *The Impacts of Arthur Khachents and the Adana Project*

The music produced during the Armenian Revolutionary Movement served multiple purposes in “waking up” and motivating the people of Armenia and its diaspora. Armenian revolutionary songs have remained relevant for decades because Armenia continues to be in a state of political instability. With the advent of social media, the performance of music during war has broadened to include the participation of many Armenians in the country and has also connected the diaspora in creating a formidable response against the country’s aggressors. Social media plays a vital role in overcoming these geographical boundaries, as do the artists who bring different meanings to these songs through very different musical renditions. Each rendition of “Zartir Lao” and “Gini Lits” has indexed both historical events and the contemporaneous contexts in which they were reproduced. Arthur Khachents repurposes these songs by telling a story about his own experiences, to which many living in border villages in Armenia and those who have left Nagorno-Karabakh can relate. As for his appeal to the Armenian diaspora, his portrayal as a *fedayee* became emblematic of that fighting spirit. Despite feelings of hopelessness and disconnection from the homeland, his renditions became a reminder that patriotism from the

diaspora was vital in bolstering support for soldiers on the frontlines. The Adana Project's transformation of these songs by creating a fusion of metal and Armenian folk elements introduced a unique interpretation of patriotic songs. Like Khachents, they also repurpose the songs to fit into contemporaneous times, as they include images of the war in their music video for "Zartir Lao." Each rendition of "Zartir Lao" and "Gini Lits" has catered to different audiences, raising awareness among civilian Armenians to figuratively become active participants in the preservation of their homeland.

## Chapter 2: Identity Retention Among Members of the AYF Washington, D.C. “Ani” Chapter

Galy Jackmajian, Secretary of the Armenian Youth Federation (AYF)

Washington, D.C. “Ani” Chapter in 2023, ran towards me with an AYF Armenian revolutionary songbook in hand. Just before she handed it to me, she pulled the book back and began to flip through its pages to tear one out. Galy’s friend walked up and wondered what she was looking for. During a silent exchange between the two of them, they began to leaf through the songbook’s pages together. They were looking for any page with the image of Nikol Pashinyan, the Prime Minister of Armenia. To their relief, his image was absent. Pashinyan was once considered a beacon of hope for the Armenian people, but after the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War he became a figure of contempt. As part of the ceasefire established on November 9, 2020, Pashinyan surrendered Armenian-controlled territories of Artsakh to Azerbaijan, resulting in an uproar among Armenians in the country and the diaspora. Most of all, Armenians were outraged that Pashinyan sent soldiers to their deaths to protect lands he ultimately signed away.

This exchange between Galy and her friend revealed the intense resentment of Pashinyan by the AYF “Ani” members, and as I became more involved with the organization, I witnessed their disapproval of Armenia’s corrupt government to which they staunchly objected through protests at the Embassy of Armenia in Washington, D.C. Some of my interlocutors, including *unger*<sup>20</sup> Areni Margossian, a member of the

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<sup>20</sup> *Unger* translates to comrade. Every member of the AYF is referred to as an *unger* (masculine) or *ungerouhi* (feminine). *Ungerner* or *ungers* is plural for comrades.

Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) who just recently aged out of the Armenian Youth Federation, have been blacklisted by the Armenian government and denied entry into Armenia for protesting at the embassy and openly criticizing Pashinyan (Avedian 2023).

During the initial stages of my fieldwork of the AYF Washington, D.C. “Ani” Chapter, my objective was to understand the extent to which the chapter’s members use music during their meetings and protests. After the experience with Galy and the songbook, a question arose that exemplifies the current situation of the Armenian people: what results when the members of a community want to disassociate songs that depict Armenian independence, patriotism, and heroism from the leader of their homeland? This chapter will delve into the “Ani” Chapter’s activities, focusing primarily on chapter meetings at the Soorp Khatch Armenian Apostolic Church in Bethesda, Maryland and the AYF Senior Seminar that took place in Franklin, Massachusetts at Camp Haiastan.<sup>21</sup> A lot has happened in Armenia and Artsakh since I started this research. These events have further promoted my interlocutors’ sense of patriotism and dedication to the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. By detailing how the Armenian Youth Federation functions, I show in this chapter that Armenian revolutionary songs can be a lens through which to understand the contours of the political ideologies of Armenian youth in this organization.

Meetings at Soorp Khatch and Armenian Revolutionary Songs in Understanding Political Ideology and Diasporic Identity

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<sup>21</sup> *Haiastan* (also spelled *Hayastan*) translates to Armenia.

AYF “Ani” begins each chapter meeting by singing “Mshag Panvor” (“Farmer, Laborer”), the anthem of the ARF and its founders, Simon Zavarian, Krisdapor Mikaelian, and Stepan Zorian. They also sing “Harach Nahadag,” also known as “Gamavorin Kaylerk” (“March of the Volunteers”) which is the Armenian Revolutionary Federation’s anthem and the march of the Armenian volunteers who defended Eastern Armenia from the Ottomans and enabled the creation of the Republic of Armenia on May 28, 1918. Excerpts of the translated lyrics follow:<sup>22</sup>

“Mshag Panvor”

Farmer, laborer, working brother,  
 Let us come together, unite, and arch  
 forward.  
 By working to protect our cause,  
 Let us stand firm with the  
 Tashnagtsootyoun.

We have had enough suffering and  
 being toiled,  
 Let us measure and judge the amount  
 of blood that has been spilt.  
 They exploit us and waste our work,  
 But only give us a ration of dry bread  
 in return.

Then, black days turn into protest.  
 Bring forth the blood and sweat that  
 is anon,  
 Torment, deprivation, sprout tongues,  
 And open the way for the  
 Tashnagtsootyoun!

“Harach Nahadag”

Forward, immortals of a  
 martyred race,  
 Armor of six centuries of  
 unforgettable vengeance,  
 Upon the far mountaintops  
 of our fatherland,  
 Let us go to plant the tri-  
 colored flag.

Giant of dedication,  
 Fiery winged fleet,  
 Volunteer army,  
 Forward, forward firmly,  
 Forward unwaveringly,  
 Towards victory, victory.

The black blood of the evil  
 ones irrigated our soil,  
 The exiled Armenian  
 renewed his life,  
 Yesterday chained, today  
 free,  
 Resurrected nobly from the  
 obscure tomb.

Giant of dedication,  
 Fiery winged fleet,

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<sup>22</sup> Translations can be found in the Armenian Youth Federation’s *AYF Camp Songbook: Camper Handbook*.

Volunteer Army,  
Forward, forward firmly,  
Forward unwaveringly,  
Towards victory, victory!

Singing “Mshag Panvor” allows the AYFers to pledge allegiance to the *Dashnagtsutyun* and its goals. “Harach Nahadag” aligns more firmly with the members of the AYF because of its thematic emphasis on avenging their ancestors and continuing their work towards Armenian triumph. Despite the message of “Harach Nahadag” that militaristic means is *the* way to achieve this, AYF “Ani” members recognize that being politically conscious and active in their communities equates them to be the “volunteer army of fiery winged fleets.” Learning these anthems is part of the regimen that begins with the AYF Juniors, ensuring that the political goals of the group are continued as they age into seniors, and then join the Armenian Revolutionary Federation.

