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**Can Danışmant**

**Tez Danışmanı: Yrd. Doç. Dr. Nesrin Yavaş**

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Ege Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Müdürlüğüne sunduğum **Search For Roots in Contemporary Armenian-American Literature** adlı yüksek lisans tezinin tarafımdan bilimsel, ahlak ve normlara uygun bir şekilde hazırlandığını, tezimde yararlandığım kaynakları bibliyografyada ve dipnotlarda gösterdiğimi onurumla doğrularım.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

*It also became clear to me that when black students spoke about the very real needs of black children to see themselves in the curriculum, that my life might have been very different If I too had had the opportunity. Perhaps being an Armenian might not have been so difficult had I heard about my history and culture in the schools.*

*Arlene Voski Avakian<sup>1</sup>*

Studies on the Armenian-American historiography and culture have had a significant place in social-sciences especially after the 1960s, when the irrevocable shattering of the minorities' silence paved the way for the emergence of civil rights movements in the United States. Until the 60s, the American public had always fallen on deaf ears on the problems of the Armenian-Americans (as with the problems of other minority groups), who had been subjected to assimilation into the mainstream American culture under the melting-pot ideology. Therefore, the 1960s were also a milestone for the Armenian-Americans, who began to speak out for themselves and who, since then, have had the narrative power to write about their stories, and subjective worlds with ethnic pride. Thus, the echoes of the American civil rights movements have had a consequential impact upon contemporary Armenian-American literature, which have gained momentum and popularity in the United States ever since then.

A prevailing theme in contemporary Armenian-American literary writing, search for roots owes its existence primarily to the Armenian history, which makes up an indispensable feature of the Armenian-American literature. The theme of search for roots captures past Armenian experiences, associating them with the present state of the Armenian-Americans to unfold the protagonists' identity-negotiation: the Americans of Armenian decent who are already assimilated, struggling to achieve Armenian-ness. If negotiation of hyphenated identities (ethnic boundaries) is a primary concern in

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<sup>1</sup> A prominent feminist Armenian-American writer and poet. Epigraph from: Agabian, Nancy. "Arlene Voski Avakian." *Forgotten Bread: First Generation Armenian-American Writers*. Ed. David Kherdian. Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2007. Pg. 424-428.

contemporary Armenian-American literature, how does the theme of search for roots contribute to the reconciliation and negotiation of identities, Armenian and American at the same time? Proceeding from this principal question, this study delves into the aspects of search for roots in the contemporary Armenian-American literature. While doing this, it defines the socio-cultural aspects of being the Armenian-Americans, drawing upon the theories about identity, ethnicity and diaspora. What is more, it also provides an analysis of the themes and issues in early Armenian-American literature to illustrate the similarities and differences in conceptions and constructions of Armenian-ness between the writings of early and late Armenian-American literature.

Beginning from these premises, this study ultimately aims to fill in the gaps in studies on the contemporary Armenian-American literature and to elucidate how the authors, by means of particular structural and stylistic devices, construct a special Armenian-American worldview that is deeply rooted in history. It will be argued that search for roots, as a prevailing theme in the contemporary Armenian-American literature, defines the protagonists' identity quests; their journeys from their American identity to their ethnic Armenian identity. This study will demonstrate the identity quests of the protagonists, who constantly struggle to negotiate their hyphenated identities: the ethnic boundaries of their Armenian-ness and American-ness, in Michael J. Arlen's *Passage to Ararat* (1975), Carol Edgarian's *Rise the Euphrates* (1994) and Peter Balakian's *Black Dog of Fate* (1997). I will argue that the Armenian-American protagonists of the given books set on a physical/mental journey to their family roots, which are to be found in the Armenian history, resulting in their achievement of Armenian-ness. I shall also try to show to what the extent contemporary Armenian-American literature is American or Armenian, whose ethnic boundaries shift between what is perceived as the United States and Armenia, especially when the theme of search for roots is taken into account.

