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Abstract
On October 2, 1878, Narduhi Magarian and Sahag Ağa Tevrizian were wed in the Ottoman border town of Erzurum. Soon afterwards, both of them sought freedom from this union, one foisted upon them by Narduhi's wealthy, violent, and alcohol-addled father, Garabed Efendi Magarian. The toxic fallout of this failed marriage prompted the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople to order an investigation. The resulting witness testimonies, held in a fragment of the Patriarchate's records in Paris, describe the beginnings of this coerced marriage, the domestic violence it involved, and the anxieties about sex and potency that it stoked. These letters also have much to say about national and gendered silences imposed by the indefinite inaccessibility of the Armenian Patriarchate's archive in Istanbul. This marriage highlights an aftereffect of national violence: how the apprehensions swirling around it serve to stifle history-writing about gendered violence. Through a single episode in the life of an Armenian woman, it also offers a view onto domestic abuse, marriage, and sex in a crisis-ridden Ottoman borderland. Although there may be an urge to recover Narduhi's voice, avoiding that temptation shows how her story is important less for what it recovers than for two historical narratives that it disrupts: one that circumscribes women's history with ideals of self-sacrifice and moral rectitude and another that attempts to construct a singular national past in the wake of catastrophe.

Keywords
marriage | sex | gender | violence | archives | Armenian studies | Ottoman history | Subaltern studies

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A FRAGMENTED ARCHIVE AND A BROKEN MARRIAGE

In 1913, a trio of Ottoman officers swept into power after a bloody coup. In 1914, these three pashas—Talat, Enver, Cemal—drove their empire into the Great War. Shortly afterwards, in 1915, they drove their Armenian compatriots into the desert.[1] As they liquidated Armenian communities, they also liquidated the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople, sending its Patriarch Zaven Der Yeghiayan to Iraq for his first exile. But by 1918, as the victorious Allies occupied Constantinople and colonized more overtly elsewhere, they helped resuscitate the Armenian Patriarchate, and Der Yeghiayan returned to Constantinople aboard a British destroyer.[2] It would be short stay. In September 1922, Allied partition plans for Ottoman lands floundered in the face of Mustafa Kemal's National Resistance. Greek troops fled, Smyrna burned, and Der Yeghiayan feared that Constantinople would suffer a similar fate. In 1922, as he prepared for his second exile, his memoirs say that he entrusted twenty-four boxes of the Patriarchate's papers to Grigoris Balakian, the Armenian bishop in Manchester, UK.[3] Balakian later took those boxes to France, where they were eventually split. One part went to the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, while another remained in France at the Armenian General Benevolent Union's Bibliothèque Nubar in Paris.[4] The removal and division of the Patriarchate's archive marked a transition in institutional memory for ex-Ottoman Armenians in a post-imperial world. Displaced like the people they describe, these records have been scattered between Paris, Jerusalem, whatever survives in Istanbul, and fragments elsewhere, like Yerevan. This displacement and fragmentation of institutional memory and its attendant obstacles continue to shape the kinds of histories that can be written after the Armenian genocide.

The Parisian fragment of the Patriarchate's archive sits a few blocks from the Seine in Paris's 16th arrondissement. It is the largest fragment accessible to researchers.[5] With materials stretching from at least 1763 to 1922, it includes

1 On the survivors and what they demonstrate about environmental imaginaries and genocidal violence, see Samuel Dolbee, "The Desert at the End of Empire: An Environmental History of the Armenian Genocide," *Past & Present* 247, no. 1 (May 2020): 197–233.

2 Der Yeghiayan, Zaven, *Badriark'agan Hushers Vaweragirner ew Vkayout'iwnner* (K'ahirē: Nor Asdgh, 1947), 198–99 and 275–76.

3 Der Yeghiayan, 302–3.

4 Boris Adjemian, "Les Archives de La Bibliothèque Nubar de l'UGAB," *20 & 21. Revue d'histoire*, no. 144 (2019): 178–79.

5 On the Bibliothèque Nubar and the provincial correspondence of the Armenian Patriarchate held there, see Dzovinar Derderian, "Nation-Making and the Language of Colonialism: Voices from Ottoman Van in Armenian Print Media and Handwritten Petitions (1820s to 1870s)" (Ph.D. diss., Ann Arbor, MI, University of Michigan, 2019), 52–55.

a large collection of the Patriarchate's provincial correspondence, letters from clergymen dispatched across the empire and especially to the Ottoman East. These eastern borderlands of Ottoman domains abut the Russian Caucasus and Iranian Azerbaijan. The region has many names—(eastern) Turkey, (northern) Kurdistan, or (western) Armenia.[6] Although the Ottoman East contained the majority of Ottoman Armenians, the region lacked a clear majority of any community. It was mixed, with speakers of Armenian, Kurmanji, Neo-Aramaic, Turkish, and Zazaki, as well as speakers of hybrid tongues like Armeno-Turkish and Armeno-Kurdish.[7] The Armenian clergy administered the church, marriage, and family law in this porous borderland, and they corresponded regularly with the Patriarchate. Their letters describe intimate relations: lovers and beloveds, husbands and wives, and parents and children. The fond about the border town of Garin (Կարին), or Erzurum, offers examples of the kinds of stories that the other fragments of the Armenian Patriarchate's records might tell.[8] Held at the Bibliothèque Nubar, that fond contains letters summarizing an investigation into the October 1878 marriage of Narduhi Magarian and Sahag Ağa Tevrizian. Both parties sought "freedom" from this union, one foisted upon them by Narduhi's wealthy, violent, and alcohol-addled father, Garabed Efendi Magarian.[9]

Narduhi's experience with this short-lived marriage has much to tell us about the history of violence and its various forms of archival silence. Each section that follows examines different silences to highlight and critique how national and gendered violence work together to stifle history-writing. The first section takes up the silences that arise from the epistemic politics of genocide.

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6 Yaşar Tolga Cora, Dzovinar Derderian, and Ali Sipahi, eds., *The Ottoman East in the Nineteenth Century: Societies, Identities and Politics* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 2.

7 The Soviet-Armenian ethnographer Gevorg Halajyan (1885–1966) wrote about his experiences as a teacher in a bilingual school in Ottoman Erzincan and Erzurum, where he grew up. He taught Kurdish and Armenian students both languages, using the Armenian alphabet to teach Kurdish. See Gevorg Halajyan, "Ergu Khosk'," *Hay Azgagrut'yun ew Banahyusut'yun* 5 (1974): 7–8; "K'rdakhōs Hayerĕ ew Kiwrderēn Lezun. *Azadamard*, no. 520 (March 7, 1911): 1; on the shared oral traditions that nourished the development of hybrid tongues, see Celilê Celil, "Bir Çift Söz," in *Aşiq û Maşûq: Ermenice Kaynaklardan Kürt Ermeni Aşk Massalları,* eds. Rober Koptaş and Karin Karakaşlı, trans. Sarkis Seropyan (Istanbul: Aras, 2017), 14–15; on Armeno-Turkish, see Murat Cankara, "Rethinking Ottoman Cross-Cultural Encounters: Turks and the Armenian Alphabet," *Middle Eastern Studies* 51, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 1–16.

