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The ABCs of Being Armenian: (Re)turning to the National Identity in Post-Soviet Textbooks

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The ABCs of Being Armenian:
(Re)turning to the National Identity in Post-Soviet Textbooks

By
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Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee
Of Lehigh University
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Art
in
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Abstract

Since its independence in 1991, the Republic of Armenia (RoA) has engaged in a complex process of redefining what it means to be culturally Armenian in the context of a free and independent nationhood. Through a comparative analysis of texts and illustrations from Soviet and post-Soviet Armenian early language textbooks, this study examines how school textbooks -- as sources of "official knowledge" -- have contributed to the construction of an Armenian identity in primarily monoethnic, parochial terms. Although official education policy rhetoric seeks to project the image of "global" and "multicultural" citizenship in the post-Soviet Armenian context, aybenarans, or early language textbooks, have (re)defined the Armenian national identity in strictly monoethnic terms by projecting particular national symbols, texts, and images. The study traces how the notion of what it means to be Armenian has changed from the Soviet to post-Soviet context, while also noting some important continuities. Despite growing arguments that textbooks worldwide increasingly emphasize universal, post-national identities, the findings of this study reveal a resilient emphasis on essentialized ethnocultural conception of who belongs to the nation and who does not.

INTRODUCTION

In a country nestled between its former enemies Turkey and Azerbaijan, Armenia has had a history of foreign domination that contributed to the shaping of the Armenian national identity. Having survived the Armenian genocide during the Ottoman rule (1915-1923) and endured the Soviet domination (1922-1991), the most recent Nagorno-Kharabakh conflict (1988-present), as well as several waves of emigration throughout the centuries, Armenians have maintained a strong sense of national identity. In fact, some scholars have referred to it as one of “the world’s most stable and persistent national identities” (Herzig & Kurkchian, 2005, p. 1). While multiple factors have contributed to the resilience of the Armenian national identity – including the language, culture, and religion – education has played an important role in institutionalizing the particular understanding of the Armenian “nation,” as well as defining its boundaries and transmitting the notions of collective (national) identity. In fact, the state educational system has served as one of the critical mechanisms in (re)articulating historical memories and visions of nation(hood) in Armenia and elsewhere (Apple, 1992; Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991; Gellner, 2006).

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, a transition from Soviet to independent Armenia has required a redefinition of what it means to be Armenian – a shift clearly reflected in educational reform efforts. On one hand, school curricula and textbooks have aimed to incorporate the values of global citizenship to signal Armenia’s transition from Soviet to Western (European) education space. As Terzian (2010) explains, education reforms of the 1990s and 2000s became aligned with Western approaches to education to allow Armenia to compete in the global marketplace by

introducing new subjects such as civic education to teach the values of openness, multiculturalism, tolerance, and human rights. At the same time, however, official curricula have also emphasized the uniqueness of the Armenian national identity by (re) articulating the myth of a primordial homeland through such subjects such as the history of the Armenian Church (Terzian, 2010). How have school textbooks accommodated these competing narratives and what do they convey about post-Soviet Armenian nation(hood) today?

Through critical analysis of school textbooks published during the Soviet period (the 1980s) and after Armenian independence (the 1990s and 2000s), this study explores changes in educational narratives about Armenian nation(hood) in the context of world culture debate. More specifically, it challenges world culture theory¹ and its main proposition that educational systems worldwide have been converging towards the universally shared “norms” of the individual, progress, childhood socialization, and the role of the state (Ramirez & Boli, 1987; Meyer, Boli, Thomas & Ramirez, 1997). From a neo-institutional perspective, mass schooling has increasingly valorized the values of “humanity,” “diversity,” and “multiculturalism,” posing “new challenges to nationalism and the monocultural narrative once favored in schools and universities” (Ramirez, Bromley & Russell, 2009, p. 29). In particular, world culture scholars have argued that post-World War II concerns about excessive nationalism and state power have put an international pressure on local governments to “de-emphasize history instruction and to give more time to civics and especially social studies” (Ramirez et al.,

¹ World culture theory is one approach within the diverse field of neo-institutional theory. It was elaborated by scholars at Stanford University under the leadership of John Meyer, proposing a set of hypotheses to explain the global expansion of mass schooling (Meyer 1971, 1977; Meyer, Ramirez, Rubinson, and Boli-Bennett 1977).

2009, p. 35; see also Benavot, 2005; Wong, 1991; the studies reported in Benavot and Braslavsky, 2006; Schissler and Soysal 2005). According to world culture theory, such reforms would eventually lead to “*a world beyond nationalism:*”

This is a world within which national borders are porous and often imagined as barriers to progress. This is a world of universalistic standards, international conferences, and transnational social movements. Within this world the model nation-state acknowledges and respects differences within its fold, significantly lowering the price of admission to its political mainstream. Within this world, the model nation-state presents itself to other nation-states (and to a broad spectrum of other entities) as a nation-state attuned to a common humanity that serves as the rationale for respecting differences between nation-states. *In short, this is a world in which humanity and diversity are increasingly valorized elements in national educational systems.* (Ramirez, Bromley & Russell, 2009, p. 49-50, emphasis added)

The broader rhetoric of education reform in Armenia may indeed reflect some international “norms” – as evident in the adoption of education policy rhetoric of “diversity” and “pluralism” emanating from the European Union (EU) and various international agencies (e.g., the World Bank, UN agencies, and non-governmental organizations) – this study suggests that such policy rhetoric does not necessarily reach the schools. In particular, school textbooks continue to portray Armenian nation(hood) in distinctly ethno-national, parochial terms. Contrary to the world culture perspective, which is predominantly based on macro-sociological and quantitative research, this study pursues an in-depth qualitative analysis of Armenian school textbooks to reveal a strong presence of narratives constructing an exclusively ethno-culturally and linguistically-based concept of Armenian nation(hood). These findings resonate with the studies of other post-Soviet school textbooks, including Kazakhstan (Ismailova, 2004) Latvia (Silova, 1996), Lithuania (Beresniova, 2011), Poland (Gross, 2010), Ukraine (Mead, 2012), and Slovakia and Estonia (Michaels & Stevick, 2009) among others.

While challenging the world culture perspective, this research also expands

the scope of the existing studies on post-Soviet school textbooks from history/civic education textbooks in secondary schools to early literacy textbooks or *aybenarans* – an area that is often overlooked in terms of analyzing political ideologies. Bright, colorful images that accompany letters guide students in their learning may seem to be void of political ideology. However, these seemingly innocent images and texts contain important messages about what it means to be an Armenian today, transmitting values to its future generations. Framed within the world culture debate, this study explores the role of *aybenarans* in (re)defining the Armenian national identity during the post-Soviet transformation period and thus serves as an important case-study for understanding the complexities of the relationship between education and national identities in the context of globalization.

WORLD CULTURE AND LOCAL POLITICS IN EDUCATION REFORM:

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theme of global educational convergence constitutes one of the central debates in comparative education. On the one hand, world culture scholars have argued that educational systems worldwide are converging towards the global model of education, contributing to the emergence of post-national identities that reflect the values of global citizenship, human rights, and multiculturalism (Bromley, 2009; Ramirez, Bromley & Russell, 2009; Meyer, Bromley, & Ramirez, 2010). On the other hand, world culture theory has been critiqued by those scholars (mostly education anthropologists) who have focused on the local enactment of global phenomena by highlighting the centrality of agency and the politics behind the implementation of globally traveling education reforms in various national contexts (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004; Schriewer, 2012). This study contributes to the world culture debate by examining

the Armenian case, especially the role of school textbooks in appropriating world culture values and (re)negotiating national identities in the context of post-Soviet education transformations. This section begins by a general overview of the world culture debate, outlining the conceptual and methodological differences among scholars on both sides of the debate. It then situates the Armenian case in the world culture debate by highlighting the political nature of knowledge production locally and the critical role of school textbooks in generating educational narratives about global/national identities.

Education and post-national identities: The world culture perspective

World culture theory posits that educational policies across the world are becoming increasingly similar, reflecting common values in education. Work in this theoretical vein asserts the primacy of world culture in shaping the nature and goals of various institutions, including education. World culture theory's central theoretical claim is that educational expansion (as evident in the introduction of mass schooling worldwide) was not a function of the political, economic, and social characteristics of individual nation-states, but rather the result of the "characteristics of the contemporary world system" itself, affecting "all nations simultaneously" (Meyer et al., 1977, p. 255). Building on this hypothesis, world culture theory argues that education is being constructed for an *imagined* world society (rather than in response to national politics) and this construction revolves around the internalization of *shared* cultural "myths" of the individual, progress, childhood socialization, and the role of the state (Ramirez & Boli, 1987).

