RIP VAN WINKLE AGBU

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Category: Opinions

By Hagop Hagopian, Canada, 18 August 2022

In the past two years, this column has exposed the illegal and secret real estate activities of Patriarch Nourhan Manougian of Jerusalem and his sole fan Baret Yeretsian who is still a "vartabed" more than fifty years after ordination. One of the illegal transactions exposed here was the Goveroun Bardez (Cows' Garden) lease which would see the construction of a large hotel on the strategic site extending across most of the western border of the Armenian Quarter. The developer is one Danny Rubinstein of Israel and Australia.

The signing of the leases follow a charted path: once the covert deal is made between Rubinstein and the alleged Patriarch (aka "Boghosig" among Jerusalemites), Rubinstein, per his modus operandi, dispatches a crew to measure the Armenian land in question before the secret real estate deal is signed by the so-called Patriarch and his *eminence gris* Yeretsian. A few weeks Rubinstein's men-with- measuring tapes popped up at Boulghourji, the Armenian-owned restaurant north of Goveroun Bardez. The restaurant has been shuttered for two years due to COVID-19. The appearance of the measuring men is clear indication that the so-called Patriarch is about to hand over the restaurant to Rubinstein. If so, it would be a prelude to a far more serious loss of land: in between Goveroun Bardez and the Boulghourji restaurant sits *the* Alex and Marie Manoogian Seminary built by the philanthropic couple. It would make no sense for Rubinstein to acquire the restaurant without acquiring the seminary land.

Jerusalemites believe in big wedding parties. Israelis believe in big wedding parties. Jerusalem is also the venue of the weddings of many diaspora Jews. These weddings are often inordinately boisterous and noisy and don't wind down until the wee hours. Rubinstein's hotel would be a big draw for wedding parties. The Marie and Alex Manoogian Seminary will be cheek by jowl to Rubinstein's hotel. The cacophony of the partygoers will make sleep impossible to the seminarians.

For a party goer in pursuit of a vertigo on the mandatory swimming pool would more than distract the young seminarians. For that reason and for the logic of owning contiguous lands (Goveroun Bardez, Marie and Alex Manoogian Seminary, and Boulghourji restaurant), it's more than likely that Rubinstein's next target will be the seminary—the biggest Armenian seminary in the diaspora.



In the past two years, despite extensive coverage of the unfolding real estate losses at the Armenian Patriarchate, the AGBU has played deaf and dumb to the illegal transactions. Perhaps its executive was busy shutting Armenian schools. But what would the organization's reaction be when the seminary, built by AGBU's Honorary Life President, goes under the gavel of the alleged-Patriarch Nourhan? What would the late Louise Simone Manoogian (the daughter of Alex Manougian and for a number of years herself president of AGBU) have said about the loss of the family heirloom?

In recent years, the AGBU has been on a diaspora schools closing binge—from Cyprus to Los Angeles. Will the philanthropic organization demonstrate similar callousness and indifference to the fate of the Jerusalem seminary? Will the AGBU raise its voice against the somnambulist "Patriarch" and stop the illegal real estate deals co-signed by a pair of modern Vasags in cowls?

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Comments

Vartan – 2022-09-01 06:22:45
I understand the AGBU will hold its 92nd General Assembly in Armenia Oct. 5 to 9. There will be a reception at the Point of View restaurant, a jazz concert, meeting "His Holiness" Karekin II, dinner at a vineyard... I bet a decision to investigate corruption at the Jerusalem Armenian Patriarchate will not be on the agenda. Perhaps which school to close next will.

Vartan – 2022-08-30 19:03:48
Thank you for publishing the article about AGBU's indifference to the plight of Armenian Jerusalem. It seems that with every passing year, the organization drifts farther away from the Armenian nation. Despite that fact, I had faint hopes somebody from AGBU's lofty executive row in New York City would reply to the criticism leveled at the organization. But an arrogant AGBU seems remarkably consistent in its indifference to the illegal real estate deals being signed in Jerusalem: there is no AGBU letter in this section, I am assuming the sophisticated New Yorkers, sitting on a mountain of donated cash, consider it beneath them to reply to justified criticism.

Serj – 2022-08-25 10:04:05
While AGBU affiliated schools have been closed in Los Angeles, the number of schools affiliated with the other side has been growing and becoming more successful. AGBU has been a failure in teaching our students.....