

Yulia Antonyan

Field Report

1. Purpose and Outcomes of being in Berkeley.

What particular goals and tasks were set up prior to coming to Berkeley? Have they been achieved? How effective was the program for me? Is there a room for improvements?

Undoubtedly, one of the advantages of the CRRC Program is the relative freedom given to participants regarding activities. It assumes maturity and responsibility of researchers involved, and it affords everyone the opportunity to best reach their goals. With regard to this, the program ideally suited me. It was saturated with opportunities for learning, experience, and exchange, and at the same time it was brief. This last factor is one of the most significant advantages personally for me, as a full time lecturer and a mother of two kids who could not be left alone for long periods of time. Most of the programs for researchers never take into account this particular circumstance.

With these opportunities and time limitations in mind, I set out the following goals for me:

- To make myself familiar with the American university system and teaching model.
- To acquire the fullest and the most comprehensible reading lists on the topic the possible.
- To have a look through some of the most important books on the topic so I could order them through Amazon or buy in bookshops later or just make idea on them.
- To establish contacts with academics in the research spheres I am interested in and make consultations with them regarding my research topic and syllabus.

As far as all those goals were easily reachable and time-bounded ones, I may say I have fully succeeded in achieving them. In particular:

- I have many new and interesting ideas given and/or stirred by Berkeley academics (see in detail in the second part of the current report);
- I have significantly improved my research plan and syllabus (see syllabus attached);
- I have looked through a number of important academic publications in Berkeley libraries;
- I have made myself familiar with some of the methods of delivering lectures and leading seminars used by Berkeley professors;
- I have acquired a good library of materials on religion and secularization issues; this will be useful not only for me but also for my students and other young researchers in Armenia (I talked to some of my colleagues and we agreed to create a shared library system to make the newest publications available for everyone).
- As the time of my visit coincided with the April 24, the Day of the Armenian Genocide, I did not overlook the chance and tried to make a bit of field work among Armenians of California through participation in events devoted to the Armenian Genocide (students' events organized in the Berkeley University campus and Memorial Walk at the Golden Gate Bridge). Although this was not planned, it turned to be a very useful part of my individual program in Berkeley.

Research and syllabus.

What particular changes have been made with regard of the research and syllabus? What new theories and practical components have been added to them? What new research statements have been elaborated?

The main topic of my syllabus is contemporary Armenian religious identities. It has developed based on the results of my previous and current field research in Armenia and some countries of Diaspora (Syria, Lebanon, Georgia). Thus far, I have conceived it as a course of lectures for the Masters Program of Cultural Studies of the Yerevan State University. Actually, it could also be

partly used more generally as a research plan for investigating some aspects of the topic that need to be elaborated and researched in more detail.

Since my visit to the University of California, Berkeley, I have made significant changes to the syllabus. Firstly, consultations with professors Charles Hirshkind, Alexei Yurchak and others helped me to improve bibliography for the course and, consequently, for the research. After I looked through the recommended books, I was able to reshape the thematic plan and add some new theoretical dimensions that evidently disappeared from the initial version of the syllabus. In particular, I strengthened the aspects of the syllabus related to secularism and increased the emphasis on forms and transformations of everyday practices. I also tried to incorporate some of the ideas and advice regarding the syllabus content, which were provided by my Berkeley consultants.

Below is the latest version of the syllabus. It contains a general description of the course, detailed descriptions of the topics to be discussed, and a general bibliography. It still lacks questionnaire and detailed bibliography for each topic. I will add them later, when all the books and articles are processed in terms of relevancy to separate topics.

Syllabus final

Transformations and current developments of the Armenian religious identities.

Course description:

The course is designed to discuss issues of current religious identities of Armenians in the light of political and cultural transformations of last decades. The Armenian case is a good illustration of how religious identities are closely interrelated with other types of identities (national, ethnic, social, and cultural) and how religion can influence the ways and processes of national and cultural development, and how reality breaks religion-related national and cultural stereotypes. The course also explores different levels and types of religiosity within the religious confessions

and movements currently existing among Armenian of Armenia and Armenian Diaspora, levels and specifics of religious discourse unfolding in Armenia and pan-Armenian cultural space.

The course is intended for students focusing on Armenian Studies, Post-Soviet studies, and Middle Eastern Studies. It is based partly on my own field research, partly on the literature listed below.