According to world culture theory, we can observe "major worldwide trends in education – trends that flow to every type of country" (Meyer 2006, xii). Primarily drawing on longitudinal and cross-national research design and quantitative analysis,

world culture scholars suggest that these trends reflect such Western ideals and policies as human rights (Suárez, 2007a; 2007b), environmentalism (Bromley, Meyer & Ramirez, 2011; Frank, Robinson & Olesen 2011; Moon & Koo, 2011; Pizmon-Levy, 2011), and women's suffrage and educational opportunities (Ramirez, Soysal, & Shanahan 1997; Ramirez & Wotipka 2001; Wiseman 2008). Furthermore, they describe global adoption of such education trends as standardized curricula (Meyer, Kamens & Benavot, 1992; Benavot & Braslavsky, 2006); evidence-based education policy (Wiseman, 2010); and managerialism and rationalization of universities (Krücken & Meier 2006). In other words, world culture scholars argue that global educational models “filter into nations,” producing “*remarkable similarities* in what is taught and learned in schools all around the world” (Baker & LeTendre, 2005, p. xii, emphasis added). The assumption is that the processes of global convergence in education are consensual and they are driven by the shared agreement among policymakers worldwide about what constitutes “good” and “quality” education. From the world culture perspective, then, global “blueprints” shape local action in various contexts. More specifically, Meyer et al. (1997) explain:

Worldwide models define and legitimate agendas for local action, shaping the structures and policies of nation-states and other national and local actors in virtually all of the domains of rationalized social life—business, politics, education, medicine, science, even the family and religion. (p. 145)

From this perspective, the role of the nation-state is withering and global citizenship is gradually replacing national identities. This hypothesis has been particularly pronounced in most recent world culture scholarship, which notes the emergence of “post-national” identities (Bromley, Meyer & Ramirez, 2011; Bromley, 2009). Drawing on quantitative analysis of almost 465 textbooks from 69 countries published since 1970, for example, they argue that “post-national” nature of identities is reflected in the increasing references

to such themes as (1) global citizenship or membership in an international community; (2) human rights; (3) environmentalism; (4) student-centrism; and (5) multi-culturalism; among many others (Bromley et al., 2011; Bromley, 2009; Ramirez et al., 2009). In a study of environmental discourse in school textbooks, for example, Bromley et al. (2011) claim that textbooks no longer discuss the fundamental concepts of nature but instead focus on how individuals can avoid damaging the earth. In a study on multiculturalism, Ramirez et al. (2009) suggest that while the initial interest in multiculturalism and multicultural education stemmed from the American schools, they “are now clearly global themes,” valorizing cultural diversity and minority rights (p. 48). Similarly, research on the worldwide expansion of human rights education (Suarez, 2004) concludes that curriculum and school textbooks increasingly incorporate a rights discourse that extends beyond national borders.

What all of these studies have in common is their macro-orientation and a reliance on quantitative analyses. Methodologically, the emphasis is on counting the frequency with which certain terms/concepts appear over time in policy documents, school curricula, or textbooks. While such an approach offers a birds’ eye view of changes in educational narratives in a cross-national perspective, it does not tell us about the motivations for policy change, the local meanings of policy texts, and the degree of shared understanding across the different groups nationally and internationally (Carney, Rappleye & Silova, 2012). What is lacking then is a close reading of the texts and the qualitative analysis of meanings that these texts transmit. It is exactly this aspect of world culture research that is strongly critiqued by its opponents who emphasize the role of local agency and national politics in adopting, negotiating, and resisting global trends.

Global models and local politics: The world culture critique

While generating important insights for comparative education (e.g., identifying global educational trends), world culture theory has been critiqued for its (1) overemphasis of global convergence and (2) failure to acknowledge local politics.² In advancing the first line of critique (the over-emphasis of global convergence), Anderson-Levitt (2003) has questioned whether the world is becoming more uniform by highlighting local variations of global reforms in different national contexts. While acknowledging global circulation of some education reforms (e.g., privatization, decentralization, or child-centered learning), she notes that world culture scholars rarely describe what actually happens inside the classroom. Based on ethnographic research, Anderson-Levitt (2003) argues that global reforms assume different meanings in local contexts and that there are major variations of world culture “models” “from district to district and from classroom to classroom” (p. 2). From her point of view, “the nearly 200 national school systems in the world today represent some 200 different and diverging cultures of schooling” (p. 2).

Furthermore, some scholars have noted a co-existence of sometimes contradictory education reforms, simultaneously reflecting global ideals and local values. For example, education decentralization reforms have been accompanied by increased centralization and control of education in many countries, including Thailand (Jungck & Kajornsinn, 2003), the United States (Hatch & Honig, 2003), and China (Ouyang, 2003). Similarly, teacher autonomy has co-existed alongside the increased control of teachers’ work as illustrated by case-studies of Thailand (Junck & Kajornsinn, 2003), Israel (Segal-Levit, 2003), China (Ouyang, 2003), and Namibia (Zeichner & Dalhström, 1999). Finally, we can observe student-centered instruction alongside content- or teacher-centered

² For a more fully elaborated critique, see Carney, Rappleeye, and Silova (2012).

pedagogies, as illustrated by case-studies of Guinea (Anderson-Levitt and Diallo's, 2003), China (Ouyang, 2003), and South Africa (Brook-Napier, 2003). In other words, these studies acknowledge the existence of global convergence in education, but they offer a more nuanced understanding of how global reforms play out in different contexts.

The second line of critique goes further by questioning the existence of global convergence altogether. In particular, Steiner-Khamsi (2004) suggests the process of globalization should not be taken for granted, thus challenging the assumption of whether globalization necessarily leads to a “world culture,” “internationality,” or “internationalism” in education (p. 4). She argues that “educational borrowing,” whereby policies and practices are transferred from one context to another, is frequently limited to education reform rhetoric only and does not necessarily result in transfer of educational policies and practices associated with it. In particular, governments may “borrow” Western rhetoric to signal their alliance with international norms and standards, but they may not necessarily be willing to implement it in policy and practice for various political, cultural, and historical reasons locally (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004).

The disjunction between (global) education policy rhetoric and (local) practice has been widely documented in comparative education research. For example, Silova (2004) illustrated how the Latvian government has transferred the European Union rhetoric of “ethnic integration” and “multiculturalism” in the mid-1990s, but used it to legitimize the maintenance of segregated schooling for Latvian- and Russian-speaking students in Latvia. Similarly, Fimiyyar (2010) illustrated how Ukrainian policy-makers adopted the rhetoric of “catching-up with Europe,” while at the same time pursued *Ukrainization*-oriented policies in education. As a result, post-Soviet Ukraine has experienced “tensions between the discourses of active citizenship,” which was

disseminated by international agencies (such as the Council of Europe) and “national consolidation,” which was pursued by Ukraine and Russia (Janmaat & Piattoeva, 2007, p. 527). In Russia, Lisovskaya and Karpov (1999) highlight similar tensions where “ideological contradictions and inconsistencies” reflected in school textbooks during *perestroika* and after the collapse of the Soviet regime, specifically “a contradictory combination of the ideological symbols of nationalism, Westernization, and a reinterpretation of communism” (p. 523).

To summarize, these studies highlight that global discourses may indeed circulate in the post-Soviet education space, yet they emphasize the role of local politics in ultimately shaping education policies and practices. By carefully untangling the complex interaction between the global and the local, these studies reveal that education reforms in post-Soviet countries has been predominantly shaped by local politics and may have involved the manipulation of global “reforms” for sometimes contradictory (national) purposes. My study is situated within this conceptual framework, paying particular attention to the complex political context of Armenian post-Soviet independence in order to understand the role of education in (re)shaping the Armenian identity.