8 The politics of place names in post-Ottoman Turkey are complex. In this article, "Erzurum" denotes the city while "Garin" is an adjective for Armenian institutions (e.g., the Garin Religious Council in the city of Erzurum).

9 Bibliothèque Nubar de l'UGAB (BNU) APC/CP12/1, Կարին (Garin/Erzurum) 139–40, Garin Provincial Administration's Religious Council Session XXII [summary] signed by members and Prelate Malachia Ormanian, February 6, 1886, 6.

As presented here, this marriage story comes from a fragment, just half of the correspondence. While some fragmentation is inevitable in any archive, it is especially so in one that, like the people it describes, faced forced exile and dispersion.[10] The Bibliothèque Nubar, for example, contains only the letters sent from the Erzurum clergymen but not the responses sent from the Patriarchate in Constantinople. There may be further documents about Narduhi in Istanbul, but we cannot know because the Armenian Patriarchate's archive and information about it are not publicly available. Powerful forces in Turkey, both within and beyond the government, police speech about questions of genocide. This makes Turkey and Armenia's shared past a difficult topic, one liable to attract violent repercussions. Ongoing apprehensions about an unsettled history of national violence justify the archive's indefinite closure, cutting off the Istanbul piece of this collection. The marriage story presented here shows how the Patriarchate's records, if made openly available, could support studies of Armenian and Ottoman life, especially in areas crucial to social reproduction, like marriage, family, and sex.

The second and third sections look to the silences that arise from the patriarchy and its routinized erasure of women. Too often, women's historians are left to piece together information based on the larger and better-preserved archives of men.[11] Like those of other women, this biographical sketch by necessity defies the convention that biographies should chart "the march from birth to death."[12] Rather, it charts a single episode in Narduhi's life, one that foregrounds how contested histories of national violence both complicate and inhere in the study of domestic violence, marriage, and sex. The episode contains violent scenes: an alcoholic father hurling abuse at his daughter, beating her, threatening her at gunpoint; a wealthy merchant intimidating his family, his business partners, and the clergy. Although this violence has little if any bearing on questions of genocide, its history remains stifled because of the silence imposed by genocide. The fears surrounding a fraught history of national violence sustain archival closure, which leads to further silences on topics like marriage, domestic violence, and sex. Narduhi's story demonstrates this aftereffect of national violence. The second section examines patriarchal violence

[10] On "the archive not as source but as subject" in the case of Palestinian archives, see Hana Sleiman, "The Paper Trail of a Liberation Movement," *The Arab Studies Journal* 24, no. 1 (2016): 44.

[11] Jean Allman, "The Disappearing of Hannah Kudjoe: Nationalism, Feminism, and the Tyrannies of History," *Journal of Women's History* 21, no. 3 (2009): 13–16; Natalie Zemon Davis, "'Women's History' in Transition: The European Case," *Feminist Studies* 3, no. 3/4 (1976): 90.

[12] Marilyn Booth and Antoinette Burton, "Editors' Note," *Journal of Women's History* 21, no. 3 (2009): 7–8.

and other forms of coercion in the home. The third turns to differing anxieties centered on sex, marriage, and male potency.

The aforementioned silences, imposed by the apologists for national and patriarchal violence, often tempt historians to try to recover the voices of subalterns, or disempowered groups. The fourth and final section draws on Narduhi's story not to embrace but to interrogate that urge to recover. It departs from another silence, not from the nation or patriarchy impelling us to forget but from an individual's implicit request to be forgotten.[13] In the investigation of her coerced marriage, clergymen interviewed Narduhi's groom and her close relations, but they could not record her account because she had fled the Patriarchate's dominion. The circumstances of her flight suggest that she may have had little interest in maintaining a connection to the Armenian Patriarchate or its archives. How do we approach subjects who did not want to be recorded or remembered? This chosen silence unsettles the imperatives that historians tend to take from imposed silences—to recover the voices of women and others who endured the violence of patriarchy, or to reconstruct the past of a nation dispersed and nearly erased. Narduhi's apparent disinterest in recovery exposes the violence and coercion that underpin patriarchal and national projects of collective identity construction, as well as the limits upon history-writing that such projects sustain.

ABSENCE AS EVER-PRESENT REFERENT

The archives of the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul remain indefinitely closed. Whatever Zaven Der Yeghiayan did not place in the boxes that he entrusted to Grigoris Balakian in 1922 and whatever has been produced and collected in the Patriarchate's Ormanyan Library since then is therefore inaccessible to researchers. This absence is not only a methodological problem but also a symptom of lingering fears that limit history-writing. The Armenian Patriarchate continues to exist because of Allied diplomatic maneuvers in 1923. As they signed the Treaty of Lausanne granting recognition to the Turkish Republic, the Allies insisted on minority protections for its non-Muslim communities. Although Turkish delegates found such protections both "humiliating" and threatening, they were not unique to Turkey. The Allies installed minority protection regimes in over a dozen states and mandates after the Great War.[14] The text of the Lausanne Treaty,

[13] For a contemporary articulation of this desire to forget and be forgotten in the Sahara in the south of Morocco, see El Montassir, Abdessamad, dir., *Galb'Echaouf*, 2021, 6:46–8:04.

[14] Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, "Republic of Paradox: The League of Nations Minority Protection Regime and the New Turkey's Step-Citizens," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46, no. 4 (2014): 666–68.

therefore, prolonged limited versions of the administrations that governed three non-Muslim communities: Greek, Armenian, and Jewish.[15] With Ankara's coerced permission, then, the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople became the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul, and it has continued to administer churches and other properties, including the Ormanyan Library. The content of that library remains a mystery because it is not open to the public.[16] Its inaccessibility hinders history-writing, but that should not distract from the power of its absence. "The ever-present reference to what has disappeared, upon deaths remembered and violations recalled" is vital for producing a "culture of fear," as Timothy Mitchell has identified in rural Egypt.[17] The absence of the Patriarchate's archive in Turkey today helps produce a culture of fear, one that persists in a climate of violence unacknowledged, which Hrant Dink characterized as a disease untreated. Armenians have their trauma and Turks their paranoia, the Istanbul-based Armenian journalist diagnosed before he was murdered in 2007.[18] His absence too is an ever-present referent to what, or who, has disappeared, and it too sustains that culture of fear.

Apprehensions about different versions of a violent past provide the justification for keeping the Patriarchate's archives closed, even if the content of its Parisian fragment suggests that the vast majority of Istanbul's collection may say little about the Armenian genocide.[19] It is true that the Patriarchate's Istanbul records are located where anyone deemed to be threatening particular interpretations of history could face harassment, legal prosecution, or worse. Yet, the Parisian fragment shows that the lion's share of these collections bear little if any connection to 1915. Of the 240 fonds of provincial correspondence in Paris, most fall firmly within the 19th century and earlier. Only a handful reach into the "sensitive" years of 1915–1923.[20] Letters from provincial clergy to the

[15] See Section III of the treaty in Martin Lawrence, *Treaties Of Peace 1919–1923* (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1924), 970–73, http://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.505099 (accessed April 24, 2023).