Content:

1. Introduction to the course. What is religious identity? Where does it stand with regard to ethnic, national, social, and cultural identities? What does religious identity mean and what cultural and social connotations does it imply in a secular state? What are mechanisms and boundaries of shaping a religious identity?
2. Soviet heritage. Politics of military atheism, secularization processes and specific relationships of dominant churches with Soviet government under the Soviet rule. What crucial changes and modifications of religious consciousness and identity have occurred within the Soviet period? What was the religious situation just before the collapse of the Soviet Union?
3. From national religion to state religious ideology/institution. The Armenian Apostolic Church as a national institution, faith, symbol of Armenianness, reification of Religion. Facets of religious and secular in perception of the AAC. What do institutional changes the AAC is currently undergoing inflict upon its role, status, content and meaning? Choice between spirituality and ideology as a social, cultural and political process. Strategies of “Reconquista” that is re-establishment of dominance or at least ideological priority of the AAC in the religious and public spheres. Current public discourse on AAC: re-considering its meaning as a key religious ideology and community institution

in Armenia. Religiosity and religious involvement patterns within the Armenian Apostolic Christianity.

4. “Other” Armenians. Armenian Catholics and Armenian Evangelical Church. Short introduction on history of the Armenian Catholics and Armenian Protestants. How the ethnic and national identities are refracting through the alternative religious identity: Diaspora and Armenia cases. Secular mechanisms of reconciliation of different religious identities: charity practices and pan-Armenian philanthropic organizations. Shaping and constructing “Armenianness” as the “sacred” which is upon all religious, political, and ideological discrepancies.
5. New religious movements. Intellectual ambiance and New Age-type movements in Armenia: religious mysticism, western healing and divination practices, shamanism, and Eastern religion practices. Search for national identities beyond the Christianity and opposed to Christianity. Armenian neo-paganism: cults of the “Ancient Gods”, invented rituals and symbolism, neo-paganistic spiritualism and theodicy, religious interpretation of nationalistic ideology. The Ancient Armenian History as a Myth and Myth as a re-born History. Arianism as a new identity. Armenian neo-pagans (“Arordis”) as a community: current developments and processes.
6. New protestant movements in Armenia: “Sects or religions?” What does “sect” mean in post-soviet Armenian cultural environment? Mechanisms and ways of intrusion and scattering of western protestant movements: views and interpretations from inside and outside. Motivations and incentives of people’s involvement into the different protestant churches and religious movements. Modifications of religious and national identities of adherents of those movements. Public and clerical discourse on contemporary religious

movements in Armenia. New protestant-type religious movements in Diaspora: search for spirituality versus nationalism and ethnicity focuses (case of the Armenian Community in Lebanon)

7. “Folk faith”: the newest developments of the Armenian vernacular Christianity as models of religious identity and religiosity. Vernacular religious practices as ways of constructing and shaping worlds and identities (recent migrations cases). Local pilgrimages and religious tourism as a way to shape identity. Archaic healing, witchcraft, and divination practices in a system of soviet and post-soviet Armenian vernacular religiosity.
8. Discourses on religion, religiosity, secularism, and Church among soviet and post-soviet Armenian intellectuals and intelligentsia (changing facets and edges of religious and secular consciousness and identities). Rationalism versus spirituality and mysticism. Clericalism versus secularism. Religious freedom versus religious monopolies. Secular mythology of religion related phenomena. Mythological and religious implications in secular practices meant to search for and re-gain identities (exemplified in touristic trips or “pilgrimages” to the Western Armenia, current territory of Turkey).

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Primiano Leonard. N. 1995. Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklore // Reflexivity and the Study of belief, Western Folklore, Vol. 54. No. 1 (Special Issue), pp. 37-56.

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Anthony Smith D. 2001. Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History. Cambridge: Polity Press

Tchilingirian Hratch. 1998. Religious Discourse on the Conflict in Nagorno Karabakh //

„Religion in Eastern Europe”, Vol. XVIII, No. 4 (August)

www.georgefox.edu/academics/undergrad/departments/soc-swk/ree (last visit 12.02.2010).

In Armenian:

Antonyan Yu. Yerb herosy darnum e Astvats. Garegin Nzhdehy ev hay nor hetanosnery (When the Hero becomes God: Garegin Nzhdeh and the Armenian neo-pagans), Problems of Armenian Ethnology and Archeology, vol. 3, Yerevan, 2007, in Armenian

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Hayots srbery ev srbavairery (Armenian saints and sactuaries). 2001. Eds. Harutyunyan S., Kalantaryan A., Yerevan: Institute of Archeology and Ethnography of National Academy of Sciences of RA.

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