The role of school textbooks: Policy rhetoric and “official knowledge”

In order to document the interplay between the global and the local, it is important to move beyond education reform rhetoric and consider its implementation in policy and practice. School textbooks present an interesting area of study because of their powerful role of transmitting particular (global and national) ideologies. According to Apple (1991), school textbooks -- be they the standardized grade-level-specific books or the novels -- “are part of a complex story of cultural politics” (p. 15). In *The Politics of the Textbook*, Apple (1991) argues that textbooks (and the official curriculum more

generally) as the sources of “official knowledge,” which is perceived by the public as valid and legitimate. Yet, he also notes that textbooks “serve as important arenas in which the positive and negative relations of power surrounding the text will work themselves out” (p. 15). Furthermore, Apple (1991) explains that it is in school textbooks where it is often determined “*whose* knowledge is of most worth”:

Writers of textbooks often respond to the current political, economic, and cultural activities, battles, and compromises. They are conceived, designed and authored by real people with real interests...what texts mean and how they are used are fought over by communities with distinctly different communities and by teachers and students as well. (pp. 1-2)

Viewed as the sources of “official knowledge,” school textbooks serve as a mirror of how society perceives itself and how it projects itself nationally and globally. Therefore, it is important, as Apple (2001) suggests, to pay close attention to attempts by “dominant groups to shape which political agendas are made public and are to be discussed as ‘possible’” (p. 6). It is within this conceptual framework that I approach the analysis of Armenian textbooks published during the Soviet period (1970s-1980s) and after independence (1990s-2000s). My focus will thus be on the themes that influenced and shaped the Armenian identity in first grade alphabet books during post-Soviet transformations, paying particular attention to understanding the *meanings* of texts and illustrations that have shaped the Armenian identity today.

While most textbook studies on nationalism and (post)national identities in post-Soviet states have examined history, civics or geography textbooks in secondary schools (e.g., Janmaat, 2004; 2005, 2007; Kuzio, 2005; Popson, 2001; Gross, 2010; Bromley, 2009; Bromley et al., 2011), my study will focus on early literacy textbooks or *aybenarans*. The focus on early literacy textbooks in this study is purposeful. Full of bright and colorful images, early literacy textbooks are rarely associated with politics.

However, this study joins the emerging research on early literacy textbooks (Mead, 2012; Silova, Mead, & Palandijan, forthcoming) to argue that students become acquainted with their national history, culture, and politics at a very early age, forming a foundation for their national identity development in the future. As Mead (2012) highlighted, early literacy textbooks play an important role in introducing impressionable young students to the popular myths and ideologies of their nation-states. In other words, an examination of children's socialization in the early stages of formal education is as important as their high school experiences, revealing the foundations upon which specific ideas about national identities are formed and transmitted to future generations. This study will thus contribute to the existing textbook study research by extending the focus from secondary to elementary school levels.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to understand how school textbooks have contributed to shaping of the Armenian national identity during post-Soviet transformation period. More specifically, it examines the interplay between the global/local and Soviet/post-Soviet, highlighting continuities and disjunctions over time. For the purposes of this analysis, I will compare six *aybenarans* published between 1970s and 2000s, including three Soviet *aybenarans* (published in 1973, 1988, and 1990) and three post-Soviet *aybenarans* (published in 1991, 2003, and 2006). All textbooks in this study were approved by the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) of the Republic of Armenia. Given that the textbook publishing market remains strictly controlled by the Ministry of Education and Science and all textbooks used in schools require Ministry approval, the textbooks used in this study constitute a representative sample. In particular, the 2003 *aybenaran* is noted to be one of the most widely used textbooks in the country.

Table 1. Aybenarans in chronological order with the publication date, author’s name, and publishing company.

| <i>No.</i> | <i>Title of textbook</i> | <i>Date</i> | <i>Author</i> | <i>Publishing Company</i> |
|------------|--------------------------|-------------|---|--------------------------------|
| 1 | Aybenaran | 1973 | Ashod Der-Krirkorian | Poligrafkombinak |
| 2 | Arevig Aybenaran | 1988 | Ashod Der-Krirokian | Koynavor Dbakrootyan Dbaran |
| 3 | Aybenaran | 1990 | Ashod Der-Krirkorian | Koynavor Dbakrootyan Dbaran |
| 4 | Badgerazart Aybenaran | 1991 | Sona Dikranian | Mshagoyte Haygagan Font |
| 5 | Zankag Aybenaran | 2003 | Julietta Gyulameerian | Datev Gitakrdakan Hamaleer |
| 6 | Aybenaran | 2006 | Angel Kyourkjian, Lilit Der- Krikorian | Edit print |

Study Design

This textbook study is based on critical discourse analysis to interpret the meanings of texts and images in *aybenarans*. The critical discourse analysis method deemed to be the most appropriate instrument to examine the role of textbooks in (national) identity construction. Critical discourse analysis supports research influenced by social structure and produced in social interaction (van Dijk, T. 1998). As defined by van Dijk (1998), critical discourse analysis is primarily used to study “the way social

power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (p. 1). Put more briefly, Wodak (as cited in Schiffirin, Tannen, & Hamilton, 2003) suggests that “critical discourse analysis takes a particular interest in the relation between language and power” (p. 2). This study utilized the critical discourse analysis method to interpret the messages portrayed in *aybenarans* as “the larger discursive unit of text...which testify to more or less overt relations of struggle and conflict” (as cited in Schiffirin, Tannen, & Hamilton, 2003, p. 2).

van Dijk (1998) lists required characteristics of critical discourse analysis research, which include the following: (1) a primary focus on social problems and political issues, (2) a multidisciplinary nature of the empirically adequate critical analysis of social problems, (3) a focus on explaining rather than simply *describing* the discourse structures in terms of properties of social interaction and especially social structure (p. 2). Overlapping van Dijk’s (1998) list, Fairclough & Wodak’s (1997) argue that “critical discourse analysis addresses social problems,” recognizing that “power relations are discursive” (p. 2) and therefore going “beyond more traditional, content-analytical analysis of ‘images’ of the Others” (p. 18).

Using the critical discourse analysis, this study explores some of the major themes constituting comparative education research on global/local identities that emerged from the world culture debate, especially the contradictory claims of emerging post-national versus essentialist ethno-cultural identities. More specifically, my goal is to trace whether, how, and to what extent Armenian textbooks reflect the global/local identities through references to (1) membership in local/international community, (2) nature/environment, (3) notions of diversity, and (4) global issues versus local history. While these themes may not exhaustively cover the multiple aspects of global/local identities,

they constitute some of the most frequently used categories of analysis in scholarship driven by the world culture debate in comparative education. More specifically, my analysis was driven by the following questions as I analyzed these major themes:

- *Membership in a local/international community.* What do textbooks say about Armenian membership in a local/international community? How do textbooks portray the national space, as well as the limits or boundaries of the nation-state? What is said (or not said) about its belonging to a broader international community and what lies outside these boundaries?
- *Nature/environmental awareness.* How is the national space portrayed inside the (national) borders? What do the texts say about nature/environmental protection? How do the textbooks portray the landscape or natural features of Armenia? What do texts have to say about the identities and lives of the people who occupy this space?
- *Notions of diversity.* How inclusive/exclusive are textbooks in terms of portraying cultural/linguistic minorities, immigrants, and other minority groups? What does it mean to be an Armenian in terms of language, culture, and religion? How have these narratives have changed over time?
- *Global issues versus local history.* Finally, how do textbooks treat global issues versus local history? What are the main events and who are the heroes and enemies? Furthermore, how has the portrayal of events and heroes/enemies changed over time?

My analysis began with a careful reading and re-reading of the *aybenarans*, paying special attention to the themes identified above. Rather than constructing a coding schema to identify specific words or phrases, this purposefully broad, question-

based interpretive framework allowed for a detailed qualitative analysis of the *meanings* of dominant educational narratives, revealing what the books aim to communicate to their readers. In the analysis that follows, I identify themes that were similar across the six textbooks as well as explore certain themes that were abruptly discontinued. Occasionally, my analysis will offer close readings of text (whether visual or verbal) that appears particularly exemplary of a recurring discourse/theme. Throughout the paper, samples of any texts are provided in English translation and are accompanied by the original texts in the Armenian language. Finally, the analysis also includes a limited number of visual imagery, which appears to be particularly powerful in the *aybenarans*.

Finally, it is important to recognize limitations of this research. Since this study is focused on the textbook itself, it captures the dominant narratives of what it means to be an Armenian today; however, it does not tell anything about how these narratives are perceived by teachers and school children. In particular, the focus on textbooks as the main unit of analysis does not take into consideration the role teachers in re-interpreting (and possibly modifying) the meanings of texts and illustrations. In other words, textbook analysis does not tell us what happens at the classroom levels and whether (and which) “official” educational narratives actually reach the Armenian children. The results of this study are thus limited to the “official knowledge” contained in school textbooks only. Furthermore, this study focuses solely on first grade alphabet books and does include an analysis of similar themes in other subjects and/or grades. Future textbooks studies would certainly benefit from expanding the scope of this study to a wider variety of subjects and grades. Finally, I recognize that the topic of the Armenian national identity is closely related to my own personal identity; and, while such a close association may allow some bias of interpretation, I have attempted to systematically consider and present alternative

explanations of the findings. More importantly, my intimate knowledge of the Armenian language and culture enables me to reveal more of a nuanced and contextualized understanding of the meanings in the texts and illustrations for this study.