[16] The library's public web site states that "cataloging is ongoing," as it has been for at least a decade. See "Ormanean Madenataran," Badriark'ut'iwn Hayots,' http://www.turkiyeermenileripatrikligi.org/site//hy/օրմանեան-մատենադարան-պատրիարքութիւ (accessed April 24, 2023).

[17] Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 153–54.

[18] Hrant Dink, *Two Close Peoples Two Distant Neighbors* (Istanbul: Hrant Dink Foundation, 2014), 17–36.

[19] "Referring to the 'events' of 1915 as 'genocide' is still considered 'insulting Turkishness' and is technically punishable by law." See Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia: The Limits of Belonging in Post-Genocide Turkey* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 14–15.

[20] "Archives de la Bibliothèque Nubar, Patriarcat arménien de Constantinople," September 2016, http://bnulibrary.org/index.php/fr/archives/les-archives-du-patriarcat-d-istanbul (accessed April 24, 2023).

Patriarchate discuss communal administration, marriage, and family law. Some notify Constantinople of local committee elections; others describe attempts to apprehend imposter priests.[21] Many letters concern the lives of women and children, since spiritual authorities maintained almost complete authority over marriage and family law until at least 1917.[22] The Parisian fragment of this collection suggests what its counterparts might contain: an unrivalled collection describing the inner workings of Ottoman and Armenian governance, based on individual cases of marriage and family law. Nevertheless, these topics fall under the broad silence imposed by the archive's closure.[23] This silence, emanating from mass violence unrelated to these topics, uncovers another sense of Marc Nichanian's statement that "Genocide is not a fact because it is the very destruction of the fact, of the notion of fact, of the factuality of fact."[24] In his telling, mass violence devoured both its targets and the traces of its own existence, paralyzing present discussions as people debate the factuality of facts and facticity that had themselves been destroyed.[25] Narduhi's story offers other sorts of facts, quite unrelated, whose present discussion also remains paralyzed by that catastrophe.

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21 BNU APC/CP (Archives du Patriarcat de Constantinople / Correspondence Provincial) 12/1, Garin/Erzurum 125, Garin Prelacy to Patriarch of Constantinople, March 15, 1886, describes an imposter priest; BNU APC/CP15/15, Muş-Bitlis 44, Daron Prelacy to Civil and Spiritual Councils of the Patriarchate of Constantinople (March 12, 1885), describes staffing and financial issues at the Surp Hovhannes Monastery in Muş.

22 Darina Martykánová, "Matching Sharia and 'Governmentality': Muslim Marriage Legislation in the Late Ottoman Empire," in *Institutional Change and Stability: Conflicts, Transitions and Social Values*, ed. Florencia Peyrou and Ioannis Xydopoulos (Pisa, Italy: PLUS-Pisa University Press, 2009), 165, http://www.ilibri.casalini.it/toc/09786767.pdf (accessed March 30, 2023); on the challenges of obtaining sources for children's history, see Nazan Maksudyan, *Orphans and Destitute Children in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 2–3, 16.

23 Dzovinar Derderian's work draws on petitions in the Bibliotheèque Nubar's collection in her work on Van during the 19th century. See Derderian, "Nation-Making," 21–32 and 89; Yaşar Tolga Cora also draws on some manuscripts in the collection in his history of Erzurum during the same period. See Yaşar Tolga Cora, "Transforming Erzurum/Karin: The Social and Economic History of a Multi-Ethnic Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., Chicago, IL, University of Chicago, 2016), 293 and 345.

24 Marc Nichanian, *The Historiographic Perversion*, trans. Gil Anidjar (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 1.

25 Nichanian, 27–28. The collections of the infamous Special Organization (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*) as well as the Turkish proceedings of British-imposed tribunals meant to investigate alleged genocidiaires happened to "vanish in their entirety" after the Great War.

SILENCE AT GUNPOINT

The silence arising from the epistemic politics of genocide helps to sustain the routinized silencing of women, gender, and sexuality in history. Women's historians constantly face facts destroyed, because their archives have been suppressed, erased, or never formed. This silencing has also worked by subsuming women's demands beneath other priorities, often defined by men. Lerna Ekmekçioğlu provides an example of this sidelining of women's priorities among Armenians in the Turkish Republic. The transition from multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire to decidedly Turkish Republic stoked fears of assimilation among the remnants of Turkey's Armenian population. No treaty would relieve them of their perceived precarity, and their decimated population, by design, ensured their lasting demographic insignificance. Post-imperial fears of disappearance translated into new demands upon Armenian women, who found themselves, more than ever, asked to bear their community into an uncertain future. It was a big ask: that they abandon their non-Armenian beloveds, that they bear and mother children conceived in rape, and that they suspend their aspirations for gender equality to serve national priorities. Those priorities consisted mainly of social reproduction, the labors of child-rearing and housework.[26] While some Armenian women may have willingly embraced these goals, working toward them meant subsuming aspirations for gender equality beneath a national agenda, one jointly determined by the patriarchy and the Patriarchate.[27] These pressures joined those from Ankara and took their toll. With time, the demands of Ottoman-turned-Turkish-Armenian feminists "waned into domestication, if not invisibility."[28] Although the violence of 1915 had targeted a national group, it imposed an aftereffect, the gendered silence of what had been a vibrant Ottoman and Armenian women's movement.[29]

The correspondence in the Bibliothèque Nubar offers a view of other sorts of gendered silence imposed by national violence. Examining the course of

[26] Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*, 32, 40–43, 122–23.

[27] To tell this history in the face of closed archives, Ekmekçioğlu relied on more readily available published materials, including *Hay Gin*, the fortnightly organ of the Armenian Women's Association in Turkey edited by Hayganush Mark. See Ekmekçioğlu, 15–18. Mark's work pushed the limits of this Armenian feminism, which was circumscribed by national priorities thrust upon Armenian women in the wake of catastrophe. On her support for the proposed expansion of women's rights in the short-lived Democratic Republic of Armenia, see 67–69. For examples in her writing on the social construction of gender roles and domesticity, see 132–39.

[28] Ekmekçioğlu, 161.

[29] For five of its key figures, see Melisa Bilal and Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, eds., *Bir Adalet Feryadı: Osmanlı'dan Türkiye'ye Beş Ermeni Feminist Yazar 1862–1933* (Istanbul: Aras, 2006).

Narduhi Magarian's marriage to Sahag Ağa Tevrizian in October 1878 presents these gendered silences at distinct moments: in the past, at "the moment of fact creation," when the sources examined here were recorded; and in the present, at "the moment of retrospective significance," when people today might go looking for Narduhi's story to include it in their history-writing.[30] While the previous section discussed the present state of these fragmented archives, this section moves into the past to examine silences imposed at different moments when these events were observed and recorded. Doing so reveals the different forms of coercion that silenced Narduhi Margarian and her potential allies. Narduhi fell silent in the face of verbal abuse, physical threats, and bodily harm. Her potential allies meanwhile—her family, the groom, his family, and the clergy—fell silent in the face of the power and intimidation of her father, Garabed Magarian.