Given that there are frequent references to the terms "deportations" and/or "genocide", it is of vital importance to define and clarify how these terms are understood within the scope of this study. 1915 events constitute one of the major issues for both Armenia and Turkey with regard to their history, politics and international relations; however, the correct use of the terms "deportations" and/or "genocide", is left

to the experts of the scientific fields concerned. In addition, the task of elaborating upon the historical accuracy of national histories lies with historians and political scientists, a fact which further explains this study's impartial stance towards such politically charged events. This study only aims to demonstrate a literary analysis of the theme of search for roots in contemporary Armenian-American literature. The interpretation of such terms enormously differs from one discursive authority to another. As a consequence, none of this study's contents, which are directly related to interpretations of the 1915 events, is among the actual subject matters to be discussed. To do a literary analysis herein, the Armenian history has been studied mostly from the Armenian point of view, only to elaborate upon the reflections and influences of past events on the Armenian-Americans and their contemporary literature. Most Armenians world-wide coin the 1915 deportations as "genocide" due to the fact that it is pivotal to their identity construction; the historical background of this study, which includes 1915 events, only serves as an instrument for the main purposes of this work. Thus, no political message out of any such historical contexts hereunder is neither politically charged nor it is meant to claim a truth or influence the reader.

To discuss and elaborate upon the issues outlined so far, this study aims in the first place to draw the outlines of Armenian history in the "Historical Background" section for the purposes of demonstrating the uniqueness of Armenian historical experience, which is central to and indispensable from the overall structure of Armenian-American literature. Armenian history, by nature, aims to empower and make the Armenian-American struggles visible to assert the Armenian ethnic pride against the WASP culture in the United States. Thus, it is intended to represent the Armenian-Americans as worthy historical agents in the historical background section. It also aims to demonstrate an alternative view of history from the perspective of the Armenians, who, as a result of being exiles in different nations (lands) throughout history, were deprived of expressing their subjective worlds proudly; a fact, which began to change in the United States after the 60s.

One subtitle of the historical background, "An Overview of Armenian History before the Ottoman Rule", provides the reader with an understanding of where the core aspects of Armenian identity originate from, that is, how the Armenians have founded



and shaped their national identity and remained culturally the same since ancient times. Armenia in the antiquity was considered as a mountainous geographical location in Eurasia: an area consisting of some parts from today's Eurasian countries. Mount Ararat, Lake Van and such geographical landmarks have always influenced the religious beliefs and national symbols of this nation. Nevertheless, the nation-making process of Armenians is a subject, which has yielded different views among historians. One such view foresees this process as a mixture of different ancient tribes, whereas another holds out that Armenians were the grandchildren of a legendary hero called Hayk, who was the grandson of Noah, and rebelled against a tyrant called Bel in the Van region. Today, Armenians world-wide still honor themselves with this second view, which relates the ancestry of their nation to Noah.

Throughout history, Armenia existed as a buffer zone between powerful countries and empires, a fact which made it difficult for Armenians to gain independence because of the wars between the surrounding states. Different historical sources indicate that the geography was occupied by many civilizations, whose reign culturally influenced the Armenians. Nevertheless, there were some spared Armenian independences as well. The Armenian Empire of Tigran the Great was one such example, stretching from Caucasus to Syria. Tigran's short-term Empire, however, was a unique exception when compared to the short lived, small principalities/dynasties in the Eastern or Southern Anatolia. Before the conquest of Armenian dynasties by stronger empires, the Armenian social life was regulated by *nakharars* - one of the first examples of feudal lords. This feudal system caused sectioning in social life between the richer noble class and the poor farmers. With the Orthodox Byzantine conquests of Armenia, the *nakharar* system declined, the military strength of Armenian people living in prehistoric Armenia weakened, giving way to the first scatterings of Armenian people.

Christianity has been one of the core aspects of the Armenian identity. One of the few independent Armenian kingdoms in Eastern Anatolia, Arsakuni dynasty, adopted Christianity during the fourth century, making Armenia one of the first countries to have Christianity as the formal religion of the state: another fact which continues to make the Armenians world-wide proud today. The adoption of Christianity

led to the growth of a culture different from Armenia's neighbors after Echmiadzin became the center of the Armenians' own church. This distinct cultural growth was also contributed by the uniqueness of Armenian language. As an Indo-European language, Armenian bears no similarities with other languages. The language has since been articulated with its own peculiar alphabet, which was invented in the fourth century, when Saint Mesrop Mashtots, the inventor of the alphabet, aimed to provide more literacy of Bible. In addition to the rise of Christianity and Biblical studies, the church also became the center of other scientific studies thanks to the teachings of *Vardapets*: a higher distinct church rank in the Armenian Apostolic Church, which has since then been a central institution for the continuity of the Armenian identity.