(RE)TURNING TO THE ARMENIAN IDENTITY:

TEXTBOOK ANALYSIS

Textbooks serve as the sites of the official construction of the “new” Armenian identity and nationhood. Based on the history of foreign domination, these textbooks reveal some of the ideals of the time that influenced the Armenian identity. Despite the predictions made by world culture theorists of embracing a universal, post-national identity, the findings of this study reveal an absence of the post-national identities and instead suggest that school textbooks may, in fact, have contributed to (re)articulating Armenian identity in strictly ethno-national terms. Not only did the concept of Armenian nation(hood) appear to return to its historical roots, but textbooks also celebrate an ethno-centric sense of national identity. Several of the themes which world culture theorists suggest are disappearing have been, in fact, directly linked and explicitly defined as being Armenian in the *aybenarans*. The themes, as mentioned earlier, include *membership in a local/global community, nature/environmental awareness, diversity, and global issues/versus local history*. In this brief textbook analysis, the Armenian identity appears remarkably consistent and similar in content during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, revealing a strong ethno-national orientation.

Membership in a local/global community

The concept of global citizenship or membership in a global/international community is frequently discussed as one of the indicators of post-national identities in school textbooks (Ramirez et al., 2009). The assumption is that group membership in

(or a belonging to) a local community are being gradually replaced by that of the global community as reflected in more frequent references made to geographic spaces/locations globally. In particular, what do textbooks say about Armenian membership in a local/international community? How do they portray the national space, as well as the limits or boundaries of the nation-state? What is said (or not said) about its belonging to a broader international community and what lies outside these boundaries?

The content analysis of *aybenarans* finds no evidence of the replacement of local (national) community membership with that of the global one. In fact, the Soviet textbooks made some frequent references to Moscow (as well as other communist countries such as China, Georgia); yet, these references have completely disappeared in the post-Soviet texts. In fact, they appear to have been consistently replaced with the messages of local (national) community membership. Through lullabies and songs, *aybenarans* define the homeland as “belonging to our ancestors,” claiming a historical link to the land. This link has been consistently expressed in both Soviet and post-Soviet Armenian textbooks. For example, the 1973 *aybenaran* describes how Armenians live in Yerevan which is the “world’s most beautiful city.” The text also highlights the beauty of the state parks and water fountains. Towards the end of the lesson, the following two sentences read: “Yerevan is the capital of Armenia. And Armenia is our dear fatherland, our ancestors’ country.” The overarching message from this lesson suggests that Armenians live in Yerevan, which is “our fatherland” and has been traditionally passed on through our ancestors.

Similarly, belonging to the (national) land -- homeland -- is one of the dominant narratives in post-Soviet textbooks. In all textbooks, the notion of “homeland” is expressed through the interweaving metaphors of blood and earth. For example, the 1990

aybenaran included a text illustrating the intersection of the national natural iconography of Armenia. In a story entitled, “Red Wine,” a boy from Yerevan tells about his trip to the countryside, symbolizing his return not only to his Armenian roots, but also reliving memories of his ancestors:

Table 2. Story entitled, “Red Wine” from 1991 *aybenaran* page 77.

Ես Երևանում եմ ապրում: Գյուղում պապիս ու իմ նախնիների շիրիմներն են: Երբ այցելում եմ նրանց, հետո եղբորս հետ մտնում եմ մառան: Ունայ-ունայ խմում եմ կարմիր գինին, խոնարհվում մեր նախնիների հիշատակի առջև և դուրս ելնում սառը մառանից: Սիրում եմ աշխատել պապիս ու պապիս պապերի այգում: Աճեանը նորից լզվում են մեր մառանի կարասները: Ես ուզում եմ, որ իմ զավակները չմոռան մեր պապերի զով մառաններն ու կարմիր գինու հին կարասները: (1991, էջ 77)

I live in Yerevan. In the village are my grandfather’s and ancestors’ gravestones. When I visit them, my brother and I go into the cellar. Gulp, gulp, we drink red wine and bow in memory of our ancestors, and emerge from the cold cellar worshipping our ancestors’ memories and feeling ...I love to work on my grandfather’s and grandfather’s grandparents’ field. In the fall we will fill our large clay jars [with wine] again. I want for my children not to forget our ancestors’ cold cellar and old red wine jars. (1991, p.77)

In this small story, the images of vineyards and wine-making are invoked as a primary means through which city-dwelling Armenians are able “return” to their roots. It is through the interaction with nature (particularly grapes and wine) that the children are invited to “worship” and find a symbolic connection to their long-gone Armenian ancestors. One cannot help but notice a strong religious aspect of the Armenian identity expressed through the imagery of wine, inspired by the blood-as-wine narrative of Christianity. Indeed, all the Armenian *aybenarans* included in this study incorporate numerous images of grapevines, either in detailed narratives about the importance of wine or simply ornamenting the pages. Whether explicitly used in the lessons on letters “kh” and “gh” (the first letters for words “grapes” and “wine,” respectively, in Armenian), or implicitly appearing in the background of Armenian children playing

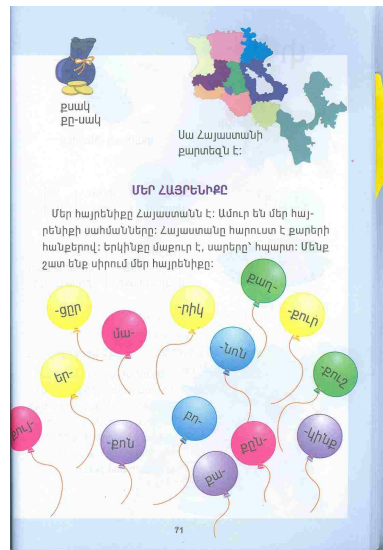
outside, the images of grapevines and/or wine-making constitute an inextricable part of Armenian textbooks and Armenian national identity. In other words, school textbooks socialize Armenian children into the particularly defined local (national) community.

If any references are made to what lies outside the Armenian national space (e.g., Mount Ararat or the Nagorno-Kharabakh territory), these references do not imply a movement towards a global community. Rather, they entail a discursive re-imagining of the Armenian national space, its borders stretching to include parts of the imagined, “unattainable” historical homeland that is beyond Armenia’s current political boundaries. For example, a map found in the 2003 textbook shows that the country of Armenia incorporates the disputed territory of Nagorno-Kharabakh (see Image 1). Contested between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Kharabakh is home to an ethnic Armenian majority yet is internationally recognized as *de facto* independent republic.³ Below the map a caption reads, “This is Armenia’s map.” Read by school children both in Armenia and Nagorno-Kharabakh, this text does not mention the fact that the conflict over Nagorno-Kharabakh has yet to be resolved between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Both the text and the accompanying illustration portray the region as unproblematically part of the country. Furthermore, the text “Our Fatherland” confidently reassures the readers not

³A brief historical background of Nagorno-Kharabagh, according to Suny (1996), begins in early modern times which had semi-independent Armenian Princes that governed Kharabagh, annexed by the Russian empire, and handed over to Azerbaijan in order to avoid “offend(ing) their ally Mustapha Kemal” (p. 133). Armenians in Kharabagh protested the unification with Armenia in the 1980s since they “claimed that the region was being kept backward by the Azerbaijani government and that Armenians were encouraged to emigrate” (Suny, p.133). In this conflict, both sides claim rightful ownership -- put simply, Azerbaijan claims territorial integrity while Kharabagh Armenians claim the right to self determination (Chorbajian, 2001). The reforms put forth by Gorbachev’s *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) inspired Kharabagh Armenians to ask for unification with Armenia. As Chorbajian (2001) explains, “people believed it was possible that Gorbachev would undo historical injustice by reuniting Kharabagh with Armenia” (p. 3). As a result of the outbreak of war, 20,000 people were killed and more than a million people lost their homes (DeWaal, 2010). Currently, the conflict has not been resolved and official negotiations are being led by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

only that these (imagined) borders are accurate, but that they are also strong: “Our fatherland is Armenia. Our fatherland’s borders are strong. The sky is clean, the mountains are proud. We really love our fatherland” (2003, p. 71).

