

From Post-Soviet Studies to Armenianology

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Abstract: Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, numerous studies on its former republics have been published. Armenia is no exception. In this article, I analyze the development of literature and published material on Armenia studies. Although this article does not encompass all of the literature published on Armenia, it should serve as a reference point for scholars who are interested in Armenia or want to use Armenia as a case study in their research.

Key words: area studies, Armenian studies, Sovietology

This article is an attempt to map the field of Armenian studies and studies on Armenia following the collapse of the Soviet Union. To manage this task, I trace the developments the literature on post-Soviet independent Armenia has undergone through a mix of reviewing and analyzing published material from the field of Armenian studies. Although this exercise might have loopholes and may not be inclusive, it should serve as a stepping stone for scholars wishing to venture into the field of Armenian studies or utilize Armenia as a case study for research in their respective disciplines.

Armenian Studies or Armenianology?

Labeling the studies conducted on modern Armenia can be accomplished by utilizing techniques used to define the field studying the Soviet Union. Beginning in the mid-1960s and continuing well into the early 1980s, a great number of texts attempted to address the conceptual/methodological difference between “Soviet studies” and “Sovietology.”¹ Ironically, it was the end of the subject of the study—the Soviet Union—that made it possible to develop finite parameters of what was meant by these two terms. Aryeh L. Unger made one of the clearest distinctions in an article published in 1998:

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Sovietology concerns first and foremost the study of Soviet politics thus making it a field or sub-discipline of political science. While not the exclusive preserve of political scientists, specialists from other disciplines—history, economics, sociology, law, among others—may be considered as practicing Sovietology to the extent that their work touches on aspects of politics.²

He continued:

“Soviet Studies” suggests itself as an obvious candidate for the generic term designating studies in the humanities and social sciences that have the Soviet Union as their object, leaving “Sovietology” as the specific term designating the study of Soviet politics.³

Furthermore, by looking into the classic definitions of area studies’ goals, one observes four main trends: (1) providing knowledge of practical value about important world areas, (2) providing students and scholars with awareness of cultural relativity, (3) presenting an understanding of social and cultural entities as they exist in areas, and (4) furthering the development of a universal social science.⁴

Based on these classifications and the distinction between “ologies” and area studies, it might be possible to operationalize the concepts of Armenian studies and Armenianology, as well as include the various publications dealing with post-Soviet Armenia under one or both of the two categories. The problem of Armenian studies, however, is that its lack of structure prohibits a multidisciplinary approach utilizing the various social sciences and language instructions, supplemented with strong supporting courses in history, government, or religion.⁵ Instead, those scholars dealing with Armenian issues have chosen to observe and analyze problems from the prism of a single discipline, pigeonholing their concerns and thus rendering the field as Armenianology rather than Armenian studies.

This phenomenon is peculiar considering that there are more than a dozen chairs of Armenian studies outside of Armenia scattered all over the United States and the world, and it is expected that these chairs promote the development of robust Armenian studies programs. The problem with this expectation is that most of these chairs focus their scholarly effort on specific issues, such as medieval history, art, language, or literature, and do not bring together resources from a range of disciplines to enable various methodologies to simultaneously answer a given question. Concordantly, post-Soviet Armenian studies have remained within the realm of social sciences’ political branches, entrenching most studies dealing with modern Armenia within the field of Armenianology.

A Country and Its Study Defined by Conflict

The convergence of the Soviet Union’s collapse, Armenian independence, and the rise of the Karabakh movement provided many historians, political scientists, and sociologists fertile ground to study the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and use it as transitory scholarship to venture into and define the field of Armenianology. *Armenianology* is the study of Armenian politics and political life. As politics encompasses a wide range of issues, it is possible to discuss ethnic conflict, nationalism, democracy, secession, and a broad range of topics falling under the field of politics, keeping the nomenclature of “Armenianology” intact.

Some of the earliest written works dealing with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict were exploratory and factual in nature. Moreover, these works were written mostly by historians—or by scholars with strong ties to the discipline of history—who, as a result of their academic background and training, presented the historical roots of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Perhaps the reason historians were the first to undertake the task of examining the conflict was the role history played in legitimizing the demands of each side to claim a historical legacy on the land. One of the first titles covering historic documents on Nagorno-Karabakh was Gerard Libaridian's *The Karabagh File*, a compilation of documents ranging from the Sovietization of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh to the demands for reunification beginning in early 1988.⁶ Although the collection was not an original analysis, it was of value for the accumulation of documents and declarations on the enclave from the early 1920s that provided a solid platform to springboard future publications on the topic.