At the end of every meeting, members rise to sing the Armenian national anthem, “Mer Hayrenik” (“Our Fatherland”), and the Artsakh national anthem, “Azat U Angakh Artsakh” (“Free and Independent Artsakh”). The singing of anthems at the start and end of the meetings empowers members to assert their loyalty to the *Dashnaktsutyun*, Armenia, and Artsakh. The singing of “Azat U Angakh Artsakh” initially stood out to me because, as someone who grew up in one of the largest Armenian diasporic communities in Los Angeles, I was never taught to sing this anthem. After hearing it at a meeting, I wanted to understand whether performing the anthem was a long-standing tradition for the chapter’s members. As I discovered, the AYF focuses its attention on supporting Artsakh in their chapter meetings,

fundraisers, and activities, including food festivals and athletic events. Other social events include dance parties and lock-in sleepovers at the church for the juniors, with senior members supervising. Because the “Ani” Chapter is Artsakh-centered, I devote space in this chapter to understand the overall significance of Artsakh’s national anthem. What struck me is that the “Ani” Chapter only recently began to integrate the national anthem of Artsakh into their meetings in 2020 when the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War began. In a Zoom interview, Galy explained:

We know that there is a genocide happening. And when [conflicts with Azerbaijan] started back up again, we really wanted to take ownership of our lands and the first step to doing that is knowing about Artsakh. You’re proud of Artsakh and you don’t know the national anthem? It’s kind of sad. We’re fighting for this land and these people, but you can’t sing along to the national anthem? So, we’ve done our best to implement it at every meeting. We even pushed it to Homenetmen.<sup>23</sup> Most of our community knows the words to the Artsakh national anthem. It’s something to be proud of and we are very proud of it. (Galy Jackmajian, personal interview, 3 May 2023)

I also discussed the singing of the Artsakh anthem with Areni Margossian, who said:

We [AYF “Ani”] were the first chapter in the region to make sure that we learned the Artsakh anthem. It became part of our meeting process to make sure that we sing the Artsakh anthem, and it’s because of our region that we brought a resolution to convention to make it so that the Artsakh anthem was mandated to be sung at every chapter meeting and at every event. It wasn’t done before, and the reason it’s being done now is because of the D.C. “Ani” Chapter. (Areni Margossian, personal interview, 21 January 2024)

For “Ani” Chapter leadership, it became vital for members to express pride and take ownership of Artsakh by learning and singing the national anthem. What is important to note is that “Ani” leadership did not only make this a goal for their chapter but extended it to their region and created a resolution so that all AYF chapters would sing the anthem at chapter meetings and events. This reflects how dedicated members

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<sup>23</sup> The Armenian General Athletic Union and Scouts is known as Homenetmen.

of the AYF “Ani” community are to Artsakh, and how they use this anthem to unite other chapters in the region to join them in their support of Armenians from Artsakh. The “Ani” Chapter’s use of the anthem supported the principles of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation to call for action and protect the homeland.

Through his concept of imagined community, political historian Benedict Anderson explains that a nation is imagined “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 2006, 6). Many “Ani” members have never traveled to Armenia, let alone Artsakh, due to countless travel advisories and the armed conflict with Azerbaijan, yet they construct an imagined community through claims focused on the region of Artsakh. The AYF “Ani” members refer to the people of Artsakh as their brothers and sisters and monetarily assist *Artsakhtsies* by sponsoring families who have fled to Armenia. The situation in Artsakh is even more dire today, as nearly the entire Armenian population has left the region after Azerbaijan regained the entirety of the disputed territory in September of 2023. Despite the exodus of Armenians from Artsakh and the knowledge that they may never step foot on Artsakh soil, members of the AYF continue to sing the Artsakh anthem and align themselves with the people of Artsakh. During informal conversations at meetings and gatherings, it is not unusual for an AYFer to say that “Armenia is nothing without Artsakh and [we] are nothing without Artsakh.” When the existence of Artsakh was first threatened in September 2020, the AYFers began to use music to figuratively claim and express their belonging to the region.

In her discussion of musical communities, ethnomusicologist Kay Kaufman Shelemay suggests a tripartite framework for discussing collective identity and community. She defines descent communities as those that are “united through what are understood from within to be shared identities, whether they are grounded in historical fact, are newly invented, or emerge from some combination of historical circumstance and creative transformation” (Shelemay 2011, 367). This model supports my investigation of the role music plays in community formation and collective identity among Armenian youth in Washington, D.C. Shelemay states that music provides a means for descent communities to perform a given identity. Armenian revolutionary songs, and the different contexts that the AYFers use these songs in, provide a means into understanding how dedicated the members are to their homeland, their organization, and the ideologies associated with the AYF/ARF. By singing patriotic songs, Armenian youth are not solely performing their collective identities as diasporic Armenians. Moreso, they perform their identities as members of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and express their allegiance to the ideologies of their organization.

To motivate fellow AYFers to attend a *heghapokhakan* or *revolutionary* song night with Armenian American singer Karnig Sargissian,<sup>24</sup> Areni wrote in the chapter’s group chat: “I think this Karnig concert gives us an opportunity to come together, sing and listen to the songs that illuminate who we are” (Margossian 2023). Areni considers it her responsibility as a senior member to involve the youth of the

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<sup>24</sup> Organized by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, the revolutionary song night featuring Karnig Sargissian took place in Bethesda, Maryland on October 14, 2023.

organization and encourage their attendance to the song night. She implies that singing these songs as a community will connect members who advocate for the independence of their homeland and promote *Hai Tahd*'s goal of the re-unification of Western Armenia with Armenia proper. Her promotion of the event among the youth serves to reinforce Armenian identity in the diaspora where opportunities for attending Armenian school, making Armenian friends, and speaking the Armenian language are limited.

Musical practices also allow descent communities to sustain themselves (Shelemay 2011, 368). *Staying Armenian* by making Armenian friends or speaking the language is something that is essential to many Armenians in the diaspora. The “Ani” members credit the AYF, their parents, and the Sunday school at Soorp Khatch for educating and enabling them to grow up with Armenian cultural and educational values. In interviews and informal conversations, many of them have emphasized how important these activities are in their daily lives. Attending church, making Armenian friends, knowing the Armenian language, and leading protests in Washington, D.C. are vital elements of the AYF “Ani” members’ lives. Many of them do not even live near Soorp Khatch, with some commuting over forty miles to attend the AYF meetings on Friday evenings, volunteer at food festivals or fundraisers on Saturdays, and teach Armenian language on Sunday mornings before attending the church service. Staying connected with the church and volunteering in their community is emblematic of the AYF “Ani” members’ dedication to their organization and for maintaining their roots.