Image 1. “Our Fatherland” 2003, page 71



The reimagining of the homeland’s contours also involves the frequent appearance of Mount Ararat which, while serving as one of the main symbols of Armenian national consciousness, is geopolitically located within the current state of Turkey. The significance of the Mount Ararat⁴ to Armenian people has less to do with its physical beauty than it does with its religious and historical place in the Armenian national narrative. For example, in an Armenian reading of biblical history, Ararat is the mountain on which Noah's ark came to rest. In addition to its religious significance, Ararat is also a symbol of the “Greater Armenia” that once stretched into the present-day territory of Turkey, south into Nakhichevan and east into Nagorno-Kharabakh (also known as Artsakh), before it was divided between the Ottoman Empire and Russia in

⁴ The Armenian name of “Ararat,” named after the surrounding province, actually refers to a set of twin peaks. “Sis” refers to the smaller peak while “Massis” refers to the larger. In contrast, the mountain is called “painful mountain” in Turkish/Azeri (Mountain of Ağrı).

1921.⁵ Given its religious and historical significance, it is not surprising that Ararat appears in *aybenarans* from cover to cover, for example, showing Jesus gazing upward toward Ararat with his hand suggestively reaching out toward the mountain(s) (1991, p. 22-23; see Image 2), or solemnly appearing in the background of the capital Yerevan (2006, p. 2; see Image 3).

Image 2. Lesson on the letter “Ah” or «Ա», 1991, page 22-23



Image 3. Children playing with Yerevan in backdrop, 2003, page

⁵ Many scholars to name a few, Bournoutian (2004), Suny (2004), Oshagan (2004), Barsoumian (2004), Hovanissian (2004), consider Armenia as split into two: the Western Armenian Province that refers to the territory of land currently within the borders of Turkey and Eastern Armenian Province, which refers to the region that was ruled by the Persians and later the Russians. The latter became the modern day Republic of Armenia.



2

Mount Ararat consistently appears in textbooks published in the Soviet to the post-Soviet periods, with some variation in frequency. For example, in the 1988 *aybenaran*, Mount Ararat appeared 10 times in illustrations on pages 6, 9, 13, 21, 23, 26, 30, 39, 49, and 70. These images appeared either as a framed photograph hung on the wall or in reference to the letter being taught or as a background image. Mount Ararat's appearance in textbooks continued into the 1990s, leaning into the period before independence. While appearing less frequently than in the 1988 textbooks, Ararat still appears in a variety of different spaces in the post-Soviet textbooks. For example, a lesson on the letter “*ruh*” or «ր» and “*suh*” or «ս» includes a picture of Mount Ararat to teach the word “*sar*” or «սար» or mountain. The symbol of Mount Ararat is also used in the backdrop of the lesson on the word “Armenia” or *Hayasdan* in Armenian. Finally,

Mount Ararat appears five times in the 2006 *aybenaran*. It is portrayed in a wall painting on pages 2-3 and 6. Giving a painting of Mount Ararat as a birthday gift on page 59 (2006) demonstrates the popularity and value of this symbol in the Armenian society.

While Ararat lies beyond the politically determined physical borders of Armenia today, the ubiquitous appearance of its image as embedded within scenes of the politically *undisputed* (e.g, towering background of Yerevan, or seen from beyond a household's window) conveys the implicit (if insistent) sense that it belongs in the natural space of Armenia. Thus, according to *aybenarans*, Ararat *discursively* belongs to Armenia, suggesting to the young readers who may infer that Ararat is a natural part of Armenia – without any political contest whatsoever. Only through written text is their recognition of its perceived displacement and the need to reclaim it, as seen in statements such as “here is the *unattainable* Ararat (1991, p. 50, emphasis added)” or “Massis is ours, Massis is ours,” (1991, p. 97).

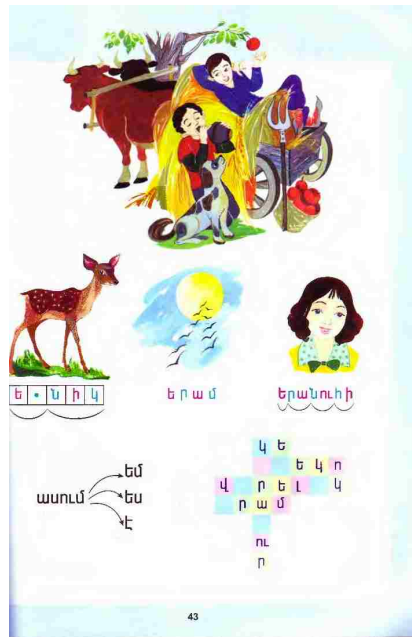
Nature/environmental awareness

References to nature and/or the environment are often interpreted as indicators of post-national identities, specifically referring to environmental awareness and rights that global citizens supposedly possess (Ramirez et al., 2009). Indeed, *aybenarans* devote a significant amount of space to the scenes of the natural landscapes and the ruralness of the land. From the macro-perspective of world culture research, this could be easily interpreted as a movement towards global citizenship. However, a close reading of the texts suggests the opposite movement towards historical conception of the “homeland.” In fact, the images of urban life, which typically appear in Soviet textbooks as symbols

of modernization and Soviet progress, appear to be gradually replaced with the images of rural landscapes as symbols of Armenian ancestry. In this case, landscapes serve to imbue the Armenian national space with the meanings that embody national and cultural identities, thus generating a particular sociospatial consciousness (Newman & Paasi, 1998).

A careful analysis of texts and illustrations reveals dominant visual motifs of sprawling and bountiful nature on nearly every page of *aybenarans*. The imagery and textual narrative are almost exclusively those of rural life, idyllic country homes maintained by Armenian families harvesting the land or tending to their flock (see Image 4). Even in instances when natural imagery is not the main focus of the text, the Armenian texts present seemingly random images of nature (e.g. grapes, -pomegranates, etc.) decorating the surrounding white space. Other images include grapes hanging in markets (2006, p. 77), children feeding hedgehogs, (2006, p. 76), as well as pomegranates and grapes presented as arches over Mount Ararat (2006, p. 62-63). The images of pomegranates appear everywhere, appearing as not only as fruit but also as jewelry and headpieces worn by the “Fall Grandmother” (2006, p. 49).

Image 4. Children with dog and hay cart, 2003, page 43



Accompanying this dominant field of visual texts are textual narratives about rural life. Such texts range in character from descriptive to celebratory in nature; they may focus on one iconic element or, they may be concerned with the bounty of the natural world in general. More often than not, these texts explicitly make the point of locating such bountiful, beautiful, varied, and irrepressible nature *within* the country, the homeland. That is, these are not just any “green hills” (or bushes, trees, and clouds) but rather, they are the green hills *of* Armenia. As the example below illustrates, the concept of “homeland” correlates with the national identity and the natural national space in the song (see Table 3 and 4) about ancestors entitled, “My Grandfather’s Armenia”:

Table 3. Song found in 2006 aybenaran entitled, “My Grandfather’s Armenia”.

«Իմ Պապիկի՛ Հայաստան»

Կա աշխարհում մի Հայաստան,
 կա աննման մի երկիր՝
 նման պապիս հեփիաթների,
 նման տատիս երգերին:

Կրկներգ.-

My Grandfather’s Armenia

There is one Armenia in this
 world, and no other country like it,
 Like my grandfathers’ jokes, like
 my grandmothers’ songs.
 My grandfather’s Armenia,
 My grandmother’s Armenia,

Իմ պապիկի՛ Հայաստան,
 Իմ տատիկի՛ Հայաստան,
 Հայոց շունչը ինձ պարզևող,
 Իմ անուշի՛կ Հայաստան:
 Ծաղիկները ամենալավ
 Միայն այստեղ են աճում,
 Աղբյուրները ամենապաղ
 Այստեղ են զիլ կարկաղում:
Կրկներգ.-
 Արևը ջերմ մայրիկիս պես,
 Գուրուրում է թռչի ու ծառ,
 Որ ամպերը մոտ չգան մեզ,
 Որ հնչեն երգու ծիծաղ:
Կրկներգ.-

Armenia's breath is rewarding,
 my beautiful Armenia. Rainbows
 are the best [here], only formed
 (or started) here, fountains are
 the coldest [here], Here it gurgles
 splendidly.
 The sun is beautiful like my
 mother, cherishing every bush and
 tree, so that the clouds do not come
 close to us, to allow us to sing and
 laugh! (2006, p. 110, emphasis in
 original)

Table 4. Text from lesson in 2003 aybenaran on page 71 near map of Armenia.