Differences in religion have since then become one of the factors, determining the course of Armenian history. Overall, the Armenian culture and religion were different, which generally caused problems on the part of the conquering states. During the Middle Ages, for instance, the last independent Armenian state called the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia was conquered by Arabs. The Christian Cilician Kingdom was considered as a threat because the Armenians assisted the Crusaders in the Anatolian peninsula, where the religion of Islam was gaining more support day by day. Being Christian in a predominantly Muslim world posed many difficulties for the Armenians. Generally, the main issues troubling the Muslim rulers were the regulation of Armenian churches and the Armenian schools, which, according to the Armenian collective believe, were the main institutions for the continuity and survival of the Armenian culture. In most cases, discriminatory acts were applied, such as assigning different dress codes for Christians, while in exceptional cases Armenians were favored by the respective rulers and given privileges.

"Armenians in the Ottoman Empire" is yet another subtitle, which aims to provide an overall understanding of the intricate relationships between the Ottomans and the Armenians as well as the socio-cultural and political aspects of the Armenian life in the Empire before emigrating to the United States. It should be noted, though, that the Armenians were also ruled by the Persian and the Russian Empires at the same

time. The case for Persian and Russian Armenians<sup>2</sup> can be the subject of a separate research on Armenian history only. The reasons for choosing the Ottoman-Armenians for this study are firstly because the Armenian-Americans are mostly the descendants of the Ottoman-Armenians<sup>3</sup>, and secondly, most of the prehistoric Armenian region was located in the Ottoman Empire. Hence, this section also enables the reader to understand more about the “Old World” concept prevailing in most Armenian-American literary writings. Furthermore, the books to be analyzed in the ensuing chapters usually conjure up images of the “Old World” from the vantage points of Ottoman-Armenians.

Again, religion is one of the principal components of this section, highlighting the tidal relationships between the Ottoman-Armenians and the Muslim rulers. Before the conquest of Eastern Anatolia by the Ottoman Turks, Sultan Mehmet II relocated some of the Armenian artisans and merchants from Anatolia to Constantinople, thereby founding the Armenian Church of Constantinople (*Patrikhane*). The Sultan also authorized the Armenian Church to govern the Christian *millet* of Armenians, Assyrians and Coptic Christians. According to this system, the religious groups of society were divided into *millets* and governed by their own religious laws and churches. Despite looking beneficial, there had been other cases where the *millet* system posed disadvantages: for instance, a Christian testimony under a Muslim court was generally considered invalid. However, the Ottoman-Armenian religious life can not solely be restricted to the governance of the Armenian Apostolic church, whose members converted into different sects due to influences from England, France and the United States. The missionary activism of these countries converted some of the Armenians into Catholicism and Protestantism in the nineteenth century.

Another aspect of the web of relationships between the Ottoman-Armenians and the Muslims can also be seen in social life, characterized by the Empire’s theocratic rule. For example, the Ottoman government applied the *devshirme* system to collect the smartest children of the Christian families, who were then converted into Islam and brought up with the education of palace schools (*Enderun*). Unlike the Balkan Christians, there were only some Armenians who were subjected to the *devshirme*

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<sup>2</sup> These are the Eastern Armenians speaking Eastern Armenian.

<sup>3</sup> These are the Western Armenians speaking Western Armenian.

system. Trade had special importance for the Ottoman-Armenians, who frequently carried out commerce activities as middle-class merchants, regulating most of the country's trade along with other non-Muslim minorities. Some Armenian merchants, even honored themselves with the title of *Amira* to refer to their higher social class. The wealthy *Amiras* contributed to the education and wealth of their communities, and established the foundations of early Ottoman industrialization. The enlightened Young Armenians, yet another group, were affected by the French philosophers like Voltaire, and put emphasis on education as well. They questioned the hegemony of *Amiras* in their community and helped in the creation of the code of regulations governing the Ottoman-Armenians. Unlike the lucky *Amiras*, most Ottoman-Armenians in the Eastern Anatolia were poor local farmers (*marabas*). Most of the time, it was difficult to sustain their life under an exploitative taxation system and under the problems created by the Muslim feudal lords (*aghas*), who provided them no money for the forced labor. Religious discrimination was but another common burden for the Ottoman-Armenians, not to mention the frequent kidnapping of their daughters as brides for the Muslims, forced conversion to Islam and the appropriation of Armenian properties by *chetes* (local gangs). Despite their demands for security, the Ottoman-Armenians received no protection from the government, which ignited more regional conflicts in the nineteenth century.