Armenian revolutionary songs also serve educational purposes. In light of the current hostility with neighboring countries, the AYF considers it crucial that Armenian youth know their own history. These songs provide the youth of the Washington, D.C. chapter with this knowledge at a young age. Galy explains why she believes learning revolutionary songs is vital for Armenian youth who are raised outside of the homeland:

It's important for us to know our history and some of the catchiest ways to learn something is through music. All these revolutionary songs tell a story. It's the easiest way for our youth to learn about these huge acts of revolution that have moved mountains for our people. To learn about those strong characters in our history, without realizing that they're learning and that they're being connected to these people and are being motivated by these people to continue the struggle for a free, independent, united Armenia. (Jackmajian, 3 May 2023)

Armenian youth bring the tools they acquire as juniors with them as they join the AYF Senior Chapter, including information from “educationals” and annual seminars, revolutionary songs, and what they learn from older *ungers*. Through this circulation of knowledge, there are certain expectations and responsibilities for each member from this community. When the AYF Juniors age out of their chapter and join the seniors, and when seniors come to a certain age where they advance to the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, there is the expectation that there will always be educated and politically informed members to sustain the goals of the organization and continue to pass down what they have learned to a younger generation.

“Ani” Chapter member and high school senior Mary Markarian, who is a Homenetmen scout and teaches Armenian language at the Sunday school at Soorp Khatch, aged out of the AYF Juniors and joined the AYF Seniors in 2022. In a Zoom interview, Mary related why she joined the AYF at the age of thirteen and how she

came to the realization that the organization is much more than what she expected. She said: “I joined for my friends but then I realized that [the AYF is] much bigger than having fun. When you go in as a junior, it’s mostly just fun but as you get more involved you realize that it’s bigger than that” (Mary Markarian, personal interview, 24 October 2023). Mary discusses her experience transitioning from an AYF Junior to a Senior and described the change in the expectations required of her:

Becoming a senior really opened my eyes to the world of what being in the ARF is and what being an AYFer is. Even though the ARF is the big scary name for it, being an AYFer is basically the same thing in fighting for the Armenian Cause. I’ve had the opportunities to speak up. Last year, I gave a speech at the protest for April 24<sup>th</sup>, and it was scary because I had never done anything like that before and I got really nervous. At Armenian school...I have recited poems and I’ve gone on stage, but I had never given a speech with my own words and my own thoughts and feelings, and it was really amazing. (Markarian, 24 October 2023)

Mary’s experience is emblematic of many AYFers’ transitions from juniors to seniors who transition with the expectation that they will be politically active role models for the juniors. Whether planning and participating in protests, passing out flyers on Capitol Hill, attending educational seminars, teaching Armenian language at the Sunday school, being a scout leader for Homenetmen, or writing for the *Armenian Weekly* newspaper, it is now the responsibility of senior AYFers to educate the youth.

#### *AYF Senior Seminar: Field Medicine*

On September 19, 2023, Azerbaijan launched an attack on Artsakh and reclaimed the rest of the territory, resulting in the mass exodus of Armenians from Artsakh to Armenia. On September 28<sup>th</sup>, it was established that the Republic of Artsakh would dissolve on January 1, 2024. This all took place one day before the

AYF Senior Seminar, so the theme of the meeting, «Ժողովուրդիս Հետ՝  
Հայրենիքիս Համար,» meaning “With My People, For My Homeland,” was  
painfully relatable for many attendees. In a letter from the Youth Organization of the  
ARF (AYF-YOARF) Central Educational Council announcing the dates and theme of  
the seminar, it was clear that the purpose of the event was to educate AYF Seniors  
about the crisis in Artsakh:

Amidst the ongoing blockade of Artsakh, our people are once again facing  
dire circumstances on our indigenous lands at the hands of violent and  
authoritarian regimes. The lectures at this year’s seminar will be focused on  
relevant and engaging issues and topics with the goal of inspiring one another  
to continue applying ourselves to *Hai Tahd* and to continue fighting for a free,  
independent, and united Armenia. (AYF-YOARF 2023)

Upon arrival to Camp Haiastan on Friday evening, each attendee was given a  
folder with a schedule of the seminar, lined paper and a pen to take notes, and the  
lyrics and transliterations for the AYF, ARF, Artsakh, and Armenian anthems.  
Throughout the day on Saturday, attendees were given lectures and led through  
workshops on topics ranging from field medicine to cybersecurity, geopolitics, and  
repatriation. Sarig Armenian, a Los Angeles-based attorney, activist, and the  
*Armenian Weekly* newspaper contributor, provided a lecture titled “International Law  
and Geopolitical Realities.” In her discussion, she defined a revolutionary as an  
individual who is educated, dynamic, and creative. She quoted an Armenian  
revolutionary song titled “Sardarapat” to support this sentiment. With lyrics by Paruyr  
Sevak, a notable Armenian poet, and music by Edgar Hovhannisyanyan, “Sardarapat” is  
about the 1918 Battle of Sardarapat, where Armenian forces defended the city of  
Sardarapat against Turkish forces, preventing the full-scale invasion of Eastern  
Armenia and securing the independence of the Republic of Armenia in May 1918

(Krikorian & Masih 1999, 21). She quoted the lyrics, «երբ չի մնում էլք ու ճար, խնթերն են գտնում հնար» (“when there is no hope in sight, the fools will find a way”). In the historical context of the song, the “fools” are those who bear arms and sacrifice their lives to protect their homeland. Despite the meaning of the song in its original context, Sarig was not suggesting that AYFers enlist in the military. She expressed that she wanted them to realize a sense of value within themselves and apply the skills they had developed at home or in their professional lives to achieve *Hai Tahd*.

For example, the field medicine workshop was led by a medical student and AYFer from Chicago. To prove the value of the skills attendees would acquire from the workshop, she explained that if soldiers on the frontlines in 2020 knew basic field medicine, the death rate of the war would have been significantly lower. Participants were taught to dress gunshot wounds of pool noodles with holes that were intended to replicate limbs and learned how to use tourniquets. To be prepared for a situation where a traditional tourniquet might not be available, participants were innovative and used what they had by making substitutions and using a thin piece of cloth and a stick as the windlass. With the skills they learned from the workshop, attendees were confident that they had acquired the general knowledge to save a life.

As youth who have grown up in the United States where the majority have not experienced what it is like to live in warzones and do not intend on leaving the comfort of their lives in the United States, what is the purpose of learning basic skills in field medicine? Do they apply these skills to real-life situations, or does learning these skills make members feel closer to what is taking place in their homeland? To

my knowledge, no member from the “Ani” Chapter fought on the frontlines of war in 2020. I presume that AYFers are taught the basics of field medicine because the foundation of their father organization, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, is based on the revolutionary activities of freedom fighters. The purpose of the field medicine training and other activities throughout the weekend was to emphasize that each member in attendance has their own role in the future of Armenia.

AYFers, including my interlocutor Mary Markarian, became inspired by the field medicine workshop that gave them the ability to provide aid to their homeland. In my interview with Mary (who was not the leader of the field medicine training), she told me that many Armenians can support the homeland by repatriating, and I asked her if she would ever repatriate to Armenia or Artsakh with the uncertainties and dangers that come with living there. She confessed that her life would be more difficult, but not for the reasons I expected. Eastern Armenian is the primary dialect spoken in Armenia and Mary speaks the Western dialect. When Mary visited Armenia in the summer of 2023, she explained to me that some locals had trouble understanding her, especially because she incorporates Arabic terms into her spoken language. But this did not discourage her, and she is motivated to learn both dialects.