Մեր Հայրենիքը
 Մեր հայրենիքը Հայաստանն է: Ամուր են մեր
 հայրենիքի սահմանները: ... երբինքը
 մաքուր է, սարերը՝ հպարտ: Մենք շատ ենք
 սիրում մեր հայրենիքը: (2003, էջ 71)

Our Fatherland is Armenia
 Our Fatherland is Armenia. Our
 fatherland's borders are strong...
 The sky is clean, the mountains
 are proud. We really love our
 fatherland. (2003 p. 71)

In other words, textbooks appear to vastly (over)emphasize the national landscape as saturated with the rural and natural, often at the expense of marginalizing the urban or industrial landscapes. Indeed, the 1973, 1988, 1990, 1991 and 2003 *aybenarans* focus solely on the natural and rural landscapes without the slightest hint of urban life (tall buildings, shopping malls, etc.). It is only in the most recently published textbooks that we can observe three small illustrations of urban landscapes peripherally seen from the classroom windows (2006, p. 5, 13, and 16). Furthermore, if Yerevan is exclusively discussed as a historical entity, describing the city as the birthplace or origin source of the “authentic” Armenian nation (e.g., see texts and images in 2003, p. 36; 1991, p. 5;

1990, p. 64; 1973, p. 44).

The overwhelming focus on rural landscapes is important. It may symbolize the conscious rejection of the Soviet past associated with the triumph of modernization, industrialization, and urbanization over “peasant” life (Silova, Mead & Palandjian, 2012). In particular, the Soviet rule in Armenia was associated with industrialization and urbanization harmful to the natural landscape of the country. In this context, it is not surprising that many nation-building projects in the former Soviet republics, including Armenia, revolved around narratives heralding “the return” to rural life and the restoration of natural environment (Schwartz, 2006; Wanner, 2001). So, although botanical and agricultural descriptions have always been deeply rooted in the iconography of Armenian national sentiment, concerns with the abundant and beautiful character of national landscapes appear to have intensified in the national narratives of the post-Soviet era (see also Schwartz, 2006; Wanner, 2001).

Notions of diversity

The increasing emphasis on the notions of diversity is oftentimes associated with the emergence of post-national identities (Ramirez et al., 2009). The assumption is that national languages, religions, and cultures are gradually losing their significance in the globalization context, while the notions of humanity and diversity become increasingly valorized (Ramirez et al., 2009). Findings from textbook analysis in this study find no evidence to support this claim. Instead, *aybenarans* appear to highly emphasize the importance of Armenian language, culture, and religion to the Armenian identity in both Soviet and post-Soviet contexts, although with various degrees of intensity over time.

Armenian language

The Armenian language occupies one of the central places in educational narratives about Armenian identity -- a theme that strongly resonated in both the Soviet and the post-Soviet contexts. Notwithstanding Russification attempts during the Soviet period,⁶ the value of learning the Armenian language remained strong. In fact, the 1990 *aybenaran* reveals a coexistence of both Soviet/communist and Armenian national ideologies, wherein stories about the Soviet heroes (such as Vladimir Elich Lenin or Yuri Gagarin) are intertwined with the texts glorifying the Armenian language. The order of these texts appears to suggest an equal importance to have both a strong sense of the Armenian national identity and of Communism since they are found together in the same section. As seen in the sample of *aybenarans* from the 1970s and 1980s, for example, poems, songs, and children's stories teach numerous lessons about valuing the Armenian alphabet. In fact, early literacy textbooks (*aybenarans*) are referred to as "sacred" in child's life, being the first book that formally introduces a child to learning of the Armenian language.

Throughout Soviet and post-Soviet textbooks, the poem "I love you, Armenian tongue" appears consistently, providing a stable continuity and a constant reminder to love and be proud to know the mother language (1973, p. 62; 1988, p. 107, 2003, p. 92; 2006, p. 100). Referring to the mother also implies a nurturing, loving individual, which

⁶ During Soviet Armenia, the teaching of the Armenian language was supported according to the Soviet policy of *korenizatsiia*, (rooting) or "nativization," which was implemented in the 1920s, that encouraged members of local nationalities to run their own republics and to operate in the native language of the region (Suny, 2004, p. 356). This policy, according to Suny (1993), helped establish "the free choice of language in schooling" (p. 102). As Suny (2004) argues, the *korenizatsiia* policy helped "Armenia become more Armenian in the 1920s" (p. 356). According to Matossian (1964), although Moscow attempted to Russify Armenia, it also left room for Armenification to take place: "The unifying purpose of Soviet nationality policy was to strengthen loyalty to the Soviet regime and to spur the national minorities forward in the work of attaining Communist objectives" (p. 162). In keeping with this notion of loyalty, Armenians could maintain their Armenian identity but in order to gain high status in Soviet society, "thorough knowledge of Russian language and culture became essential" (Matossian, 1964, p. 162).

the Armenian language is equated to, according to this text. A sample of this text as described below in Table 5 emphasizes the Armenian national pride for their culture and language:

Table 5. “I love you, Armenian tongue” poem.

| | |
|--|--|
| Կը սիրենք քեզ. Ինչ շնորհ քեզու, Մայրիկիս պէս Քաղցըր ես դուն: Քեզմով ես միշտ Ուրախ կ'երգենք, Կը խօսինք ճիշտ, Կ'արտասուենք: (1973, էջ 62) | I love you My Armenian tongue, You are sweet like my mother. With you I always sing happily, speak and recite correctly. (1973, p. 62, translated by author) |
|--|--|

In the 2003 *aybenaran*, the poem was preceded with questions that expect prescribed answers (See also image 5. “*Why is the Armenian tongue sweet as a mother? Armenians speak Armenian, then what language do French, Chinese, Georgians, and Russians speak?*” (p. 93). These questions allude to the idea of one nation, one language (see also Image 6 and Table 6). The first question expects the reader to reply that the Armenian language is as sweet as a mother since the image of a mother depicts someone who is caring, loving, and nurturing. The second question expects the reader to unproblematically map different languages onto their specific (national) communities, implying that Georgians speak Georgian and that Russians speak Russian. Following these examples, the same answer could then be applied to Armenia, thus reinforcing the idea that *all Armenians* should learn to read, speak, and write Armenian.

Image 5 questions following Armenian tongue poem 2003 *aybenaran*, page 93



Image 6. Lesson on words related to “tongue” 2003, page



Table 6. Translation from lesson about “tongue” on page 57

հայոց - մայրենի - լեզու
 Ես հայ եմ: Իմ մայրենի լեզուն հայերենն է:
 (2003, էջ 57)

Armenian - mother - tongue
 I am Armenian. My mother tongue is
 Armenian. (2003, p. 57)

Another song highlighting the fatherland was found in the 2003 *aybenaran* in the form of a lullaby (p. 94). As the mother puts her child to bed, she sings a sweet lullaby wishing her son sweet and beautiful dreams. The lullaby ends by saying, “when you grow up that you will become successful, one day you will fill my house, the

fatherland will be proud of your name.” The third song in this sample was found in the 1991 *aybenaran* entitled, “Armenian Tongue” (p. 97). This song not only teaches the Armenian letters but also incorporates messages such as, “Armenian is Armenia’s language” and “forever the Armenian language rings both night and day.” The final line of the song repeats the following words, “The fatherland is strong”. Finally, the 1991 text (see Table 7) directly links the Armenian language to national patriotism.

Table 7. Letter to the reader in 1991 *aybenaran* page 3.