Obtaining information about Narduhi requires recourse to the larger and better-preserved archives of men. The only sources about her obtained here are the letters concerning the annulment of her marriage. Dated between December 1885 and May 1886, the letters bear the signatures of the clergymen who made up the Religious Council of Garin, the spiritual half of local Armenian governance. Most of their information about Narduhi comes from her status as the daughter of Garabed Efendi Magarian, who apparently inherited from his father the epithet "Kürkçübaşian" (Քիւրքճիպաշեան).[31] Thanks to Yaşar Tolga Cora's work, we know that Garabed Magarian came to Erzurum as a child from the town of Arapgir in the 1840s. He arrived with his father, Kürkçübaşı Agop, a ruthless and resourceful man who rose to prominence and wealth during the Ottoman reform era known as the Tanzimat (1839–76).[32] Like his father, Garabed Magarian was also ruthless and resourceful. "The most famous resident of Erzurum," the Garin Religious Council wrote, he was "fierce-willed and inflected by intelligence." "Strict in his decisions and stubborn in their execution," he was also "continually drunk" and "known to be addled by vice. In advancing his intentions, he would use threats against his father [Agop]

30 These are two of the four moments of historical production identified in Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2015), 26.

31 Kürkçübaşı literally means the chief furrier, though its meaning as an epithet remains an open question.

32 On Kürkçübaşı Agop Magarian, his rise, and his alleged crimes, see Cora, "Transforming Erzurum/Karin," 199–211; for a description of Agop Magarian containing both respect and rebuke cited therein, see Tevkants', Eremia, Chanaparhordutyun Bardzr Hayk' ew Vaspurakan *1872–73 T't'.* (Erewan: Hayastani Gitutyunneri Akademia Patmut'yun Institut, 1991), 40–41. There, Eremia Tevkants alluded to something dark about Garabed Magarian's reputation, writing that his "immoral path" had "cast a dark shadow on his [father Agop's] glory and honor."

and other notable and highly influential people, and he would not hesitate to deploy arms and violence."[33]

These letters depict a stormy but powerful patriarch, but what of Narduhi herself? We learn that "in 1878 she was about 19 or 20 years old," and that "she was quite free-willed [ազատ կամքի], though not with her father. She endured his vigorous influence."[34] In February 1878, Russian forces occupied Erzurum in the course of the 1877–78 Russo-Ottoman War. With their entry, "rumors swirled about her regarding this and that."[35] Soon after, her father resolved to marry her off to Sahag Ağa Tevrizian, the cousin of his business partner and close friend. "The choice of Sahag did not please Narduhi." The pair had spent their youth together, but she seemed to harbor a "revulsion" toward him.[36] "Some thought" that she "had another young person who liked her."[37] Given the note's mention of her marriageable age, her "free-willed" character, and the "rumors about this and that," including "another young person," and considering this resulted in her father's abrupt resolve to marry her off, we might assume that the rumors alleged an affair during the Russian occupation.[38] That affair might help us understand Narduhi's rejection of this marriage to Sahag.

Garabed, true to his reputation, deployed verbal abuse, physical assaults, and deadly threats to intimidate his daughter. Her female relatives tried to support her: "Narduhi's mother, grandma, aunts, and Narduhi herself" tried to stall and sway Garabed to reconsider. He would not. A priest named Mgrdich Torosian also intervened, suggesting to Garabed that Narduhi would not consent to the marriage. Yet, the patriarch insisted: "I gave her to Sahag. You must give her to Sahag." And "to this the priest was also silent." Garabed resorted to brute force. "The father upbraided the girl with intense admonitions and horrible reprimands, and what's more, he beat her on several occasions to make her obey."[39] This account of the marriage idea's early stages reveals different layers of gendered silence: the silencing of Narduhi's reasons for rejecting the marriage through evasive language about an alleged affair and the silencing of Narduhi and her potential allies, familial and priestly, by different forms of co-

33 BNU APC/CP12/1, Garin/Erzurum 139-40, Religious Council Session XXII [summary] signed by members and Prelate Malachia Ormanian, February 6, 1886, 2.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 3.
37 Ibid., 2.
38 On Ottoman marriage ages, see Martykánová, "Matching Sharia and 'Governmentality,'" 160–62, 164, and 169.
39 Ibid, 3.

ercion. While her relatives faced the power and petulance of Garabed Magarian, she faced verbal and physical abuse.

The various attempts to stall the wedding themselves stalled, and on 2 October 1878, the ceremony commenced, revealing again how domestic violence imposed silence. On the wedding day, Narduhi again resisted by refusing to don her bridal gown. Her father, incensed, held a pistol to her head: "'It's either Sahag or the bullet!' he thundered."[40] The Garin Religious Council speculated that the "miserable" Narduhi recalled how Garabed had made a similar threat against her grandfather, Agop, and how Garabed had not shied away from firing a shot, albeit not a fatal one. This time, Narduhi acquiesced before shots were fired. Still, she was visibly rattled and completely silenced. She arrived at the ceremony in her gown but in a "stupefied state." "At every moment of the ceremony she displayed reluctance," to such an extent that her bridesmaid (խրսնքոյր) and the priest had to intervene physically to arrange her zombie-like body.[41] Whether trauma or a silent protest, her altered state was obvious enough in the testimonies collected by the Garin Religious Council. Nevertheless, the priest, Melkiseteg Melkisetegian, completed the ceremony. Afterwards, Narduhi remained silent around Sahag, with whom she refused to speak. Yet, in his absence, she spoke of her opposition to the marriage.[42] Despite Narduhi's resistance before and after the ceremony, this episode shows how her father's domestic violence exacted her silence during the ceremony itself and thereby facilitated this coerced union.

Examining the position of Sahag Tevrizian and his family highlights the power of wealth and intimidation in silencing Narduhi's potential allies. Sahag and his relatives had learned of Narduhi's rejection beforehand, and they too tried to stall, suggesting the marriage might be too hasty. But Garabed insisted, and they did not resist because they relied on him for their livelihoods. According to the correspondence, the Tevrizian family had fallen into "urgent circumstances" and was "under the influence of Garabed's business and profit such that not only Narduhi but also Sahag was compelled to obey him."[43] That the Tevrizians found themselves in a precarious position should come as no surprise. Erzurum and the surrounding borderland was facing simultaneous crises. The town had been a frontline in the 1877–78 Russo-Ottoman War, which brought a siege, epidemics, famine, and a Russian oc-

40 BNU APC/CP12/1, Garin/Erzurum 139-40, February 6, 1886, 5.
41 BNU APC/CP12/1, Garin/Erzurum 139-40, February 6, 1886, 5.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., 6–7.
44 William Edward David Allen and Paul Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields: A History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border 1828–1921* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 211–12.

cupation.[44] In the wake of the war and on the eve of the marriage, rising food prices and the ongoing Ottoman sovereign debt crisis of 1875–81 wiped out savings and spread mass immiseration.[45] These effects were especially potent in border regions like Erzurum, where the military had procured its needs with unbacked paper currency, if it paid at all.[46] Any one of these troubles could explain the "urgent circumstances" and the pronounced "influence of Garabed's business and profit." These hints at the Tevrizian family's precarity also offer a motive for the priest Melkisetegian to obey Magarian's orders, since Melkisetegian was a parish priest of the Tevrizian family and may have been privy to their financial situation. This coercion differed from what Narduhi endured, since it emanated from wealth and status rather than force and abuse, but it exacted the same silent obedience.