She continued:

I feel like if I got there, I would want to keep pursuing my career in science. When I go to college, I want to be a biology major, and I hope to do that [in Armenia]. I want to be a doctor, I just want to help the people, just teach people all that stuff. Especially what we were doing at Senior Seminar with field medicine, I would be willing to teach field medicine to people if I had to, if it came down to it. Even before anything happens, we need to educate people, we need to teach them about these things to prevent the loss of more lives. We have to teach people how to survive. (Markarian, 24 October 2023)

Mary makes no indication that she would go to the frontlines of the war to fight, but she still has the desire to aid through medicine.

I presume that the workshop on field medicine was not strictly intended to train AYFers to become medics in the war zones of Artsakh. The patriotism that comes with being a member of the Armenian Youth and Armenian Revolutionary Federations through the members' shared beliefs that these organizations will "save" Armenia instills within the youth the idea that, because revolutionary figures have brought victory to the nation in the past through warfare, their development of skills that would be essential in a battlefield will strengthen the goals of the organization. For example, Mary views herself as someone who will teach people how to survive. Even though members are taught these skills that they will likely never use in combat, I believe it makes them *feel* as though they are the equivalents of Armenian revolutionary figures.

After the workshops and lectures, AYFers came together and discussed the AYF's responsibility in saving Artsakh. Upholding educational values of the AYF is essential to achieving the political goals of the organization, and attendees of the seminar stressed that saving their homeland largely depends on having educated and politically informed AYFers. Many in attendance called attention to the low turnout of attendees and stated that AYFers should have abandoned all prior commitments to be present at Senior Seminar. They discussed chapter "educationals" and that even though these presentations are vital to the AYF culture, they have been viewed as unimportant and pushed towards the end of meetings. This discussion prompted an immediate change in the AYF "Ani" meetings at Soorp Khatch. The next chapter

meeting began with an “educational,” where Galy led a presentation about *fedayees* who had fought and perished in the First and Second Nagorno-Karabakh wars. She ended her talk by addressing her fellow *ungers* and expressed that they are the generation that will save Artsakh and Armenia. Both Sarig and Galy emphasized every AYFers’ role in achieving their organization’s ideology and, through their presentations, encouraged young members to find inspiration in Armenian revolutionaries.

### *AYF Senior Seminar: Saturday Evening and the Drive Home*

A typical Saturday evening at Senior Seminar would involve a party of dancing to Armenian music followed by singing revolutionary songs around a campfire. However, the atmosphere at this year’s Senior Seminar was somber and the party that would usually take place was canceled. Instead, members sat by the campfire and sang Armenian revolutionary songs accompanied by an acoustic guitar and *doumbek* (a type of goblet drum found in various parts of the Middle East). At protests, Armenian youth would sing revolutionary songs that were generally upbeat and celebratory, but the songs members sang at Camp Haiastan were ones with melodies and lyrics that were melancholic and reflected the atmosphere of the entire weekend.

“Mardigi Yerke” (“Soldier’s Song”) was one of the first songs that was sung. “Mardigi Yerke” is about loss and longing to return home. The lyrics convey a sense of nostalgia and collective memory for the mountains, rivers, and lands of Armenia,

whether it be for Armenia proper or the lands that are no longer Armenian territory.

The lyrics are about a soldier who wishes to return home to his mother.<sup>25</sup>

To fly home in my mind,  
Where my mother is awake,  
To see those fields,  
I am filled with immense longing,  
Where in every spring,  
Filled with raging waters,  
The mountains would bloom.

To go to the streams,  
To the cold water that I miss,  
To be in the fields,  
With our green fruit orchards,  
Where the flowers are fragrant,  
Where in my younger days,  
The wind would always kiss me.

My motherland, in my heart,  
If I don't die in the battle,  
Ah, my mother, that I treasure,  
I will return home once more,  
And will embrace your soul,  
With heartfelt kisses,  
And I will hold you close to my heart.

Music is an important component in how individuals cope with displaced identity, and this is evident when the AYFers sing patriotic songs. Although they physically were not on the battlefields of Artsakh in 2020 or in Artsakh during its final days in October 2023, the situation there is something they have been grappling with for the past four years. That evening around the campfire, they grieved over the realization that they might never be able to see Artsakh and that Artsakh was no longer Armenian territory.

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<sup>25</sup> Translation can be found in the Armenian Youth Federation's *AYF Camp Songbook: Camper Handbook*.

I drove back home with five other participants from the seminar: my sister Lilia; Mary; Vana Kassardjian, a first-year college student and member of the “Ani” Chapter; and two other members from the chapter. On the drive back home, the six of us carried on a conversation that reflected the overall political tone of the weekend and the organization. The driver asked everyone what they thought of Senior Seminar. Everyone in the car agreed that they learned a great deal from the speakers who presented, as well as from their fellow *ungers* during group discussions. They pointed out that while some attendees spoke too much, others were not contributing enough, and they openly explained that this was likely out of fear to say the wrong thing. The AYF is a politically charged organization and some members are cautious in expressing perspectives that might not align with the goals and practices of the federation’s by-laws.

On the drive up to Camp Haiastan we listened to rap, R&B, and country music, and no Armenian music was played. About two hours into the eight-hour drive back, Mary, Vana, and the driver began to sing along to covers of Armenian revolutionary songs. This lasted for three hours. Vana and Mary, who were sitting behind me in the third row of the minivan, quietly sang along to the songs that they learned together as AYF Juniors. These songs have become the foundation of their friendship since their childhood. As each song finished and another began, I could hear the women say to each other, “Oh, I love this song.” When I asked Mary why she thought the driver chose to play these songs on the way back home, she said: “I guess it was just like, over the weekend, being with all these Armenians...we’re not used to it. We’re surrounded by *odars* [non-Armenians]. After coming back from an

event that is full of Armenians, you don't want to let go of it" (Markarian, 24 October 2023). According to Mary, singing Armenian revolutionary songs on the way home allowed them to remain connected to one another for a little bit longer. In the United States, many Armenians' daily interactions are with non-Armenians, so this weekend became very important for them. In fact, Mary told me that she is one of the only Armenians at her school. For Mary and the others in the car, being with other Armenian youth during Senior Seminar gave them a sense of cultural belonging.

Mary also elaborated on what this experience meant to her and compared the feeling of returning home from Senior Seminar to returning home from her first trip to Armenia:

When I came back from Armenia, I was only listening to Armenian music. Even after the Senior Seminar trip, I'll still listen to *heghapokhagan* more, especially because of the Karnig Sargissian concert that happened, too. After being with Armenians for more than you're used to, you just don't want to let go of it. I want to say in *hayeren: mtnolorde*. You kind of want to keep that vibe going on, you don't want to let go of it. (Markarian, 24 October 2023)

As a young woman who has grown up in Maryland where there are few Armenians, her opportunities to make Armenian friends and be involved with Armenian language and culture came through her participation with the AYPF. Singing Armenian revolutionary songs during the drive home was Mary's way of holding on and sharing her Armenian identity with her Armenian friends.