«Հայաստանի բանալին Հայոց Լեզուն է»

Սիրելի հայրենակից,

Ես չգիտեմ թե դու քանի տարեկան ես՝ յոթ՞, երեսո՞ւն, գուցե նոյնիսկ յարանասո՞ւն, որովհետև այս այբբենարանը ոչ միայն սովորական առաջին դասարանի համար է...որտեղ հանախ հայր ու որդի, պապ ու թոռ կողք-կողքի են նստելու, միասին են բարձրանալու հայոց այբուբենի ֆայցր ու դժվարին աստիճաններով: Թող բարի լինի քո վերադարձը և իմացիր՝ Հայաստանի բանալին հայոց Լեզուն է...մեր Լեզվի դուները բացելով, մտիր ներս, դեպի քո պատմութիւնը, մշակույթը, քո ժողովրդի բնավորությունը:(1991, էջ 3)

“Armenia is the key to the Armenian language”

“Dear Armenian patriot, I don’t know how old you must be 7? 30? maybe even 70? because this *aybenaran* is not only for first grade children,...its for fathers and their sons, grandparents and their grandchildren, side by side sitting together reaching up to Armenian alphabet the sweet and difficult steps...Let the good key return you and learn that Armenia’s key is the Armenian tongue....letter by letter, key by key, our language’s doors open, towards your history, culture, your people’s behavior. (1991, p. 3)

Other texts that discussed the significance of learning Armenian were told through stories about the alphabet book or *aybenaran* itself. These texts describe how alphabet books explain why they are considered highly important and emphasize that it is to their credit that children are able to learn how to read and write in Armenian. In the 1990 textbook, an imaginary dialogue between the *aybenaran* and the medical

book (which share the shelf) suggests that *aybenaran* is perceived to be used more by its readers based on the appearance of its pages, compared to its' neighbor, the thick medical book. Despite the title written in gold or the beautiful binding, the medical book claims prestige based on its appearance. However, the *aybenaran* reminds the readers that if one does not study the *aybenaran* first, the medical book means nothing. The message offered in this text encourages children to study the *aybenaran* well enough to move onto reading prestigious books, such as the medical book.

In the 2003 *aybenaran*, there is a farewell message for the student the student at the end of the book (p. 92). It suggests that the alphabet book has established a relationship with the reader and now the lessons have come to an end, symbolically ending the relationship. The alphabet is described as being “golden” like a precious stone. Noting that it also refers to the mouth being golden since an individual who is able to speak Armenian is very rich. According to this text, in a world full of many languages, the Armenian student may be unique for learning to read, write, and speak in Armenian. Furthermore, the text portrays the the joy and excitement of children being able to speak, read, and write Armenian: “Jan, how great is is, how joyful, I read and write freely” (p. 92). Similarly, the 2006 *aybenaran* contains a farewell message that describes the alphabet book as “glorious” (p. 105). Exclaiming, that in such a short life, the student celebrates one of his/her greatest accomplishments when the day comes that they have finished studying the *aybenaran*. However, the student will carry the lessons of the *aybenaran* with him/her throughout the rest of their life. It ends with the following statement: “With you I write, with you I read, to Mashtotz I owe a holy debt” (2006, p. 105).

Armenian Church

Similar to the Armenian language, the Armenian church occupies an important place in school textbooks. In both Soviet and post-Soviet *aybenarans*, religion is portrayed as a key indicator of the Armenian identity, revealing images of Armenian churches and religious symbols, including the cross. As seen earlier in the short story on “Red Wine,” the symbolism of grapes and wine relate back to religious meanings, inspired by the blood-as-wine narrative of Christianity. In the corner of the lesson on Mesrob Mashtotz in the 1973 *aybenaran*, a small Armenian church appears next to the letters of the Armenian alphabet (p. 61). Though it is quite tiny, its presence in a Soviet textbook is uniquely symbolic, considering that practicing the Christian faith was prohibited during the Soviet period. Several similar images appear in other textbooks published during the Soviet period (e.g., textbooks published in 1973, p. 2; 1990, p. 58), emphasizing the importance of religion to Armenian identity.

The presence of religious images and texts significantly increases during the post-Soviet period. For example, the 1991 *aybenaran* explicitly discusses the Armenian Church and religion in two lessons. The first one appears on page 63 with the letter “Yeh” or «Է» for *Eve* (pronounced *Evah* in Armenian). Illustrated on the bottom corner of the page are Adam and Eve who, according to the Bible, were created by God in the book of Genesis. In the picture, they appear standing next to an apple tree with a snake wrapped around the tree trunk. In the background, we see a picture of Lake Sevan, with the image of the Church of Lake Sevan. The second explicit mention of Armenian religion is found when teaching the letter “Kuh” for “Krisdos” (1991, p. 78). The text includes several other words that begin with “Kuh” but also mention Jesus Christ and Jesus’s students. On the adjacent page is an image of Jesus. Similar to the 1991

aybenaran, we witness a significant increase in the number of images of the Armenian Church in the 2006 *aybenaran*, including images of the Armenian Church buildings appearing randomly, children lighting candles, or a family having a picnic playing near a church (cover, p.4, 46, 56, 62, 63, 101).

As the above examples demonstrate, religion appears as a significant indicator of Armenian national identity, confirming the findings of other scholars who have discussed the Armenian Church in relation to Armenian nationalism (Guroian, 1994; Panossian, 2006). As texts and illustrations from this textbook analysis reveal, Armenian religion has provided citizens with an understanding of the importance of Christianity to the Armenian nation, thus emphasizing the uniqueness of the Armenian national identity.

Global issues versus local history

Finally, it is important to consider whether and to what extent the place of local history has been de-emphasized in the curriculum. In particular, several studies suggest curricula around the world have tended to de-emphasize history instruction and to give more time to civics and especially social studies, especially since World War II (Ramirez et al., 2009; see also Benavot 2005; Wong 1991; the studies reported in Benavot and Braslavsky 2006; Schissler and Soysal 2005; for the corresponding trend in higher education, see Frank and Gabler 2006). According to these studies, the emphasis is increasingly placed on studying the issues of global concern. The findings of this study do not support these claims. According to textbook content analysis, both Soviet and post-Soviet textbooks have consistently glorified national heroes, highlighting their contributions to the development of the Armenia as a nation. Within these texts, global issues do not appear altogether; instead, the local history is highlighted from within.

From the person who invented the alphabet to individuals who contributed to Armenian literature, images and texts describe a number of Armenian heroes. For example, Mesrob Mashtotz’s contribution of inventing the alphabet appeared at least once in five of the six *aybenarans*. While each told the story with variations of details, all texts describe Mesrob Mashtotz as the first Armenian teacher. Moreover, throughout these five *aybenarans*, Mashtotz appears in stories that encourage children to glorify him for inventing the Armenian alphabet in 404 B.C.⁷. The emphasis placed on the word “learn” underscores the idea that students should learn the alphabet by heart. Some extend further to include information about where Mashtotz was buried -- a site many people visit to pay tribute to him (see Image 6).

Image 6. Lesson about Mesrob Mashtotz from 2003 *aybenaran* page 91



In the 2003 *aybenaran*, reference is made to the Madenataran, a museum where ancient manuscripts are kept. This museum was named after Mashtotz to specifically

⁷ Initially the purpose of creating an Armenian alphabet was to read the Bible in Armenian since Christianity was adopted as the religion of the state in the year 301 B.C. *Grapar*, or classical Armenian, was the style of language used in publishing the Bible in Armenian. The style of language Armenians conversed in was known as *ashkharabar*, or language of the people, which is true to this day.

honor his contribution of inventing the alphabet. The 2003 *aybenaran* offers a new image to accompany the alphabet and takes note of the Madenadaran being named in his honor. Known as the Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, the Madenadaran is a museum where ancient manuscripts are kept, dating back to 700 B.C. While in the Soviet *aybenarans* a drawing of Mashtotz was simply displayed, textbooks published in an independent Armenia offer a picture from the Madentaran where a child is kneeling next to Mashtotz who stands tall holding a scroll with the alphabet written on it. The museum was built in 1957 which does not offer an explanation as to why the Soviet *aybenarans* do not use this image. Therefore, it is interesting that the post-Soviet *aybenaran* uses this picture especially in light of the argument made by world culture theory in regards to national monuments.

Other historical figures that appear in post-Soviet *aybenrans* include pictures and texts of individuals who have contributed to Armenian Literature and include playwrights such as Hovanness Toumanyanyan, Ghazaros Aghayan, and Taniel Varoujan. Despite the claim suggested by world culture theorists that the importance of national history and heroes in school curricula would decrease over, this does not appear to have occurred in the Armenian case, where texts and images highlighting the importance of national heroes and national history has endured into the newly independent Armenia.

CONCLUSION

Consistently woven throughout all of the *aybenarans* in this study was the significant lesson of learning how to read, write, and speak Armenian. However, by learning the lessons of literacy, the *aybenarans* have also offered powerful lessons about what it means to be an Armenian. Notwithstanding the world culture theory claim that curricula worldwide have been moving towards the ideals of global citizenship and post-

national identities, the findings from Armenian *aybenarans* reveal the opposite tendency of cultivating a strong sense of the Armenian ethnocultural identity. In the context of post-Soviet transformations, whereby the Western education discourses (especially those emanating from the European Union) have entered the Armenian education space, the idea of the ethnonational Armenian identity has been persistently carried through in school textbooks via (national) symbolism and and mythology. While global discourses may indeed have been circulating in the post-Soviet education space, it is local politics that has ultimately shaped the actual education policies and practices, including school textbooks and curricula.