The last subtitle under the historical background, "Armenian Question: Conflicts of the Nineteenth Century and Deportations", aims to shed light upon the reasons underlying Armenian national awakening, which brought about successive uprisings and conflicts in the Empire. This section of the historical background has special importance because the socio-political upheavals that are defined here are retained in the memory of the first generation Armenians, who emigrated to the United States. This fact will be observed in the books to be analyzed, when the attitudes and beliefs of older generation Armenians are conveyed to the third generation Armenian-American protagonists. Another importance of this section lies in its coverage of the 1915 events and its effects on the first generation Armenian-Americans. Traumatized by the consequences of being uprooted from their motherland, most of the first generation Armenian immigrants in the United States consciously or subconsciously transferred

their trauma to their children. It shall also be noted in the next chapters that not all Armenian migrants in the United States have had the deportation experience. Yet, it will be clarified that the 1915 events, after the politization of the Armenian diaspora in the 600s, became the cardinal feature of Armenian identity.

To shed light on the aforementioned historical aspects in this subsection, I firstly elaborate upon the definition of the Armenian Question. Next, I explain aspects of Armenian nationalism, and briefly point out what happened during the 1915 deportations. That the Armenian Question is interpreted from different vantage points by the historians is emphatically stated. Some historians suggest that the Armenian Question was about the democratic demands of the Ottoman-Armenians for security and equality, while some others hold out that the Armenian Question was a gateway for the stronger European Empires to benefit from, and eventually to invade and divide the dissolving Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman-Armenians were inevitably affected by the winds of nationalism sweeping throughout Europe as well as by the domestic problems of the recent decades, which had left a negative stamp on the Armenian collective psyche.

With the rise of Armenian nationalism, the Armenian intelligentsia produced works about the Armenian history and culture. Through influences of such works, a new social group called *fedayees* appeared. These were generally armed groups, trying to defend the helpless poor farmers, who faced social difficulties caused by *aghas* and gangs in the Eastern *vilayets*. The Armenian progressives also demanded protection, and the *Tanzimat*, *Islahat* and other reforms made promises for the equality and security of Christian minorities. However, most Armenians were disappointed with the inefficiency of such reforms, especially during Sultan Abdulhamid's era. Thus, such dissatisfaction among the Armenian activists gave rise to the foundation of radical nationalist parties: Armenakan, Hunchakian and Dashnaksutyun were some of them dedicated to ameliorate the Armenians' political and social conditions. Some historians evaluate the actions of these parties as terrorism and rebellion, targeting the establishment of an independent Armenia. On the other hand, some others point out their protesting nature to achieve democratic civil rights. Whatever the reason might be, the social conflicts

angered Sultan Abdulhamid II, who heavily quashed the uprisings with military forces (with the reinforcements of Kurdish cavalry - *Hamidiye*).

The mistrust between the Muslims and the Armenians continued with the dethroning of the Sultan by the Committee of Union of Progress (CUP), which also promised progress and equality for all sections of the society. The Ottoman-Armenians, however, experienced the same disappointment with CUP because the party policies were no different from those that prevailed during Abdulhamid's era. As the First World War broke out, the mistrust became more apparent in the Eastern frontier against Russia: the Armenians were deported from their motherland to the Syrian desert of Der-el Zor in 1915 with the order of CUP party's minister of interior affairs, Talat Pasha. According to the Armenians, what they experienced was "genocide" because they reasoned that the deportations were part of an organized racial extermination plan. Counter arguments, on the other hand, claimed that the deportations had nothing to do with a planned ethnic cleansing, and that the Armenians were deported out of national security reasons. Further, they found the coinage of the word "genocide" excessive for the deaths during war-time conditions. The political nature of this historical event is still debated in the international political arena today. However, this study seeks no answers to these questions.

Another chapter of this study, "Social and Cultural Aspects of the Armenian-Americans" helps the reader scrutinize further about the Armenian-Americans in the United States. Through an analysis of the socio-cultural aspects of the Armenian-American life in the United States, generational differences among the characters and their self-conceptions of what is to be an Armenian-American are better understood in the books to be studied herein. The subtitle "Immigrations to the United States and the Armenian Experience" illustrates the sociological background of this comprehension, offering in depth information to the reader about the Armenian-American social life in the United States dating back to times of the early Armenian settlement in the New Continent. The Armenian immigrations to the United States have different phases, the statistical numbers and times of which I will explain in this section. Accordingly, the first Armenians arrived the new continent before the twentieth century and the immigration waves continued in mass numbers up to the 1990s. It will be stated that

myriad reasons underlied these immigration waves. There were problems for the passers of Ellis Island during the early immigrations because of the American restrictive quotas for the new comers, which included heavy inspections on health and other difficult bureaucratic processes. These difficulties aroused fears of losing Armenian aspirations for creating a new life in the United States.