Although my interlocutors attended Senior Seminar with a deep-rooted sense of Armenian patriotism, they felt *more* Armenian on the drive back home. They were proud to have gone to Senior Seminar for two reasons: they rediscovered the spirit of the Armenian revolutionary *fedayees* and gathered new knowledge and the tools they needed to continue the struggle for a free, independent, and united Armenia. Singing

Armenian revolutionary songs was not only an expression of their Armenian heritage and comradery with their *ungerner* but of their enthusiasm in their individual capabilities in one day achieving the “re-liberation” of Artsakh. In the next chapter, I will discuss how members of the Armenian Youth Federation Washington, D.C. “Ani” Chapter sing revolutionary songs, specifically “Zartir Lao” and “Gini Lits,” in genocide commemorations through the marches and protests they organize in Washington, D.C. I will focus on the commemoration of the 108<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian genocide that took place on April 24, 2023, in Washington, D.C.

## Chapter 3: 2023 Protest & March in Commemoration of the 1915 Armenian Genocide

Up to this point, I have explored how the members of the Armenian Youth Federation in Washington, D.C. use patriotic songs to educate its members and build senses of patriotism, solidarity, and community among them. One purpose of Armenian revolutionary songs is to educate the members about the values of the organization. These songs become even more ideologically charged in the AYFers' activities oriented toward justice for and recognition of the Armenian genocide.

This chapter will explore the march and protest in commemoration of the 108th anniversary of the 1915 Armenian genocide in Washington, D.C. I consider the overall function of this event as simultaneously a protest and a commemoration, and the role music plays in mediating these purposes. I demonstrate how these distinct functions as protest and commemoration played out during the event. I argue that while the AYFers carry out protests in Washington, D.C. to raise awareness among the general public of the Armenian genocide and 9-month blockade of Artsakh by Azerbaijan, chanting and singing revolutionary songs in Armenian functions to further the mission of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation in their own community. Additionally, they aim to rally more Armenians to the cause of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation.

### *Protesters and Counter-Protesters in Previous Years*

Growing up in Los Angeles, I attended genocide commemorations as a K-12 student at AGBU Manoogian-Demirdjian School in Canoga Park, California, and

continued to attend commemorative events in Los Angeles as a student at UCLA with friends and other members of the university's Armenian Students' Association. I attended commemorative events every year, but it was not very common to see counter-protesters. When I participated in the genocide commemoration in Washington, D.C., the presence of counter-protesters surprised me because it was something I was unaccustomed to. By coincidence, I saw a friend from Los Angeles at the protest and she also agreed that she had never seen so many Turks or Azeris at commemorative events and protests in Los Angeles. She even expressed that she felt scared. For me, the presence of counter-protesters marked a significant difference between the protests in LA and D.C. I have discussed this with my interlocutors, who expanded on what commemorations in Washington, D.C. have looked like in previous years. Areni Margossian explained:

You definitely see counter-protesters in D.C. I think it was in 2015, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary; there was a protest in Sheridan Circle, which is in front of the Residence of the Turkish Ambassador. The counter-protesters actually started attacking the protesters and there was a violent outbreak where people got injured. There are always protesters in front of the Turkish Embassy as well. What I've heard is that the Turkish Embassy will hire people randomly to be protesters. They're given signs and chants, but they're not Turkish people, they're just people for hire to look like there's a big group of people. What we do, yes, we have in the past responded with drowning them out with our revolutionary songs. And I remember, I think it was in 2021, we did a march and we had our speeches in front of the Turkish Embassy but the counter-protesters there were so loud that our speakers couldn't drown them out. On the spot we just moved everything to Sheridan Circle, and we continued our protest there and had the speeches and everything given there because we don't want to be drowned out by Turkish voices. (Areni Margossian, personal interview, 21 January 2024)

Areni's description of protests in previous years was similar to what I experienced in the 2023 protest in commemoration of the genocide. In this chapter, I will incorporate

statements from interviews conducted with members of the “Ani” Chapter to illustrate the 2023 commemoration through their experiences.

“We Demand Justice!” Demonstration Protest, April 24, 2023



Figure 5. Promotional flyer for “We Demand Justice!” protest. Source: Armenian Youth Federation Washington, D.C. “Ani” Chapter.

On April 24, 2023, the AYF “Ani” members led a protest in commemoration of the 108<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1915 Armenian genocide in Washington, D.C. The protest began at the Embassy of Azerbaijan and proceeded down Embassy Row, proceeded past the Embassy of Turkey and the Residence of the Turkish Ambassador, and ended with a program in front of the White House. As the protesters neared Sheridan Circle and the Residence of the Turkish Ambassador, Turkish music consisting of the *oud* and vocals could be faintly heard wafting in the distance. As

they approached, it became apparent that Turkish and Azerbaijani counter-protesters were using music to drown out the voices of the Armenian protesters. The immediate reaction of the AYFers was to blast Armenian patriotic songs, beginning with “Gini Lits” (“Pour the Wine”), over their loudspeakers and begin singing along with the recordings in unison. The counter-protesters then countered with even louder music. If this was considered a battle, the counter-protesters won as the voices of the Armenian protesters were overtaken. As we left Sheridan Circle, I was able to hear the AYFers screaming the lyrics to “Gini Lits” as the music of the counter-protesters faded away.<sup>26</sup>



Figure 6. Members of the AYF participating in the commemoration of the 108<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian genocide.

<sup>26</sup> A link to a video I took at the protest can be found here: <https://youtu.be/zqxKppUA-c0?feature=shared>.

Introduced in Chapter 1, “Gini Lits” (“Pour the Wine”) is about the assassination of Talaat Pasha, one of the key architects of the Armenian genocide. Since Arthur Khatchents’ use of “Gini Lits” on the frontlines of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War, the song has become a standard during protests involving the war, and the AYFers found this song to be applicable to their current situation as a song of protest and celebration. In an interview with me, Areni Margossian discussed the AYF’s use of Armenian revolutionary songs to respond to counter-protesters during protests commemorating the Armenian genocide. She explained: ““Gini Lits’...is very powerful because it’s about the assassination of Talaat Pasha, and what greater song to drown out their voices than with a song about the assassination of one of the orchestrators of the genocide?” (Areni Margossian, 21 January 2024). Below is an excerpt of the lyrics detailing the Armenian Revolutionary Federation’s involvement in the assassination carried out by Armenian revolutionary Soghomon Tehlirian and the celebrations that took place thereafter:

The Tashnagtsootyoun had a meeting,  
They decided upon the death of Talaat,  
Tehlirian became very lucky.

Pour the wine, dear friend, pour the wine,  
Cheers to the drinkers, cheers, cheers to the drinkers.

Talaat Pasha fled to Berlin,  
Tehlirian caught up behind him,  
He shot him in the forehead and laid him on the floor.

Pour the wine, dear friend, pour the wine,  
Cheers to the drinkers, cheers, cheers to the drinkers.