Despite these sources' fragmentary nature, this half of the correspondence presents different ways silence was imposed in the course of this contested marriage. One worked through abuse and assault, silencing Narduhi at gunpoint. The other worked through power and wealth, further amplified by the widespread desperation of this recently-occupied, disease-ridden, and half-starved border town of Erzurum. The Patriarchate's priests were at ground zero for these developments. Their accounts thus offer a unique perspective for piecing together histories of marriage like this one, and the violence and the gendered silences that arise at different moments of history-making.

TOXIC FALLOUT

The end and aftermath of this coerced union show how the inaccessibility of the Patriarchate's collections sustains the dominance of male-oriented histories by suppressing sources that could tell different stories. Other work on Armenians in the Ottoman East has unearthed how realms like trade, agriculture, pastoralism, and taxation constituted political arenas for powerful men: Otto-

[45] On the climatic forces that shaped the 1879–81 famine, see Zozan Pehlivan, "El Niño and the Nomads: Global Climate, Local Environment, and the Crisis of Pastoralism in Late Ottoman Kurdistan," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 63, no. 3 (2020): 342–46.

[46] On how Istanbul's sovereign debt default and currency devaluations contributed to the 1879–81 famine, see Özge Ertem, "Considering Famine in the Late Nineteenth Century Ottoman Empire: A Comparative Framework and Overview," 2017, 164–65, https://helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138/179361 (accessed April 5, 2023); on the military use of paper currency and the devastation of its repudiation see Matthew Ghazarian, "A Climate of Confessionalization: Famine and Difference in the Late Ottoman Empire," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 54, no. 3 (August 2022): 494–97.

man officials, local strongmen, merchants, and spiritual leaders.[47] The manuscript letters concerning Narduhi's marriage offer a different perspective, not the politics of economic production but of social reproduction. Marriage and sex sit at the heart of social reproduction, a topic that de-centers men by more accurately presenting them within networks of familial and romantic relationships that included other-than-male subjects. Like production, marriage, sex, and the social reproduction they undergird also formed arenas of intense competition across space, sect, gender, and class. The fallout of this particular marriage offers examples of those competitions and their intimate details, including attempted murder, conversion out of marriage, and differing anxieties surrounding sex and impotency. Even the extant half of this correspondence shows how different layers of the church hierarchy treated topics like domestic violence, conversion, and sex.

In the wake of her coerced union, Narduhi attempted to poison Sahag to liberate herself, and the fallout offers insight into conversion, violence, and hierarchies of faith in the late Ottoman Empire. Narduhi's toxic recourse was not without precedent. The Ottoman secular (*nizamiye*) courts, formed during the empire's 19th-century reforms, contain a number of cases accusing women of poisoning their spouses.[48] In the months after his wedding, Sahag felt sudden stomach pains on several occasions after eating food prepared by Narduhi. One evening, a Tevrizian servant intercepted a drink prepared by one of Narduhi's maids. It contained "a salt like substance," poison. The Garin Prelacy dispatched the priest Mgrdich Torosian to question Narduhi, who admitted that she sought "freedom through Sahag's death."[49] Afterwards, Narduhi spent time away from Sahag before disappearing entirely. Rumors swirled again, this time indicating she had gone to Istanbul, where she married in the "Greek" church a "manservant of foreign nation and religion."[50] Seeming to anticipate the reader's disbelief, the letter re-emphasized at this point that "everything written here has been confirmed by numerous witnesses."[51]

47 Richard E. Antaramian, *Brokers of Faith, Brokers of Empire: Armenians and the Politics of Reform in the Ottoman Empire* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 105–20; Cora, "Transforming Erzurum/Karin," 254–69. Cora shows how the marriage between Kürkçübaşı Agop Magarian's widowed daughter, Sırma and the British Dragoman Antuan Maghack in May 1868 became an arena for political rivalry between artisans and notables in Erzurum, and how the Armenian Church's remaining power to administer marriages thus afforded it a powerful position to adjudicate such political conflicts. See Cora, "Transforming Erzurum/Karin," 389–92.

48 Ebru Aykut, "Toxic Murder, Female Poisoners, and the Question of Agency at the Late Ottoman Law Courts, 1840–1908," *Journal of Women's History* 28, no. 3 (2016): 122–26. In 1858, poison was explicitly listed as a form of murder in the newly promulgated Ottoman penal code.

49 BNU APC/CP12/1, Garin/Erzurum 139-40, February 6, 1886, 6.

50 Ibid., 6–7.

51 Ibid.

Narduhi's escape to Istanbul and her presumptive conversion through marriage connects two strands of scholarship on conversion among non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire, one focused on troubled marriages and one on violence. Narduhi's case shows how a conversion from one Christian sect to another could, like a conversion to Islam, offer a non-Muslim woman an escape from an unwanted marriage. Even in the 19th century, when state reforms included moves toward religious juridical equality, those reforms left mostly untouched the powers of different religious authorities to administer marriage and family law.[52] Previous scholarship has shown that conversion to Islam facilitated for non-Muslims an otherwise difficult exit from unwanted unions. This was thanks to Islam's privileged role in the Ottoman sectarian hierarchy, which generally celebrated those who became Muslims.[53] If Narduhi had been a Muslim woman, conversion would have provided a less viable exit, since the authorities did not typically permit Muslim women to marry non-Muslim men. Such a union would affront the empire's intersecting hierarchies of gender and sect. Yet, as a female subject of the Armenian church, Narduhi could marry and convert to her groom's faith without affronting those hierarchies. Her marriage and presumptive conversion to the Eastern Orthodox Church suggest that a lateral rather than a vertical movement within the empire's sectarian hierarchy, from one Christian sect to another, could support an exit from an unwanted marriage.

Narduhi's departure also highlights how conversion provided an escape from domestic as well as from mass violence. Previous scholarship has shown how converting to Islam could shield people from ethno-religious and state violence during the late 19th century. When sectarian pogroms called the Hamidian Massacres gripped Anatolia from 1893–97, Armenian individuals, families, and villages attempted to embrace Islam to avoid joining the tens of thousands of dead and dispossessed.[54] Narduhi's flight offers an example of how conversion could provide an escape from a different sort of violence—not national, sectarian, or ethnic, but domestic.[55] By providing details about Narduhi's attempted poisoning, flight, remarriage, and presumptive conversion, the Garin

[52] Martykánová, "Matching Sharia and 'Governmentality,'" 165.

[53] Elyse Semerdjian, "Armenian Women, Legal Bargaining, and Gendered Politics of Conversion in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Aleppo," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 12, no. 1 (March 1, 2016): 13–17; for an early modern case, see Marc Baer, "Islamic Conversion Narratives of Women: Social Change and Gendered Religious Hierarchy in Early Modern Ottoman Istanbul," *Gender & History* 16, no. 2 (2004): 441–42.