First wave Armenian immigrants in the United States formed ghettos in different cities. Fresno was the most significant of all the Armenian settlements in the new continent. Farming was one of the most common occupational practices to sustain their lives in close ethnic circles with the fear of assimilation. It was difficult for the early immigrants to adapt to the American culture. Until the 1960s, American mindset supported the melting-pot ideology, expecting the immigrants to leave their Old World habits behind and assimilate into the dominant white culture. Such attitude toward minority groups caused myriad conflicts between the Armenians and the WASPs. Armenians had their share of discrimination when they were represented with degrading stereotypes: “greedy rug merchants”, “savages”, and “starving Armenians” to name a few. Legally labeled as Asians during the early stages of their immigration, the Armenian immigrants went through myriad forms of discrimination in the United States. Early Armenian immigrants were refused from jobs until the *re-Halladjian* lawsuit, which ruled out that the Armenians had Caucasian roots. Despite the court’s ruling, discrimination was well and alive in cities like Fresno, where Armenians were frequently referred to as “Fresno Indians”. Discrimination continued until the civil rights movements in 1960s, when ethnic pride became the motto in the air. However, by the time ethnic pride took precedence over Americanism, most of the third generation Armenian-Americans had already assimilated into the mainstream American culture. For some Armenian-Americans, assimilation had even outweighed their ethnic pride. Whatever the extend of their assimilation has been, the Americans of Armenian descent, since their earlier immigrations, have established their own political and cultural institutions to sustain their cultural presence in the United States, which in the long run earned them visibility and voice in the American society.

Another subtitle of this chapter, “Aspects of Identity, Ethnicity and Diaspora”, provides the theoretical background of my principal arguments. Identity, ethnicity and

diaspora are intersectional notions of personal subjectivities, whose definitions are central to the analysis of contemporary Armenian-American literature. As for 'Identity', Stuart Hall's theories of identity and subjectivity will be applied to have an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of identity construction. According to Hall, the modern concept of identity is an influx state continuously producing and reproducing itself. Common history, mythical ancestry, set of symbolic structures, language, race, religion, sexuality and other constituents of identities make up the collectivity of identities, whose meanings are continuously redefined. What Hall adds to these arguments is that articulation provides subjectivity as well as a negotiation of different, fragmented, multiple and distinct elements of our identities: a fact which will be observed in the literary works to be studied at length in the sections to come. Apart from Hall, Anthony Giddens' views on identity construction will provide further insight into the ever changing nature of identity. According to Giddens, identity is a project, whose form changes circumstantially in time and space. Constructed by us and others with no certain beginning or end, identities travel between past and future with no stability. Always in flux, identity is a not fixed entity; it is always in the making. Michel Foucault holds out that subject comes into being as result of the historical processes as well as the hegemonic discourses. In other words, history regenerates the subject through social production. Therefore, identities are re-articulated in different historical conjectures marked by the discursive powers of the time.

'Ethnicity', the following subsection, is central to the arguments of this study. Ethnicity is inseparable from the protagonists' identity quests, their search for ancestral roots. Travelling mentally and physically between their ethnic boundaries, the protagonists of the literary works attempt to negotiate their Armenian-ness and American-ness during their search for roots. The concept of ethnicity/ethnic identity will be attempted to be defined from myriad vantage points to substantiate my argument. Anya Peterson Royce's conception of ethnic identity as a totality of feelings about the values, symbols, and common histories of group members can easily be applied to the literary works of this study, in which there are countless references to religious practices, national symbols, customs, language and cuisine. Werner Sollors's definition of ethnic identity as a counter-construction against the dominant culture will



shed light on the ways the protagonists conceive of and define themselves in the American and Armenian social circles respectively. Also, Joane Nagel's views on the dynamics between the insiders and outsiders will reveal that ethnicities can alternate depending on the points of address in varying situations. According to Matthew Jendian, ethnic boundaries can be maintained via ethnic institutions, such as schools and religious buildings: an aspect that can also be observed in the books to be analyzed.

In the same subsection, I further explain that ethnicity provides identity with sense of belonging via a narration of a mythological ancestry and establishing bonds with the concept of homeland. Ethnicity may be inherited, achieved or it can be assigned by a particular power inside or outside the ethnic circle. Because of this shifting pattern, a person may not be able to speak out the mental language of his/her ethnic group because a person's ethnic consciousness may differ from one to another. Ethnicities can also be regarded as alliances to nationalisms: the former has mental boundaries, the latter has physical boundaries, and both depend on the same national definitions and institutions. Benedict Anderson parallels this opinion, arguing that language and the mechanization of print publications are regarded to be the most significant factors in the construction of national consciousness because national languages have encouraged the creation of imaginary national communities throughout history. After incorporating the Foucauldian aspect into this opinion, articulation of ethnic languages in print mediums can be seen as gateways for making ethnically conscious communities a historical agent: another fact which I will relate to the books to be analyzed in this study.