The AYFers symbolically view themselves as *fedayees* intent on achieving justice for Armenians today but through political activism and advocacy rather than

violence. This song, although violent through its lyrics, is not sung by AYFers to promote physical violence. However, some Armenians prefer not to sing revolutionary songs such as “Gini Lits” because of the extremity of the lyrics. In *The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars*, historian and political scientist Razmik Panossian indicates four themes that are entwined with commemorations of the Armenian genocide:

(1) the obvious point that ‘we are a victim nation’ and all of our dead of 1915 are ‘martyrs’; (2) tied to this, the notion of suffering a great deal injustice which still continues because (3) ‘we have been expelled from our historic homeland.’ This leads to the longing for the ‘lost lands’ which is awaiting the return of its ‘true inhabitants.’ Finally, (4) the more radical use the opportunity to demand justice, revenge, and retribution... (Panossian 2006, 238)

Panossian explains that these themes are based on his observations of Armenian genocide commemorations that he witnessed in London, Toronto, and Montreal, as well as from media sources. The last theme, he explains, arose in the 1920s through acts of revenge, including Operation Nemesis, which I introduced in Chapter 1 of this thesis. Panossian concludes that “...despite the overwhelming sense of victimhood, the acts of [Dashnak volunteers] wove an element of revenge and retribution into post-Genocide Armenian mentality, especially among the Dashnak side of the diaspora” (Panossian 2006, 238). A friend, whom I have known for years and who recently repatriated to Armenia, explained in an interview with my sister Lilia that:

My parents didn’t allow me to go to [AYF]. I used to be so upset when I was younger. They didn’t allow it for political reasons. We still learned a lot of the patriotic songs, but I think there is a distinction here. For some of the AYF songs sometimes there are...if you actually listen to the lyrics, some of it can be hate-based and violence inducing. So, it was a little political being happy that this and this person murdered this and this person, so my parents were a bit passive. So, I didn’t grow up learning a lot of those songs. I learned them later in life when I thought they were cool. There are different kinds of

Armenian patriotic songs...different levels. (anonymous, personal interview with Lilia Yaralian, 26 October 2023)

Despite the Turkish and Azerbaijani counter-protesters' efforts in silencing them, the AYFers carried on with their protest by singing "Gini Lits." During an interview with me, Galy, referencing the recent aggression of Azerbaijan towards Armenians in Artsakh, stressed that history is now being repeated today. She explained that each revolutionary song "tells a story of our past, our present, and our future" (Galy Jackmajian, personal interview, 3 May 2023). Not only do these songs recount events of Armenian history, but I have seen first-hand how they inspire and motivate many young Armenians in the continuation of the Armenian Cause.

A few days after the commemoration of the genocide, I conducted an informal interview at Soorp Khatch with AYF member Ani Arzoumanian who participated in the march. Ani grew up in New Jersey and was a member of the AYF New Jersey "Arsen" Chapter until she moved to Washington, D.C. in 2022. Although she did not remember the specific songs that the AYF played over their loudspeakers in reaction to the counter-protesters, Ani recognized that the AYF used music to combat the counter-protesters, who were using their music for the same purpose. Ani recounted her experience at the protest:

I remember that we tried to drown out their music. I've seen this before, in D.C. specifically, where there are a lot of Turks who are willing to come out and counter-protest. They play this very happy music that they dance to and to make fun of us and to celebrate our deaths or whatever they're actually thinking. On that end, that's the bad side, the detrimental side of the music. How they're using music to belittle us and to drown out our voices, and we tried to do that to them this year with our music. (Ani Arzoumanian, personal interview, 28 April 2023)

In this context, Ani felt that there was a battle using music as emblematic of the past and present conflicts between Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. Some counter-protesters were smiling, dancing, waving Turkish flags, recording the Armenian protesters, and holding up their fists. I do not know if it was the music or the behavior of the counter-protesters themselves that gave her the impression that the counter-protesters were celebrating Armenian deaths. Ani felt belittled by the counter-protesters as they celebrated on Embassy Row while she and her *ungerner* marched for the recognition of the Armenian genocide and the end of the blockade of the Lachin Corridor. Galy had very similar sentiments about the counter-protesters: “it feels like you’re being spit in the face... because you’re there demanding justice for these crimes that these peoples’ ancestors committed against your great-grandparents and just to see them so happy dancing to their music is just blood-boiling” (Jackmajian, 3 May 2023). In an interview, Maryland-native and AYPF Alice Kahkajian expressed pride in the AYPF’s use of “Gini Lits” to oppose the counter-protesters:

Seeing our ability to use that really powerful piece as a way to drown out the voices of the Turks who continue to oppress our identity today, who continue to commit genocide today...that was just a very powerful act and I think that we have songs such as “Gini Lits” that remind us of people in the past who have done a lot of powerful things in order to fight for Armenian culture and that’s kind of what like the AYPF stands for as well. (Alice Kahkajian, personal interview, 28 April 2023)

Although the Armenian community was calling on Azerbaijan to end the blockade of the Lachin Corridor, in our interview Alice referred to the Turks as those “who continue to commit genocide today.” Many Armenians, including Ani, refer to the events that took place in Artsakh as a continuation of the 1915 Armenian genocide

committed by the Ottoman Empire. During the war in 2020, Turkey provided Azerbaijan military aid and President Erdoğan openly expressed pride in the military actions of Azerbaijan and President Aliyev.<sup>27</sup>

When I asked Galy why the AYF chose to begin their protest at the Embassy of Azerbaijan, she explained that the crimes committed by the Ottoman Empire have not ended and that Azerbaijan continues to commit the same crimes today. She said:

Today there is a genocide in Artsakh. There are 120,000 people blockaded by the government of Azerbaijan, call it a dictatorship. And it just keeps getting worse every single day. If we're going to demand justice for this crime that was committed in 1915-whatever, it hasn't ended. Now it's moved on to Azerbaijan committing that same crime. So, we had to remember that somehow and demand justice not just for the Armenian Genocide in 1915 but also 2020-2023 and ongoing. (Jackmajian, 3 May 2023)

In her master's thesis in Music at the University of New Mexico titled "Azat, Ankakh, Artsakh': Music, Memory, and the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War," Sasha Arteaga argues that "the Armenian government and the global Armenian population consider the unfolding events in Artsakh and recently, in Armenia proper, to be not just a continuation of decades-long conflict with Azerbaijan and Armenia, but a continuation of the Armenian Genocide" (Arteaga 2023, 4-5). Similar sentiments are expressed by Natalie Kamajian, a Performance and Culture Ph.D. candidate at UCLA, who explains that this "illuminates how Armenians view the Armenian Genocide not as an isolated event in history, but as a process of continued attempts by Turkish peoples to annihilate Armenians, displacing them and erasing any trace of them from the region entirely" (Kamajian 2022, 54). Many members of the Ani

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<sup>27</sup> Andrew Roth's *The Guardian* article "Nagorno-Karabakh: Erdoğan Praises Azerbaijan as Thousands Flee to Armenia." [https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/25/nagorno-karabakh-refugees-pour-into-armenia-after-military-offensive-azerbaijan?CMP=share\\_btn\\_url](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/25/nagorno-karabakh-refugees-pour-into-armenia-after-military-offensive-azerbaijan?CMP=share_btn_url).