Therefore, as of 1990, there was a surge in the number of publications addressing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from an ethnonational perspective and the right of Armenians to unite the breakaway region with Armenia.⁷ The focal point of these studies was the history of the region, and several among them approached the issue from an international legal perspective.⁸ Initially, the publications dealing with Nagorno-Karabakh questioned whether Armenians had the historic and legal right to secede. Gradually more and more research began to examine the war from the conflict resolution perspective by suggesting mechanisms and means to resolve the conflict or by explaining the role of the major world and regional powers in the conflict. Some of the titles dealing with the latter category include Edmund Herzig's *Iran and the Former Soviet South*,⁹ Pavel Baev's *Russia's Policies in the Caucasus*,¹⁰ and Neil MacFarlane's *Western Engagement in the Caucasus and Caspian Region*.¹¹

The shift in interest from legal justifications or historic rights to a “finding a way out” approach did not have any cutoff point. As early as the first months of the conflict, several studies, such as Niall Fraser et al.'s “A Conflict Analysis of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Dispute,” attempted to provide strategies to contain and resolve the conflict.¹² Most of these publications were either written by scholars who had an interest in the region before the breakup of the Soviet Union,¹³ or by scholars who, taking advantage of the popularization of the concept of “conflict resolution,” used the conflicts of the former Soviet Union as case studies for the application of conflict resolution theories and approaches.¹⁴

Another subfield for examining the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been a comparative approach to look at this issue within the framework of other conflicts in the region, such as the Georgian-Abkhazian, Georgian-South Ossetian, or Russian-Chechnyan standoffs. The scholarly benefits of this approach have pushed forward the idea that the ethnic conflicts within the former Soviet Union have a range of aspects common to each other: All are byproducts of Soviet nationalities' policies and use historical grievances to perpetuate conflicts.¹⁵ A final category for assessing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict includes publications dealing with the correlation between the conflict and the transfer of oil from the Caspian region to international markets. Published research on this topic did not start until the late 1990s, when it became clear that the transfer of Caspian oil to

Western markets would be mostly through Azerbaijan via Georgia and Turkey, such as through the Baku-Tbilisi-Çeyhan pipeline. These researchers approached the issues from dual perspectives. First, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan could have a destabilizing role in building the pipeline, and resumption of hostilities would threaten the continuous flow of oil. Second, the impact of petrodollars might encourage renewed fighting, the economic windfall causing an arms buildup that encourages a military solution. Within this category are Charles Blandy's *The Impact of Baku Oil on Nagornyy Karabakh*¹⁶ and Michael P. Croissant and Bülent Aras's *Oil and Geopolitics in the Caspian Sea Region*.¹⁷

Regardless of the approaches or methods used, the conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh has provided—and continues to provide—a major source of research material even after a decade of ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The recent trend of studying the conflict is marked by a shift from scholarly and academic discourses to more journalistic and policy-driven analyses.¹⁸

Studying the Nation and the State

The fall of the Soviet Union opened up the once closed archives and borders behind the iron curtain. Although this created opportunities for scholars to have access to resources to conduct research on the former constituent republics of the Soviet Union, it also forced them to retool themselves after the fall of the Soviet Union with concepts and approaches that otherwise were used only occasionally to explain and analyze the Soviet space. One of these approaches has been a move to study nationalism and ethnic politics in postcommunist states.¹⁹

The early period of post-Soviet studies has been characterized by an increase in the number of studies dealing with national minorities, ethnic conflicts, and the role of nationalism in the breakup of the Soviet Union. Because Armenia was more known for its nationhood rather than statehood, most of the early scholarly works conducted on Armenia attempting to deal with issues other than the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict focused on the attempts of the new state to develop institutions and to tackle the duality existing between state and nation. One of the earliest attempts to deal with this was a collection of essays that highlight the overall sentiments of the Armenian leadership, both in Armenia and its diasporas.²⁰

In *Looking toward Ararat*,²¹ published in 1993, Ronald Suny undertook the task of writing modern Armenian history from the age of Armenian dynasties to modern times. However, the study did not cover Armenia's post-Soviet period extensively, mostly because of the publishing date's proximity to the independence of Armenia. This drawback did not undermine the book's value as an attempt to view modern Armenia through the prism of continued historical development from ancient times to 1992. Another book published more than a decade later, in 2004, *Modern Armenia: People, Nation, State*, had a similar structure but provided more attention to and analysis of independent Armenia. This was partially due to the time elapsed between Armenia's independence and the book's publication, and partially due to the background of the author, Gerard Libaridian, who was not only a historian but also took part in many of the political processes in the new republic.²²