Proceeding from the above arguments, William Safran suggests that, in this rapidly globalizing world, national/ethnic identities are weakening because of the heterogeneous nature of post-modern identities as well as their amalgamated cultural essences. Acculturation and assimilation facilitates the making up of such hybrid identities, posing a threat to the retention of the ethnic/national cultures. This opinion also finds its best expression with Herbert Gans's theory of "symbolic ethnicity", according to which the peoples of globalized contemporary societies practice their ethnic culture only through symbols. Pursuant to this theory, ethnic individuals practice their ethnicities via certain cultural patterns expressed by nostalgic symbols like ethnic

holidays, ethnic cuisine, and by an identification with ethnic issues. This makes ethnicity an extra identity for leisure time and nostalgia. Anny Bakalian's conception of the Armenian-American identity follows the same path: Today's Armenian-Americans voluntarily, situationally and rationally accept their symbolic ethnicity, whereas the immigrant generation unconsciously and compulsively embraced the traditional Armenian-ness ascribed to them. As I shall also claim, this makes the early Armenian migrants already an Armenian, while making the assimilated generations as "feeling" Armenian only.

The last subsection under the "Social and Cultural Aspects of the Armenian-Americans", 'Diaspora', attempts to define the Armenian diasporan political and cultural consciousness. The term diaspora connotes an act of traveling from the homeland to the hostland. It can also be related to the consequences of globalization and translocality of movements. The diaspora concept also refers to the forced dispersals from the homeland as a result of various political, historical or ethnic conflicts. In this respect, commemoration assists in the retention of imaginary homelands within the diasporan memory. Diasporan institutions reproduce the homeland culture in the hostland so as to transfer their ethnic heritage to their members, who struggle to continue their culture in the face of assimilation into the dominant culture. William Safran's opinions are also in line with this view: the diasporans keep the myth of turning back to their imaginary homeland, which seems utopian because they are neither willing to give up their lives in the hostland nor to lose their cultural touch with the motherland. Like Safran, Kachig Tololyan considers the Armenian diaspora as a transnational nation, existing not only in the homeland but also scattered across the borders of other nation-states.

The correlation between the Armenian diaspora and 1915 deportations constitute another aspect of the 'Diaspora' section. Robert Cohen's definition of the Armenian diaspora classifies Armenians as a victim diaspora because of the catastrophic experience of the 1915 deportations. Indispensable from the identity constructions of the Armenian diaspora, the deportation catastrophe politicized the Armenians world-wide when the two Catholicoses of the Armenian Church advised the commemoration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1915 events, following the world-wide recognition of the

1915 deportations as genocide in 1964. Within the same subsection, effects of the 1915 deportations on the Armenian diaspora are studied. According to Seviç Göral, the deportees were deeply traumatized and they transferred their experiences to their descendants indirectly. While Göral also discusses that the 1915 events are central to the construction of Armenian-ness today, Kachig Tololyan draws our attention to a generally neglected aspect of the Armenian-Americans, pointing out that not all Armenians experienced the 1915 events; as in the case with the Armenians from Iran. So what is to be taken into consideration is the fact that the deportation is not a shared experience for all segments of the Armenian-American population. Nevertheless, most of the Armenian-American diaspora immigrated to the United States from the Ottoman Empire, where the prehistoric Armenian region was located. Most important of all, the deportation, as Tololyan says, has become the only truth politicizing the Armenian diaspora not only in North America, but also in France, Lebanon and Syria (24).

Differences between the first and the third generation Armenian-Americans yet require deeper insight to analyze the relationships between the characters in the books to be studied. To do this, I will try to explain the course from being Armenian to being an Armenian-American with reference to William Saroyan's claim about the creation of "New Armenia(s)" in his essay "The Armenian and The Armenian". According to this coinage, the Armenians are claimed to have the potential of creating "New Armenia(s)" elsewhere no matter who tries to exterminate their race. This conception parallels Jendian's immigrants' adaptation theory, which puts forward that immigrants create substitutes of their motherland in the "substitution phase", while, in the second stage called "Destitution", they put emphasis on the immigrants feelings of homelessness with no sense of belonging either to the host or the home country. In the last stage of this theory, called "Institution", ethnic community members embrace the home culture and amalgamate their ethnic and mainstream identities, which results in a hybrid ethnic formation. Taking into account Saroyan's argument, does the existence of third generation Armenian-Americans in the institution phase imply that the United States serve as "New Armenia"? I will also answer to this question through an analysis of the generational differences among the characters.