Chapter feel similarly. The concept of history repeating itself is a common sentiment among the “Ani” Chapter members and the songs that were used in past conflicts have now been revitalized in the face of Turkish-Azerbaijani aggression.

“Zartir Lao” (“Awake My Son”) was also sung by the AYPF “Ani” members during the protest. According to Galy, “Zartir Lao” has transformed in meaning in relation to the current crisis in Armenia and Artsakh:

[“Zartir Lao”] was sung decades ago and we’re singing it again in 2023 to wake up our generation of Armenians, to fight for our rights, for justice, for self-determination, for independence, for peace. This song has had a huge role in the past few years. Mostly with the Zartir Lao Movement that happened in Armenia and across the diaspora to wake up Armenians and to realize that what is going on is not okay. We have internal traitors working with external enemies to fulfill the Turkish Pan-Turkic<sup>28</sup> goal. So, it’s used to wake up the youth, to wake up the new generation, to continue fighting. (Jackmajian, 3 May 2023)

The song has developed an additional layer of meaning in urging Armenian youth to realize the corruption of the Armenian government. Although the song is still situated towards urging Armenians to “wake up,” it is no longer solely about fighting external aggressors. As a condition of the ceasefire to the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan signed away most of the territory of Artsakh to Azerbaijan, enraging many Armenians in the country and its diaspora. Armenians knew that Azerbaijan did not want peace, but when Pashinyan openly expressed the view that Armenia was ready to engage in peace talks with Azerbaijan in April 2022, that was the last blow that instigated the opposition movement to demand Pashinyan’s resignation (Balayan 2022).

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<sup>28</sup> Pan Turkism refers to the unity of Turkic peoples.

As part of the opposition movement, the Armenian Youth Federation/Armenian Revolutionary Federation adopted “Zartir Lao” as a popular rallying song and slogan for their protests in Armenia and the United States. During a conversation with me, AYPF “Ani” member Sune Hamparian discussed the use of “Zartir Lao” in the “Ani” Chapter’s activities. Sune is present at all AYPF-organized events, leads chants, and provides speeches at protests. She is the daughter of Aram Hamparian, the Executive Director of the Armenian National Committee of America in Washington, D.C., and because of her upbringing, she is exceptionally active in the AYPF. Like Alice Kahkajian, Sune explained that singing Armenian revolutionary songs with her *ungerner*, especially “Zartir Lao,” makes her proud. She referred to “Zartir Lao” as a slogan that was used during the 2020 Artsakh War and more recently used by the chapter in its efforts in helping Artsakh:

It started as a rallying cry and more recently I’ve heard [“Zartir Lao”] a lot. We used to have it on t-shirts. But the way [the song] makes you feel. I think it’s melancholic and reminds you of all the terrible things. You now, it’s one thing to hear [the lyrics] said, but music makes you feel it more deeply. (Sune Hamparian, personal interview, 28 April 2023)

For the AYPFers, “Zartir Lao” has evolved into having a stronger impact outside of the melody. Now, the phrase lives on as a popular slogan that AYPFers and community members have worn on t-shirts, printed on banners, and used during protests. The meaning and purpose of “Zartir Lao” have evolved from a song summoning Armenians to defend their homeland in battle or a song dedicated to the *fedayee* Arabo to a tool of protest in the current context, urging young Armenians to figuratively wake up and realize that Nikol Pashinyan will lead to the destruction of Armenia.

*Armenian Revolutionary Songs, Protest, and Identity Formation*

Ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino states that “as activities that involve and coordinate the sound and motion of relatively large groups of people, singing, chanting, dancing, and marching can create the actual sense of collective unity through sounding and moving together” (Turino 2004, 18). The singing of “Zartir Lao” creates a sense of Armenian identity among the AYFers and unity in their shared goal to achieve *Hai Tahd* and to rally other Armenians in support of the opposition movement. In *Music and the Armenian Diaspora: Searching for Home in Exile*, ethnomusicologist Sylvia Angelique Alajaji discusses the Armenian community of Lebanon and how singing patriotic songs and hymns in unison at church, school, and cultural organizations contribute to creating a sense of collectivity (Alajaji 2015, 85). Singing patriotic songs during protests in Washington, D.C. unites AYFers in solidarity, not only because of the nationalistic sentiments of the songs but because they are singing solely in Armenian. According to Alajaj, after the genocide Armenian choirs in Lebanon created a sense of “home” “through the symbolic sounding of ‘Armenia’—sonically sounding its borders and linguistically giving voice to its symbols, its tropes, its heroes, its past, and its future” by singing in Armenian (2015, 91). The singing of “Gini Lits” and “Zartir Lao” during this protest was highly participatory (Turino 2008, 26) among the members of the greater Armenian community of Washington, D.C. Turino explains that “at such moments, moving together and sounding together in a group creates a direct sense of *being* together and of deeply felt similarity, and hence identity, among participants” (2008,

43; emphasis in original). I presume that singing prominent Armenian songs is meant to index hope and rally more Armenians to the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. My interlocutors have told me that they want to metaphorically “wake up” Armenian youth, and I believe that they envision these songs bringing in more supporters to their cause.

The Armenian Youth Federation formed out of descent through members’ shared ethnicity, but AYFers are also connected through processes of dissent. Dissent communities “generally emerge through acts of resistance against an existing collectivity...[and] tend to coalesce quite rapidly, arising in response to a particular event or circumstance at a specific moment in time” (Shelemay 2011, 370). Dissent communities also use musical performance to raise awareness for their cause. As pointed out through the discussion of “Zartir Lao,” the *Dashnaktsutyun* conveys its message of disapproval in the Armenian government through music. The Armenian Youth Federation and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation both emerged from acts of resistance and continue to be politically dedicated organizations to working to create a free, independent, and united Armenia. It is important to note that Armenian revolutionary songs are not just embraced by members of the *Dashnaktsutyun*, but also by many Armenians who have the same desire for the well-being of their homeland.

### Legibility/Illegibility of Language

When the AYFers protested to raise awareness for the Armenian genocide and the events taking place in Artsakh, they only sang songs in Armenian. Although

posters that the protesters held and their chants and slogans were a mix of English and Armenian (ex: “1915 Never Again” or «սպարսաք, սպարսաք մինչեւ վերջ» (“fight, fight until the end”)), it is important to consider who the AYFers were singing for and who they intended on influencing to join their cause. Singing and chanting in Armenian may contribute to their aspirations in retaining their senses of Armenian identity. It is possible that singing these songs during protests is not aimed at raising awareness in the greater Washington, D.C. community, but to promote the organization’s goals within themselves by singing prominent songs that many Armenians may be familiar with. Despite this, members of the organization have told me that one of their goals is to make more people aware of the 1915 genocide. They marched from the Embassy of Azerbaijan to the White House and made stops along the way for designated speakers to give speeches in both Armenian and English, so there was not a complete divide between Armenian and non-Armenian speakers.