Beginning in the mid-1990s, a multitude of publications began to tackle the dual processes of nation- and statemaking in the post-Soviet space. Some of these publications dealt exclusively with Armenia, such as Edmund Herzig's "Armenia and the Armenians,"²³ whereas others included Armenia in a larger context of examining the South Caucasus and within a comparative perspective, such as *The Making of Foreign Policy in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* as well as *Small Nations and Great Powers*.²⁴ Within these two categories, the issues of nationalism and democracy;²⁵ statemaking and its domestic economic, social, and political components;²⁶ and the foreign policy aspect of statebuilding were addressed.²⁷

Within the examination of modern Armenia, the study of national identity has also witnessed a surge. In this

context, the study of the identity of the Armenians living both within and without (diaspora) Armenia received some attention. Scholars, such as Khachig Tololyan and Razmik Panossian, have written extensively on the changing aspects of the nation vis-à-vis the state.²⁸ A new edited volume, *The Armenians: Past and Present in the*

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Making of National Identity, dealt with the social and political challenges of defining the Armenian self in Armenia.²⁹ With the turn of the twenty-first century, scholars began paying more attention to the concept of democratic development and consolidation, partly because the use of nationalism exhausted most ideas and partly because of the development of a "fourth wave of democracy."³⁰ The studies of political transformation—at times, consolidation—such as Cory Welt's "Armenia's New Autocrats"³¹ focused on regime change and the development of (un)democratic political institutions in Armenia. No doubt, the 1998 palace coup in Yerevan, when President Levon Ter-Petrossian resigned and Robert Kocharian came to power, fueled further interest in the topic of political change and democratization. To date, it has continued to generate scholarly interest, as evidenced by such articles as "Institutional Reform as Part of Democratic Transition in Armenia."³²

Although the political aspects of statebuilding in Armenian studies have been dealt with extensively, one of its major shortcomings has occurred in the spheres of economy, society, and other aspects of sociopolitical life directly influencing the process of statemaking, which have received little academic exposure. This lack of attention is not because of disinterest in those fields, but rather because of the small number of economists, sociologists, and other social scientists—other than political scientists and historians—who deal with Armenia. In recent years, there has been a gradual increase in the attention given to the fields of economy, society, and the information technology sector in Armenia as a result of an increased number of professional associations and research centers dealing with these issues. One of the professional associations dealing mostly with the econ-

omy is the Armenian International Policy Research Group, which, since 2002, has been organizing annual conferences to draw attention to economic development and indicators, as well as social issues in Armenia. The new generation of doctorate recipients has helped advance new components in the study of state development as a result of their recent training and interest in Armenia.³³

Trends and Opportunities

This article is a rough attempt to map the field of post-Soviet Armenian studies. Although length limitations do not allow for the full engagement of this topic, the discussion allows the development of several conclusions. First, the scholarship on post-Soviet Armenia has been limited to the confines of politics—with its vast subdivisions—dealing mainly with conflict resolution and nationalism. Although this could have provided an opportunity to examine the phenomena and issues in depth, the trend has been mostly to repeat ideas and overlap research. This is somewhat a result of the lack of new resources for examining the conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as the fact that few scholars have ventured outside of “conventional wisdom” to utilize various disciplines or approaches to study different issues in the South Caucasus.

A second limitation that scholars studying Armenia face is the lack of contribution that such studies have in the general field of social sciences or humanities. Studies dealing with Armenia tend to apply existing theories and concepts rather than devise new ones. The importance of devising new theories and concepts stems from the fact that the role of any regional study is to contribute to the larger field of the social sciences by proving or disproving theories and concepts to further advance a particular field of study. This shortcoming has been more profound since September 2001, after which most of the social sciences and studies on regions have been geared toward security studies explaining trends and threats to the policy community, but have failed to examine matters from a more academic and scholarly perspective.

This having been said, some of the approaches in Armenianology harboring vast potential for development and contribution to the larger field of social sciences remain understudied. The examination of various social trends encompassing the role of women and information technology in the growth of a developed society in Armenia still needs a great deal of attention and could provide not only insights into the various processes at play in the fifteen-year-old republic, but also a social science laboratory in which to develop new theories and enrich the various fields of social science. Finally, scholars working on modern Armenian topics ought to pay more attention to areas that are usually understudied or neglected. As Voltaire said, “the man who ventures to write contemporary history must expect to be attacked both for everything he has said and everything he has not said.”