Apparently, Susan Schwalgin sheds light on another significant aspect of the Armenian diaspora: the Armenian Republic's independence in the 1990s changed the motherland conception for the Armenian diaspora, who used to regard themselves as exiles in the previous decades. The creation of an Armenian homeland aroused deep enthusiasm in the Armenian diaspora, making Armenians defend Armenia's national interests world-wide, commemorate the 1915 events, lobby for the recognition of 1915 events as genocide. Formerly, for those early Armenian migrants in the United States, the survival of the Armenian culture in the face of the threat of assimilation into the WASP culture played a significant role. However, with the foundation of the Armenian Republic, Armenian people started traveling to their newly independent homeland. Such an experience necessitated the (re)construction of the meaning of Armenian-ness through ethnic discoveries, which was a absolute challenge for the Armenian-Americans. This is owing to the politicization of Armenian-American diaspora in the 1960s. Already assimilated into the American mainstream culture, the third generation Armenian-Americans feel the need to struggle for reaching "Armenian purity", which they construct by traveling to Armenia.

"Themes and Issues in Armenian-American Literature", the fourth chapter of this study, aims to give an overall understanding about the themes and issues in early Armenian-American literature. Another purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the early migrants' attitudes toward the symbolically ethnic third generation Armenian-Americans, who construct their ethnicity by journeying back to their roots, and who struggle to achieve their Armenian-ness through a negotiation of their hyphenated identities. The pioneers of the Armenian-American literature include writers such as Leon Serbian Herald, Emmanuel Vardanyan, William Saroyan, Richard Hagopian, Peter Sourian, Diana Der-Hovanessian, Michael J. Arlen, Peter Balakian, Peter Najarian, David Kherdian, Arlene Voski Avakian among many others. Early literary examples can be categorized as periodicals because most of the earlier works were published in the Armenian-American press. The Armenian-American press published works about nostalgia, immigrant life, politics, patriotism and other issues related to early Armenian cultural and social life in the United States. The language of these early works changed in time, shifting from Armenian to English. This change in language

shows that the Armenians either sacrificed their mother language for the sake of gaining more popularity or, more importantly, they have assimilated into the WASP culture in contemporary times.

The end of the periodical stage marked the emergence of Armenian literature in the United States. Search for roots with its emphasis on ethnic pride, however, is an antithesis against earlier common themes, which depict melancholic yearnings and exilic feelings of Armenians in a foreign land. In fact, the Armenian-American literature, according to Rubina Perroomian, is an “uprooted” literature, whose existing conventions were cancelled by the trauma of 1915 events as a whole, and which, therefore, centralized on the effects of the catastrophe. For introductory purposes, lamenting the lost past, immigrant life in the United States, humanism (war is bad) and search for roots will given as the common themes surfacing in Armenian-American literature. In the light of this warning, my generalizations are only meant to be taken as particular, momentary formulae that attempt to describe common features in the interests of utility, not absolute categories that obliterate change.

Lamenting the lost past, as an early common theme, focusing on the feelings of nostalgia and longing for the motherland. As a matter of fact, it addressed to the Armenian feelings of homesickness in the United States because many Armenians felt in exile at the beginning. Leon Serabian Herald’s poem “Memories from My Village”, for example, expresses the poet’s yearning with pastoral depictions because his village, having been destroyed, existed on the maps no more. Resembling to J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur’s “What is an American”, Leon Surmelian’s essay “Armenia” is an apt example for this early theme. “Armenia” attempts to define Armenian-ness as well as the mental boundaries of Armenia through cultural descriptions about the nation and the geography at a time, when it did not exist as a country on the maps. Lastly, Richard Hagopian’s “Saint in the Snow” makes a good example for this theme. Having its roots from an oral story, it also takes place in the Old World to convey a moral message to the reader: the importance of caring for the helpless poor people.