### *From Protest to Commemoration*

In my discussion, I consider the overall function of the event as a protest and a commemoration, and the role music plays in mediating these distinct purposes. Following the march to the White House, members of the Armenian community gathered for the commemorative program to begin, which included prayers by the *Der Hayr* (married priest) from Soorp Khatch and musical performances. Members of the executive board of the AYF asked me and my sister Lilia to sing a song titled

“Kilikia.”<sup>29</sup> “Kilikia” was composed by Kapriel Yeranian, with lyrics by Nahabed Rousinian, and is dedicated to the historic region of Kilikia located in present-day Turkey. In *Hayots Tseghaspanutyun Azdetsutiune Erg-Erazhshtutyun Vrah (The Impact of the Armenian Genocide on Music)*, Avo Katerjian explains that “Kilikia” is like other mournful songs that were composed in response to the Armenian genocide (Katerjian 2010, 148). According to Katerjian, this song has become an anthem for Kilikia Armenians who fled massacre at the hands of Ottoman Turkey. The lyrics depict longing for Kilikia and one’s desire to die there. Singing this song during genocide commemorations is emblematic of the historic regions that are no longer Armenian but are still part of an imagined homeland. The lyrics appear below:

When the gates of hope are opened  
And the winter takes leave of our homeland,  
When our beautiful land of Armenia  
Beams its euphoric, delightful days;  
When swallow returns to its nest;  
When the trees are clothed in leaves,  
I yearn to see my Kilikia,  
World that deluged me in eternal sun.

I saw the meadows of Syria,  
The mountains of Lebanon and its cedars;  
I saw the land of Italy,  
Venice and its gondolas;  
No other island is like our Cyprus,  
But truly compared can be nowhere  
With my exquisite land of Kilikia,  
World that deluged me in eternal sun.

There is an age in our lifetime  
When every desire dissipates in air,  
An age when the yearning soul  
Aspires to reach the memory’s trail.  
When my lyre quivers and chills,  
Sending love its final smile.

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<sup>29</sup> Also spelled Cilicia.

Let me go rest in my Kilikia,  
World that deluged me in eternal sun. (Hacikyan et al. 2005, 227-228)

The shift in song choice is noteworthy. From singing revolutionary songs celebrating the assassination of Talaat Pasha, to singing along to an a cappella performance of a song about loss and the dying wish to see land that was once part of Armenia, these very different songs represent the resilience that my interlocutors tell me is so important to their lives as youth in the diaspora. In “Music and the Mediation of Remembrance: Reflections on the Commemoration of the Centennial of the Armenian Genocide” from the edited volume *Performing Commemoration: Musical Reenactment and the Politics of Trauma*, Alajaji discusses concerts of genocide commemoration as “sites of memory...but also sites of identity construction. In their framing and positioning of the genocide, they consequently frame and position the Armenia diaspora” (Alajaji 2020, 221-222). The march and protest in 2023 may also represent “a site of memory” (Nora 1996-1998) for Armenian youth in Washington, D.C. They continue to sing patriotic songs about the bravery of Armenian revolutionary figures, but the intergenerational memory of the genocide and the trauma that young Armenians in the diaspora may experience at these commemorations is reflected through songs that display themes of longing for the homeland, such as “Kilikia.”

## Conclusion

Ethnomusicologist Alyssa Mathias emphasizes “the importance of looking beyond the past and toward the various ways that uncertain futures produce meaning in Armenian music” (Mathias 2021, 257-258). Throughout this thesis, I have explored Armenian revolutionary songs with a focus on “Gini Lits” (“Pour the Wine”) and “Zartir Lao” (“Awake My Son”), and how the uses and meanings of these songs have been transformed over time in response to war and the political instability of Armenia and Artsakh. These songs have evolved over the years to their uses on the frontlines of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War by soldier and musician Arthur Khachents, through music videos created by the Adana Project, and among Armenians in Washington, D.C. during AYP-led protests commemorating the 1915 Armenian genocide and calling for the end of the blockade of the Lachin Corridor. I explored how these songs have evolved lyrically and how they are performed during contemporaneous contexts.

While there are foundational themes, including oppression from neighboring countries and the triumph of the Armenian revolutionary figure, that carry on through these songs, contemporary renditions are adapted to current circumstances of war and political upheaval in Armenia and Artsakh. Thus, these songs index historical events and the contemporaneous contexts in which they are reproduced. Armenian revolutionary songs hold immense historical weight through the stories they tell about Armenian *fedayees*, which makes them a unique tool for political resistance, instilling

solidarity and patriotism and helping youth in Washington, D.C. maintain a sense of Armenian identity. This research reveals how the AYF uses music to metaphorically stand in rank with Armenian soldiers, unite in solidarity with fellow AYFers, and cope with war in Nagorno-Karabakh. Despite geographical boundaries, for many Armenians who followed the 2020 Artsakh War from their homes in Armenia and the diaspora, it seems that covers of revolutionary songs by Khachents and the Adana Project also instilled solidarity and hope among those who supported their homeland in spirit.

Looking towards future research on Armenian revolutionary songs, I intend to explore the sociopolitical contexts of these songs in dialogue with the experiences of my interlocutors in Washington, D.C. and with the other AYF chapters in the United States. This would provide a comparative account of how Armenian youth interact with these politically charged songs. My field site at Soorp Khatch Armenian Apostolic Church in Bethesda, Maryland was particularly advantageous in terms of location and how politically active my interlocutors were in their community. I believe that it would be fascinating to investigate other chapters in different regions of the United States to understand the various relationships Armenian youth in the diaspora have with revolutionary songs and the purposes they may serve in less politically active regions of the country.

Returning to a question I posed in Chapter 2 regarding Galy and the incident with the AYF songbook: what results when the members of a community want to

disassociate songs that depict Armenian independence, patriotism, and heroism from the leader of their homeland? I believe that the current divide among Armenians in Armenia and those in the diaspora becomes evident. While members of the *Dashnaktsutyun* and many other Armenians do not support Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, there were enough Armenians that supported his recent re-election in 2021 so that he won over 50% of the vote (Agence France-Presse 2021). From a young age, the Armenian Youth Federation Washington, D.C. “Ani” Chapter members learn to sing songs about Armenian revolutionaries who played a role in securing Armenian independence. As adults, they choose to disassociate these songs from Pashinyan and now use them during protests in Washington, D.C. to expose what they perceive as a corrupt leadership endangering the security of Armenia. Revolutionary songs have remained relevant for decades because Armenia continues to be in a state of political and geographical instability. But this is not the only reason these songs remain relevant.

At Senior Seminar, I spoke with an AYFer living in New York City, and told her about my work with the Armenian Youth Federation “Ani” Chapter and research on Armenian revolutionary songs. She informed me that she knows many fourth and fifth generation AYFers who never learned to speak Armenian but can sing the Armenian revolutionary songs learned through the AYF. These songs are important to members of the organization and are considered a shared value within the sixty-two AYF chapters worldwide. While Armenian revolutionary songs allow them to further their political ideology in Washington, D.C. and rally more Armenians in support of

their organization, what I believe is most important to the AYPF “Ani” members is that these songs stand for their community values, help ensure the dissemination of Armenian culture and history, facilitate the cultivation of leaders among the youth, and help them maintain their sense of Armenian identity.

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