NOTES

1. See, for example, Dan N. Jacobs, “Area Studies and Communist Systems,” *Slavic Review* 26, no. 1 (1967): 18–21; and Frederic J. Fleron Jr., “Soviet Area Studies and the

Social Sciences: Some Methodological Problems in Communist Studies,” *Soviet Studies* 19, no. 3 (1968): 313–39.

2. Aryeh L. Unger, “On the Meaning of ‘Sovietology,’” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 31, no. 1 (1998): 18.

3. Unger, “On the Meaning of ‘Sovietology,’” 23.

4. See Julian Haynes Steward, *Area Research, Theory and Practice* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1950), 2.

5. See Marshall K. Powers, “Area Studies: A Neglected Field of Academic Responsibility,” *Journal of Higher Education* 26, no. 2 (1955): 82.

6. Gerard J. Libaridian, ed., *The Karabagh File* (Cambridge, MA: Zoryan Institute for Contemporary Armenian Research and Documentation, 1988).

7. Some of the titles dealing with this issue include Christopher Walker, ed., *Armenia and Karabagh: The Struggle for Unity* (London: Minority Rights Publications, 1991); Mark Malkasian, “*Gha-Ra-Bagh!*” *The Emergence of the National Democratic Movement in Armenia* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1996); and Bagrat Ulubabian, *Art-sakhian baykare [The Struggle of Karabakh]* (Yerevan: Gir Grots, 1994).

8. See, for example, Otto Luchterhandt, *Nagorny Karabakh’s Right to State Independence According to International Law* (Boston: Baykar, 1993); and Tim Potier, *Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia: A Legal Appraisal* (Boston: Kluwer Law International, 2001).

9. Edmund Herzig, *Iran and the Former Soviet South* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995).

10. Pavel K. Baev, *Russia’s Policies in the Caucasus* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1997).

11. Neil MacFarlane, *Western Engagement in the Caucasus and Caspian Region* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1999). Although the role of Iran, Turkey, Russia, and the United States in the South Caucasus is almost always addressed in any publication dealing with the region, works dealing with the exclusive role of one country or another in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict include Hamid Reza Nazif Arefi, “Theories of Mediation in Iran’s Foreign Relations and Diplomacy Concerning the Karabakh Conflict” (master’s thesis, College of International Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Republic of Iran, Tehran, 1995); Alexei Arbatov et al., eds., *Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union: Russian and American Perspectives* (Cambridge, MA: John F. Kennedy School of Government, 1997); and Svante E. Cornell, “Turkey and the Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh: A Delicate Balance,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 1 (1998): 51–72.

12. M. Niall Fraser, Keith W. Hipel, John Jaworsky, and Ralph Zuljan, “A Conflict Analysis of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Dispute,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 34, no. 4 (1990): 652–77.

13. Some of the examples in this category include Tamara Dragadze, “The Armenian-Azerbaijan Conflict: Structure and Sentiment,” *Third World Quarterly*, no. 2 (1989), 55–71; Viktor Nadein-Raevski, “The Azerbaijani Armenian Conflict: Possible Paths towards Resolution,” in *Ethnicity and Conflict in a Post-Communist World: The Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and China*, ed. Kumar Rupesinghe et al. (London: Macmillan, 1992); Levon Chorbajian, Patrick Donabedian, and Claude Mutafian, *The Caucasian Knot: The History and Geo-Politics of Nagorno-Karabagh* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1994); Svante E. Cornell, “Undeclared War: The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Reconsidered,” *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 20, no. 4 (1997), 1–23; and, more recently, Thomas de Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

14. For instance, see Bruno Coppieters, ed., *Contested Borders in the Caucasus* (Brussels: Vrije Universiteit Brussel Press, 1996); Michael Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict: Causes and Implications* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998); and David Laitin and Ronald G. Suny, “Armenia and Azerbaijan Thinking a Way Out of Karabakh,” *Middle East Policy* 7, no. 1 (1999): 145–76.

15. See, for example, Hossein S. Seifzadeh, "Caucasia: Democratic Development and Identity Crisis," *Amu Darya* 4, no. 3 (1999); Bruno Coppieters, *Federalism and Conflict in the Caucasus* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2001); Charles King, "The Benefits of Ethnic War: Understanding Eurasia's Unrecognized States," *World Politics* 53, no. 4 (2001): 524–52; Ivlian Haindrava, "Karabakh and Abkhazia: Dynamics of Non-Settlement," *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 19, no. 1 (2002); and Hratch Tchilingirian, "The Struggle for Independence in Post-Soviet South Caucasus: Karabakh and Abkhazia" (PhD diss., sociology department, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2003).