Framed within the world culture debate, this study examined whether and to what extent Armenian school textbooks reflect any of the worldwide trends circulating in the international policy arena, including such curricula themes as (1) global citizenship (or membership in a international community), (2) nature/environmental awareness, (3) notions of diversity, and (4) global issues versus local history.

First, in regards to the ideas of global/local citizenship, *aybenarans* appeared to be exclusively concerned with reiterating the notion of “Our Fatherland” in terms of a strong ethnocentric (national) community. While the Soviet textbooks included some references to an international community (e.g. communist states of China), there is no mention of international countries in the post-Soviet *aybenarans*. Ignoring its physical neighbors on the map (e.g., Turkey and Azerbaijan) is also worth noting, especially given the role of textbooks in discursively re-imagining the Armenian national space to include parts of the “unattainable” historical homeland that lies beyond Armenia’s current political boundaries such as Mount Ararat or Nagorno-Kharabakh. Second, a close reading of *aybenarans* reveals that the discussion of nature and

environment in school textbooks does not signify the emergence of post-national identities (e.g., environmental awareness). On the contrary, *aybenarans* continue to discuss the national space within the context of the Armenian fatherland. As the study has illustrated, images of and texts about nature invoke associations of the “rootedness” of the Armenian identity in its (national) soil. This is reflected in many images of rural landscapes, reinforcing the idea that “homeland” correlates with the national identity and the natural national space. Third, the notions of diversity appear to be absent in *aybenarans*. Cultural/linguistic minorities are not visible and there is no space for immigrants and other minority groups on the pages of *aybenarans*. Instead, *aybenarans* portray the Armenian nation in the most narrow and homogeneous way, with the Armenian language, religion, and culture serving as the dominant indicators of the Armenian (national) identity. Finally, the textbooks seem to emphasize the importance of Armenian history and its national heroes.

Although limited to the examination of early literacy textbooks used in the first grade, the findings of this study reveal important insights about Armenia’s educational reforms and their implementation in the context of post-Soviet education transformations. It reveals that post-Soviet education reforms have not necessarily led to the emergence of post-national identities and Armenia’s movement towards membership in a global community. Instead, *aybenarans* project a very different vision of the Armenian nation -- the one based on ethnocultural conception of Armenian nationhood, deeply rooted in its historical “homeland.”

Methodologically, this study contributes to the world culture debate on educational convergence/divergence by offering a contextualized, qualitative study of the *meanings* of educational narratives which, at the first glance, may appear to indicate

the emergence of post-national identities (such as the mention of nature/environment, diversity, etc.). However, findings from critical discourse analysis of Armenian school textbooks reveal that these educational narratives assume very different meanings in the Armenian context. It thus challenges world culture theory's claim of educational convergence and suggests that it is important to go beyond the policy texts to understand local meanings in their specific historical, political, and cultural contexts. Instead of its reliance on macrosociological, quantitative studies, world culture theory would thus benefit from more in-depth, contextualized, and qualitative analyses.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the world culture debate by highlighting the contested meanings attributed to schooling across contexts. More specifically, the findings of this study align with scholarship that has questioned the perceived convergence of education, highlighting the complexity of local context and the importance of the disjunctions between policy rhetoric and school practice (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004; Silova, 2006; Carney, Rapple, & Silova, 2012). Furthermore, it joins broader scholarship on post-socialist transformations in education (Silova, 2010; Griffiths & Millei, 2012), suggesting that Soviet education policies and practices have not necessarily been replaced with the Western ones. Instead, as this study has illustrated, post-Soviet transformation processes have involved a return to historical legacies, thus reinforcing an ethnocultural conception of the Armenian identity. This study recognizes the emerging scholarship of post-socialism, which complicates our understanding of globalization processes in education by highlighting contradictions and complexities. As Silova (2010) suggests, post-socialism offers “a (re)reading of the global through the lens of pluralities, discontinuities, and uncertainties... a (re)reading of the global that is free of its predetermined finality” (p. 20). In this context, the study of Armenian *aybenarans*

present a unique case of the complex interplay between the global and the local, opening new paths and possibilities for post-Soviet educational transformations.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS EXPERIENCE

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Volunteer Intern

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- Created briefing informational handouts on a weekly basis for distribution.
- Developed talking points for moderator to read during briefing activities.
- Provided technical support from building Powerpoints to maintenance and use of audio-visual equipment.
- Prepared upcoming fall 2011 briefing season calendar of topics.
- NEWS ARTICLE: Education student commutes to the UN to brief NGOs, January 17, 2011, Katie Karabasz
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- Spring 2011 Briefing Season available to view online:
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Internship Coordinator Armenian Youth Federation Eastern Region USA Internship Program to Armenia

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- Organized trips, meetings, and lectures for interns to participate in during the program.
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- Liaised with other organizations and government officials in Armenia to administer the program.

Middle East Research Assistant Providence, RI
The Unity Center, Rhode Island College 10/2005-5/2006

- Promoted awareness of Middle Eastern social, cultural, educational and political issues.
- Organized lectures on topics involving the Middle East.
- Documented activities for The Unity Center archives.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

After School Reading Enrichment Program Instructor, Grades 3 & 4 Glendale, CA
Vahan & Anoush Chamlian Armenian School Teacher
 12/2009-3/2010

- Trained to prepare readers below grade level to read for comprehension.
- Taught small groups of students in phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency and phonics.

5th Grade Lead Language Arts and Social Studies Teacher Glendale, CA
Vahan & Anoush Chamlian Armenian School 9/2007- 6/2010

- Taught two fifth grade inclusive language arts classes.
- Crafted engaging lesson plans for the fifth grade.

6th Grade Language Arts and Social Studies, 8th Grade U.S. History, and 12th Grade Public Speaking Elective Hollywood, CA
Rose & Alex Pilibos Armenian School 1/2007 -6/2007

- Instructed two sixth grade Language Arts classes and Social Studies Ancient Civilizations.
- Constructed and implemented lesson plans according to the California Department of Education Standards.
- Designed lesson plans and taught US History to an eighth grade class.
- Taught high school elective public speaking course according to Stephen E. Lucas' 9th Edition text.

Student Teacher Valley Glen, CA
Monlux Magnet Elementary School 8/2006 – 12/2006

- Completed student teaching with Anne Marie-Wotkyns, California's Best Teacher in 2007.
- Prepared and taught full instruction lessons in language arts, math, social studies, science and physical education.
- Participated in grade level, faculty and staff, and Magnet meetings.

Volunteer English and Math Teacher Yerevan, Armenia
Zadeeg Orphanage 6/2003 - 8/2003

- Conducted math and English language curriculum to accommodate several grade levels.
- Organized physical educational activities.

RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS

- The ABC's of Being Armenian: (Re)turning to the National Identity (currently under review)
- "Our borders are strong": A case study of the Armenian identity through Aybenarans (alphabet textbooks) Caucasus Edition Online Journal (May 2012) can be retrieved from <http://caucasusedition.net/>
- Pedagogies of Space: (Re)Mapping National Territories, Borders, and Identities in Post-Soviet Textbooks- August 2011(*in review*)

CONFERENCE PRESENTATION

Rewriting empire(s): Post-Soviet revisions of history, identity, and nationhood in textbooks at the 55th Annual Regional Conference of Comparative and International Education Society Regional (May 1-5, 2011), McGill University, Montreal, Canada.

Pedagogies of Space: (Re)Mapping National Territories, Borders, and Identities in Post-Soviet Textbooks at the 56th Annual Regional Conference of Comparative and International Education Society (April 22-27, 2012)*, Puerto Rico and at the 17th Annual Association for the Study of Nationalities at Columbia University, New York.

GRADUATE STUDENT ACTIVITY

College of Education, Comparative and International Education Student Representative to the Lehigh University Graduate Student Senate (2011-2012)

Comparative and International Education Student Representative to the Lehigh University College of Education Graduate Student Council (2011-2012)

Lehigh University Graduate Student Representative to the Graduate Research Council (2011-2012)

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Member of Comparative and International Education Society (CIES), Association for the Studies of Nationalities (ASN)

COMPUTER SKILLS

SPSS and Internet

Microsoft Office, Adobe Acrobat, Excel, Powerpoint,

LANGUAGES

(intermediate)

English (native); Armenian (native); and French