[54] Selim Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 213–29.

[55] On domestic violence in legal cases, see Aykut, "Toxic Murder, Female Poisoners, and the Question of Agency at the Late Ottoman Law Courts, 1840–1908," 124–25.

Religious Council's letters lay out this alterative path to escaping an unwanted marriage, and, in so doing, shed new light on cross-sectarian marriage, conversion, and violence in the late Ottoman East.

As the Garin Religious Council's letters shift to the question of annulling the defunct union, they offer a view of the anxieties and tensions that arose among different segments of the church hierarchy charged with adjudicating marriage in a crisis-ridden era. By the mid-1880s, the clergy, secular authorities, and laypeople were openly debating questions like consent, dowries, and marriage age.[56] In August 1885—just months before the correspondence examined here—members of the Ottoman Armenian National Assembly in Istanbul discussed a bishop who had allegedly facilitated another case of "forced marriage" (բռնի ամուսնութիւն) in a discussion about "the marriage issue."[57] These ongoing public discussions might have influenced the Garin Council's seeming desire for swift and silent closure of this issue. Indeed, after gathering information through eight depositions, the Council recommended annulment, for which they requested the Patriarch's approval.[58] While Constantinople's replies are absent, the extant half of the correspondence suggests that the Patriarchate desired a slower, more thorough investigation, suggesting its own anxieties about sex and reproduction.

The letters expose the provincial clergymen's frustrations with Constantinople's cautious pace. Having survived poisoning attempts and now abandoned by Narduhi, Sahag requested permission to remarry. The Garin Religious Council forwarded his request to the Patriarchate, which apparently did nothing until three years later, when it ordered a formal investigation. The Prelate and head of the Religious Council of Garin, Malachia Ormanian, was not impressed with the Patriarchate's pace.[59] "This issue has stalled before the central Patriarchal Council for three years. Recently it has become severely sensitive, especially since it includes a question of honor. Therefore, I am obliged to request

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[56] Hasmik Khalapyan, "Marriage Law and Culture: Ottoman Armenians and Women's Efforts for Reform," *EVN Report* (blog), July 11, 2019, https://evnreport.com/raw-unfiltered/marriage-law-and-culture-ottoman-armenians-and-women-s-efforts-for-reform/ (accessed April 5, 2023); by the 1890s, discussions of divorce law were also appearing in the Armenian press, as in "Amusnaludzman Haygagan Ōrēnk'i Mĕ Bēdk'ĕ ," *Piwzantion*, no. 329 (December 7, 1897).

[57] "Pŕni amusnut'ean" in *Adenakrut'iwnk' Azkayin Zhoghovoy* 7 (August 2, 1885): 128–30.

[58] While a prelate could adjudicate marriage issues, he had "no right to pronounce divorces," since that was under the "authority of the catholicos or the patriarch." See Malachia Ormanian, *The Church of Armenia: Her History, Doctrine, Rule, Discipline, Liturgy, Literature and Existing Condition*, trans. G. Marcar Gregory (London: A.R. Mowbray & Co., 1912), 117 and 135–36.

[59] Ormanian went on to become Patriarch of Constantinople (1896–1908) and was a prolific author and speaker. For a major work later translated into English, see Ormanian, *The Church of Armenia*.

that Your Beatitude, please, immediately, order the Patriarchal Council to immediately make a decision so that we may immediately take the necessary and appropriate action."[60] Although Ormanian's prose is laden with the pleasantries typical of such correspondence, its tone is insistent and perhaps slightly annoyed. The note implies that the Patriarchate failed to keep its "promise," and it also signals faltering patience by thrice repeating synonyms for "immediately."

This letter and those that followed highlight the different concerns of local clergymen arising from the potential social fallout of this "severely sensitive" failed marriage. The reference to a "question of honor" signals these concerns, but whose honor is an open question. Perhaps the reference is to Sahag, whose marriage had ended in an attempt on his life and rumors that his unwilling and unruly bride had remarried. Perhaps it is to Narduhi and her family, who now faced rumors about any combination of domestic abuse, attempted murder, and illicit elopement. The reference to "honor" could also have been directed at the clergy themselves, who may have regretted falling "silent" in the face of Garabed and, ultimately, blessing this coerced union. Having recently faced calls for greater oversight in light of other forced marriages, the clergy likely preferred to keep this case from the public eye.[61] A later letter confirms as much. The Garin Religious Council wrote that it had kept the annulment from the Garin Civil Council, the lay half of local Ottoman Armenian governance. "If the Civil Council discusses this, it will give rise to all sorts of gossip."[62] The Garin Religious Council's fears about rumors may have arisen from a desire to protect the reputations of those involved, from a desire to shield clergymen who were already under increasing scrutiny about marriage, or from other factors indicated in the missing half of the correspondence. Whatever the Garin Religious Council's motivations, its references to "sensitivity" and "honor" exemplify the kinds of anxieties that questions of marriage stoked in local clergymen during this period.

Despite its apparent frustration, the Garin Religious Council fulfilled Constantinople's request for a formal investigation, taking depositions from witnesses including Sahag Tevrizian, his family, Narduhi's bridesmaid, a Magarian servant, clergymen, and other employees of the Garin Prelacy. Summarizing its findings, the Council recommended an annulment. In other cases of wives

[60] BNU APC/CP12/1, Garin/Erzurum 146, Prelate Ormanian to Patriarch of Constantinople, December 27, 1885.

[61] "Pṙni amusnut'ean" in 128–30.

[62] BNU APC/CP12/1, Garin/Erzurum 124, Prelate Ormanian to the Patriarch of Constantinople, February 17, 1886.

accused of poisoning their husbands, some faced death sentences while others received "patriarchal forgiveness."[63] For Narduhi, the Garin Council seemed to recommend forgiveness. The concluding section reads like a contemporary legal resolution, each of its six lines beginning with the phrase "Considering that" (Նկատելով թե):

– "Considering that Narduhi Magarian announced her opposition before all of this…"
– "Considering that Narduhi submitted to the wedding ceremony only in the face of Garabed Efendi Magarian's tyranny, despotism, and use of violence and weapons…"
– "Considering that, although Sahag and the Tevrizian household were partially aware of Narduhi's resistance, they were in urgent circumstances and slowly assented to Garabed Efendi's tyranny…"
– "Considering that Narduhi displayed her rejection after the ceremony…"
– "Considering that Narduhi and Sahag were not materially or bodily known to each other…"
– "Considering that Narduhi, to free herself, tried to murder him…"

"…this council has decreed that Sahag Tevrizian and Narduhi Magarian's marriage on 2 Oct 1878 was conducted under duress" and should therefore "be considered to have not taken place."[64] The six-point list accords with earlier indications that the Garin Council desired swift closure. This correspondence also offers examples of the different stances in the debates about marriage taking place at this time. Indeed, this list shows that, by 1885, some clergy would "consider" a woman's consent to a union, even if some men, like Garabed Magarian, believed it to be a father's right to "give" his daughter into marriage. The six points also emphasized that the bride and groom had not "bodily known" each other, and this oblique reference to sex anticipated Constantinople's more intense concerns surrounding marriage and reproduction, revealed in the next letter.