16. Charles Blandy, *The Impact of Baku Oil on Nagornyy Karabakh: Waxing Western Influence, Waning Russian Power* (Surrey, UK: Conflict Studies Research Centre, 1997).

17. Michael P. Croissant and Bülent Aras, eds., *Oil and Geopolitics in the Caspian Sea Region* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000). See also Hrair R. Dekmejian and Hovann H. Simonian, *Troubled Waters: The Geopolitics of the Caspian Region* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2003); and S. Frederick Starr and Svante E. Cornell, eds., *The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline: Oil Window to the West* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University-SAIS Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2005).

18. One of the most prolific diplomats writing on the conflict based on his own experiences is the Russian mediator Vladimir Kazimirov, whose latest writing is "Looking for a Way Out of the Karabakh Impasse," *Russia in Global Affairs* 2, no. 4 (2004): 117–25. One of the latest books dealing with the conflict coming from a more journalistic perspective has been de Waal's previously mentioned *Black Garden*.

19. See Paul Kubicek, "Post-Communist Political Studies: Ten Years Later, Twenty Years Behind?" *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 33, no. 3 (2000): 302.

20. Gerard J. Libaridian, *Armenia at the Crossroads: Democracy and Nationhood in the Post-Soviet Era* (Watertown, MA: Blue Crane Books, 1991).

21. Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

22. Gerard J. Libaridian, *Modern Armenia: People, Nation, State* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2004).

23. Edmund Herzig, "Armenia and the Armenians," in *The Nationalities Question in the Post-Soviet States*, ed. Graham Smith, 248–68 (New York: Longman, 1996).

24. Adeed Dawisha and Karen Dawisha, eds., *The Making of Foreign Policy in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1995); and Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus* (Surrey, UK: Curzon, 2001).

25. Peter Rutland, "Democracy and Nationalism in Armenia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, no. 5 (1994): 839–55; Donald V. Schwartz and Razmik Panossian, *Nationalism and History: The Politics of Nation Building in Post-Soviet Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Center for Russian and East European Studies, 1994).

26. See, for example, Yevgueny Kozhokin, ed., *Armenia: Problems of Independent Development* (Moscow: Russian Institute for International Studies, 1998).

27. One of the earliest and most comprehensive books dealing with the geopolitical and domestic political components of the countries of the South Caucasus was Shireen Hunte, *Transcaucasia in Transition: Nation Building or a New Empire?* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1994). Five years later, Edmund Herzig's *The New Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1999) provided more in-depth analysis of the progress—or lack thereof—the countries of the South Caucasus have achieved in the process of state making.

28. Tololyan has dealt with the issue of diasporas in the journal *Diaspora*, which he edits. Some of Panossian's writings include "The Past as Nation: Three Dimensions of Armenian Identity," *Geopolitics* 7, no. 2 (2002): 121–46; "Between Ambivalence and Intrusion: Politics and Identity in Armenia-Diaspora Relations," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 7, no. 2 (1998): 149–96; and an upcoming book, *The Armenians:*

From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars (working title) (London: C. Hurst and Co.).

29. Edmund Herzig and Marina Kurkchyan, eds., *The Armenians: Past and Present in the Making of National Identity* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005).

30. On this concept, see Michael McFaul, "The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship," *World Politics* 54 (2002): 212–44.

31. Cory Welt, "Armenia's New Autocrats," *Journal of Democracy* 8, no. 3 (1997): 77–91.

32. Alexander Markarov, "Institutional Reform as Part of Democratic Transition in Armenia," *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 10, no. 4 (2001): 109–18. Some of the other publications on these issues include Neil S. MacFarlane, "Democratization, Nationalism and Regional Security in the Southern Caucasus," *Government and Opposition* 32, no. 3 (1997): 399–420; Gerard Libaridian, *The Challenge of Statehood: Armenian Political Thinking since Independence* (Watertown, MA: Blue Crane Books, 1999); Stephen Astourian, *From Ter-Petrossian to Kocharian: Leadership Change in Armenia* (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, 2001).

33. In terms of novelty of research, two recent PhD dissertations have introduced a breath of fresh air in the study of Armenia: Armine Ishkanian, "Hearths and Modernity: The Role of Women in NGOs in Post-Soviet Armenia" (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, Department of Anthropology, 2000); and Audrey Selian, "Cosmetic Democracies: Political Development and ICTS in Post-Communist Armenia" (PhD diss., Tufts University, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, 2005).

Erratum

In the Winter 2006 issue, Eugene Huskey and Taras Kuzio were listed as the issue editors. That is incorrect. Sally Stoecker was the issue editor. We apologize for the error.