In response to Garin's recommendation that Sahag be allowed to "go free," the Patriarchate demanded an investigation into Tevrizian's "lack of virile ability" (այրական կարողութիւն). The Patriarchate apparently wanted to know whether Sahag was impotent, perhaps to rule out the chance of a child born

63 Aykut, "Toxic Murder, Female Poisoners, and the Question of Agency at the Late Ottoman Law Courts, 1840–1908," 130.
64 BNU APC/CP12/1, Կարին 139-40, February 6, 1886, 7–8.

out of wedlock.[65] The Garin Council saw no need for such an investigation: the witness testimonies agreed that Narduhi would not even speak to Sahag, let alone share a bed with him.[66] In a later note, the Garin Council re-emphasized that the witnesses, "worthy people," had confirmed that the marriage had not been consummated.[67] The extant correspondence is silent for another six weeks. Then, on May 2, 1886, the Garin Council notified the Patriarchate that it had come to a compromise on the potency test. "Instead of applying medical examinations," it had ordered a parish priest and a former nurse to take a confession, presumably from Sahag.[68] The parish priest, Mgrdich Torosian, had "41 years of impeccable service" to support his report.[69] The note does not mention the methods or results of this potency examination, simply stating that it "had been ordered." These questions of male potency raised by the Patriarchate show how its concerns differed from those of the Garin Council: the provincial clergy focused on containing damage to social relations, "honor," and preventing further rumors from spreading, while the central clergy focused on questions of sex and reproduction.

This letter declaring the potency compromise also further highlighted these clashing priorities by introducing a new potential rumor, that Sahag might have an extra-marital affair. The suggestion is oblique, introduced when asking the Patriarchate to expedite its final decision. "If the decision is delayed, we cannot hinder Sahag from cohabitating with a widow."[70] If not purely hypothetical, this last comment might clarify the "question of honor" and the "strict sensitivity" of this case. Nevertheless, the Patriarchate continued at its stately pace. Perhaps it wanted to leave no stone unturned, or perhaps it did not fully trust the Garin Council's reports. These differing priorities at different levels of the church hierarchy may also have reflected the different demands

[65] According to the 12th century law code written by the celibate priest Mkhitar Gosh (1130–1213)—one that formed an important basis of canon law as deployed in the Ottoman Empire—one spouse's sterility was not sufficient grounds for granting a divorce. For more on this code in other contexts, and on Armenian marriage law in general, see Houri Berberian, "'Unequivocal Sole Ruler': The Lives of New Julfan Armenian Women and Early Modern Laws," *Journal of the Society of Armenian Studies* 23 (2014): 90–91 and 94–98; in some interpretations of Islamic law in the Ottoman Empire, male impotence was considered grounds for granting a divorce, as discussed in Leslie P. Peirce, *Morality Tales: Law and Gender in the Ottoman Court of Aintab* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2003), 136–37.

[66] Ibid., 7.

[67] BNU APC/CP12/1, Garin/Erzurum 124, Prelate Ormanian to Patriarch of Constantinople, February 17, 1886, 1.

[68] BNU APC/CP12/1, Garin/Erzurum 129, Prelate Ormanian to Patriarch of Constantinople, May 2, 1886, 1.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

they faced. Although the Council was legally subordinated to the Patriarchate, it also exercised autonomy in managing its relationships with local officials, potential financial supporters, and other powerholders.[71] The need to maintain these relationships might explain the Garin Council's desire to minimize potentially damaging rumors. The Patriarchate, meanwhile, needed to oversee issues that concerned the empire's entire Armenian community. For instance, as this annulment discussion was taking place, data collection was underway for the 1881–93 Ottoman census. This was a moment when the Patriarchate's biopolitical aspirations began to clash with those of the Ottoman government.[72] As scrutiny intensified over the precise number of Armenians in the eastern provinces, the Patriarchate may have pinned its demographic hopes on more successful child-bearing marriages and fewer annulments. While the other half of the correspondence might shed light on this theory, the extant letters suggest that whatever the Patriarchate's motives, its anxieties and priorities differed from the Garin Council's. Different sections of the church hierarchy had different and in this case competing priorities. While these sources alone cannot explain the Patriarchate's precise motives, they offer examples of what other parts of the Patriarchate's collection might hold, including investigations into attempted murder, conversion, sex, and impotence.

RECOVERING DISRUPTING VOICES

The previous sections showed how different silences introduced at different points in history-making raise different challenges. One set arises from the epistemic politics of genocide. A culture of fear in Turkey arising from questions of genocide justifies the continued inaccessibility of the Armenian Patriarchate's records. Their absence stifles history-writing about Ottoman Armenians. Another set of challenges arises in the gendered effect of that archive's inaccessibility, which exacerbates the inconsistency of the source base for women's history. These challenges impose different silences, one national and one gendered, but both silences invite the same remedy: to seek out silenced subjects and restore their voices. This temptation to recover is especially strong

[71] For examples of this kind of autonomy and relationship management among local councils and prelacies, see Antaramian, *Brokers of Faith, Brokers of Empire*, 95 and 106.

[72] The National Archives, UK, Foreign Office (FO), 424/122, 24/1, January 7, 1881, describes how Erzurum garnered close demographic scrutiny concerning alleged Armenian augmentations in this period. See also enclosure 2 (same file), FO 424/106, 273/7, June 29, 1880, and Fuat Dündar, *Crime of Numbers: The Role of Statistics in the Armenian Question (1878–1918)* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction, 2011), 163–71.

for authors writing about subalterns, those groups largely elided from history for reasons including class, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. Nevertheless, women's, subaltern, and sexuality studies have long noted the pitfalls of the recovery enterprise.[73] In her work on 19th-century British India, Durba Mitra has shown how the urge to recuperate female sex workers' voices, for instance, went on to serve "state policy as well as a conservative social agenda."[74] That is, attempts to recover women's voices yielded yet another form of exploitation. Her findings have joined the likes of Anjali Arondekar's on the history of sexuality in pointing to the limits of history as a "search and rescue" mission.[75] Though quite distinct from those cases, Narduhi's story—given its subject and its archival complications—invites a similar urge to restore the voices of those who have endured gendered, nationalist, or other forms of violence.

Accepting that invitation would be a mistake. To try to recover Narduhi's voice would overlook another form of silence in her story, one she chose. In light of her flight to Istanbul, we have no indication that Narduhi wanted to maintain any connection with the Armenian Patriarchate or its records. Her voice is, after all, absent in the depositions taken by the Garin Religious Council because she had fled the Patriarchate's dominion. How do we approach subjects who might not want to be remembered? Here I follow Saidiya Hartman in admitting that this article is "placing yet another demand upon the girl, by requiring that her life be made useful or instructive, by finding in it a lesson for our future or a hope for history."[76] Narduhi's story offers lessons both useful and hopeful, but they emerge not in what this story recovers but in the two narratives it disrupts: one that conscripts women and their memory into nation-building projects and another that, in the wake of catastrophe, constructs history around a singular collective self.

Narduhi's story disrupts the narratives of the ideal woman that emerged in the wake of the Armenian genocide. Historians of women in other contexts have noted how the women who have gained historical notoriety have been made to

[73] Anjali Arondekar, "In the Absence of Reliable Ghosts: Sexuality, Historiography, South Asia," *Differences* 25, no. 3 (December 2014): 98–100; for earlier critiques of this urge to restore voices, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (London ; New York: Longman, 1994), 104; Gyanendra Pandey, "Voices from the Edge: The Struggle to Write Subaltern Histories," in *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, ed. Vinayak Chaturvedi (London and New York: Verso, 2000), 285–86.

[74] Durba Mitra, *Indian Sex Life: Sexuality and the Colonial Origins of Modern Social Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 178.

[75] Arondekar, "In the Absence of Reliable Ghosts," 99.

[76] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 12, no. 2 (June 1, 2008): 14.

fit demanding models of moral rectitude and self-sacrifice.[77] In the aftermath of genocide, similar models arose among Armenian authorities, who valorized a version of this ideal woman. She set aside her desires for the vote, wage work, and other steps toward emancipation to instead embrace social reproduction in the home. She was church-going, nation-building, and child-bearing, and her purpose was to ward off assimilation by transmitting to future generations national language, culture, and faith.[78] Narduhi Magarian defies this ideal. She was no model wife or daughter, nor a woman of faith or nation. She disobeyed her father, poisoned her husband, abandoned her family, and left the Armenian church. Her defiance shook, split, and maybe even inspired the clergy. The Garin Religious Council's final recommendation, after all, was not to track her down, not to punish her, but to grant her the freedom she nearly killed for. Narduhi's story therefore disrupts these patriarchal conventions of women's valorization that redoubled after 1915. Instead, her story exposes the violence and coercion endemic to the marriage and social reproduction that formed the foundations of that ideal, as well as how determined and resourceful women like Narduhi might reject it altogether.

Narduhi's story also disrupts another narrative that intensified in the wake of national violence, that of a singular national past. Gayatri Spivak has noted that Armenia's subject position, not quite postcolonial, offers a valuable staging ground for critiquing narratives of singular national pasts. The "importance" of Armenia, she wrote, is precisely that it "cannot lean toward existing theories. It cannot be comfortably located in the generally recognized lineaments of contemporary imperialism and received postcolonialism. It has been too much in the interstices to fit such a location."[79] Indeed, as an ex-domain of the Ottoman Empire, that imperial "freak," Armenia does not fit neatly into the matrices of power typical of postcolonial theory.[80] Appearing at once as prosperous merchants, precarious cultivators, imperial treasurers, socialist revolutionaries, and the consorts and perhaps even mothers of sultans, Armenians join other non-dominant Ottomans in defying the inherited opposition between colonizer and colonized. Rather, Armenia's subject position is inflected more by a "profoundly

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77 Lynn M. Hudson, "Lies, Secrets, and Silences: Writing African American Women's Biography," *Journal of Women's History* 21, no. 4 (2009): 138–39; Ula Taylor, "Women in the Documents: Thoughts on Uncovering the Personal, Political, and Professional," *Journal of Women's History* 20, no. 1 (2008): 194–95.

78 For examples of how the magazine *Hay Gin*, the organ of the Armenian Women's Association in Turkey, and its editor, the feminist luminary Hayganush Mark, attempted to push back against unmitigated versions of this ideal, see Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*, 122–23.

79 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Other Asias* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 117.

80 Alan Mikhail and Christine M. Philliou, "The Ottoman Empire and the Imperial Turn," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 4 (2012): 742.

diasporic historical 'identity' and its attendant cultural nostalgia," which, Spivak suggested, could unveil "the inability of the national narrator to constitute itself."[81] That is, histories of violent dispersion and their resultant nostalgia offer an opportunity to critique constructions of a singular national past.[82]

What would that critique actually look like? Narduhi's story offers an example. Her flight and its traces disrupt precisely that desire to constitute a singular national narrative and its "attendant cultural nostalgia." Indeed, after 1915, Armenians intensified efforts to assemble the history of a singular nation capable of sustaining a shared collective self.[83] Calls to adhere to exclusive, homogenous communities were not new or unique to Armenians, but, following the threat of extermination, they were ever more resounding.[84] These attempts to constitute a uniform national narrative from a position of extreme vulnerability offer an example of subaltern groups' inclination toward "the unification in historical activity" that Antonio Gramsci has described.[85] His idea of "unification" has often been read as past attempts by disempowered communities to try to unify into polities.[86] Looking to Armenians after 1915 offers another sense of "historical activity": not as attempts at state formation in the past but as the assembly and unification of narratives about the past. If social reproduction looked to the future, then the related project of national history looked to the past to stitch together a fragmented body politic. Narduhi's story undermines these attempts at "unification in historical activity" by exposing the coercion that undergirded such singular national projects. Her path to liberation did not affirm a collective self but rejected the gendered violence that has sustained such selves. Stories like hers show how ethnic, sectarian, and national boundaries—avidly imagined then and now—were porous and coerced and therefore

81 Spivak, 118.

82 For an investigation of 18th-century iterations of this "nostalgia" among Armenians in Madras following their violent dispersion from New Julfa in Iran, see Sebouh David Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 213–14.

83 Armenian women, for instance, were advised to transmit a singular national past by replacing their "lullabies" with "military" songs, which would recount "the glorious history of the Armenians and the limitless suffering that Armenians endured" and thereby "cultivate patriotism deeply in their young hearts." Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*, 48–49.

84 In Turkey as well—albeit in different circumstances—there was an intensifying drive to construct a singular national history after the First World War. On that process and its profound consequences for Alevi communities in Anatolia, see Kabir Tambar, *The Reckoning of Pluralism: Political Belonging and the Demands of History in Turkey* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 54–56.

85 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), 54–55; for a related analysis of this passage in Gramsci, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

86 Pandey, "Voices from the Edge," 285–86; Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity*, 33–36.

violent and contrived. In this way, her rejection disrupts the narrative of a homogenous nation that has inspired an intense nostalgia and a unifying "historical activity" for dispersed Armenians who endured unspeakable horrors.

Reading Narduhi's story through the silences it generates and the narratives it disrupts urges us to rethink the anxieties surrounding the Istanbul Armenian Patriarchate's records. Perhaps an inconvenient document could emerge, rekindling tensions and drawing unwanted attention to Turkey's Armenian community. Yet, Narduhi's story shows how these archival hesitations go beyond the Armenian genocide. Stories like hers are disconcerting because they deny patriarchal authority its typical safehouse, the family. In Erzurum, an immiserated, disease-ridden, and famine-stricken borderland in the 1880s, both the patriarchy and the Patriarchate struggled to assert their authority. Narduhi's example shows how a resourceful woman could deny it altogether. The unease that surrounds the Patriarchate's records, to be sure, arises in part from the potential evidence it may contain concerning the national violence of a century ago. But it also arises from the *actual* evidence it *does* contain concerning the gendered violence complicit in nation-building. Stories like Narduhi's provide such evidence. They therefore continue to languish in a fragmented archive whose absence has been so productive for so many fervent imaginings of the Ottoman past in the post-Ottoman present.

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