Immigrant life in the United States is another theme surfacing in the early Armenian-American literature, with its focus on the Armenian encounter with the American as well as the struggles of adaptation to the American culture. David

Kherdian's short story "Our Block", for example, portrays cultural aspects of early immigrant life, narrating the difficulty of being an Armenian in the United States, where they are discriminated, and labeled as "harmones" by the WASP population. Surmelian's short story "Sombrero", on the other hand, depicts the writer's personal experience, in which an American barber shows him the way out of his shop after mistakenly taking him for a Latino. Despite being discriminated, Surmelian ends up with optimistic feelings, stating that he no longer felt like an alien following a summer rain, which he considers as baptism. Marjorie Housepian's "How Levon Dai Was Surrendered to the Edemuses" is also an apt example for this subject, which describes an Armenian family's disappointment with their son's marriage to an American – an *odar* (outsider): a frequent aspect in Armenian-American literature, which underlies the Armenian ethnic fear of assimilating into the WASP culture.

A third common theme in early Armenian-American literature, humanism, is appropriated by the Armenian-American authors in two ways; optimistically and pessimistically. In the literary publications dealing with the theme of humanism, the optimistic aspect focuses on the "crazy" Armenian archetypal character created by William Saroyan, who first expresses his/her ethnic Armenian pride, and who later relates this pride to being a citizen of the world, celebrating the equality and universality of human existence. The shift from Armenian pride to the universal brotherhood of all humans connotes the Armenian "double-consciousness" and is regarded as a "humanist utopia" in Derrida's terms. Tololyan argues that this "mad" Armenian self is a medium for recoding alienation in an environment, where prejudice against the Armenians prevailed. The creation of the "crazy" or "mad" Armenian archetype also owes its existence to the unique style of Saroyan, whose approach to identity issues is materialized in what is to be called the Saroyanesque style. Saroyan's short story "Gaston" makes an apt example for this kind of literary expression, in which a father and a daughter try to reach a conclusion about keeping Gaston (a peach worm) alive. The peach worm, a metaphor for the suppressed homeless people, ends up dead upon the daughter's disgust, which disappoints the father. "The Pomegranate Trees" from the collection of Armenian immigrant stories by Saroyan, *My Name is Aram*, is another example for the optimistic view of humanism as an earlier theme. Aram Garoghlanian is

the protagonist of the whole collection. In the short story, Aram's father absurdly attempts to plant pomegranate trees in the middle of a desert, ending up with disappointment after finding out about Americans' ignorance of the fruit.

The pessimistic aspect of the theme humanism, however, criticizes wars by elaborating upon its traumatic effects. The short story, "Death is an Empty Coffin", by Emmanuel P. Vardanyan condemns the bigotry of wars with melodramatic juxtapositions: war/peace, joy/misery, and beauty/ugliness. The protagonist Paul Victor, a Westerner in a Middle Eastern town by the Tigris River under Western military occupation, is desperately trying to make sense of life in the midst of honor killings, hatred for the city's non-Muslims and religious fanaticism. After Victor tries his best to save a traumatized adolescent in the village (Salim), he finds the child dead on a bed, repetitively muttering "Death is an Empty Coffin" to emphasize his pessimism. At the end, Victor concludes that the memories of the wars should not be "unearthed": a conclusion which also applies to the first generation Armenian immigrants in the United States, who had struggled to reconcile with 1915 events. Obviously, Vardanyan, also an ex-soldier, tries to bury his past afflicted with the horrors and traumas of wars while avoiding the exposure of the details of the wars he was engaged in.

The principal subject of this study, the theme of search for roots in contemporary Armenian-American literature, is shaped by the accumulated bulk of earlier Armenian-American literature. It became popular especially after the 1960s, a period which Nishan Parlakian names as the era of Armenian cultural renaissance in the United States. The civil rights movements of the 60s paved the way for the minorities like the Armenians to be no longer ashamed of expressing their ethnic pride. As pointed out by Perroomian, the Armenian-American diaspora in the 60s became highly politicized, which resulted in the second and the third generation Armenian-Americans' reconciliation with the 1915 events. This was also owing to the calls by Catholicoses Vasken I and Khoren I in 1964, who advised that the Armenian diaspora should commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 1915, bringing it to world-wide recognition. This call for political awakening triggered a huge bulk of Armenian writing including translations, reproductions of the survivor testimonies, stories, and memoirs about the deportations.

The theme of search for roots began to surface in the Armenian-American writing/literature with the post 1960s phenomena. Also manifest in the literature of other American ethnic communities, the Armenian-American writing/literature made identity politics a priority, depicting chasms of dislocation, stories of loss and exile and dilemmas of identity. Aiming to raise Armenian ethnic consciousness, the theme of search for roots surfaced in contemporary Armenian-American literature through the protagonists' inner-journeys ending with self-recognition, self-valuation and self-knowledge. These journeys highly prevail in the third or second generation Armenian-Americans' literary works, which depict the protagonists' struggle to connect to the Old World to achieve Armenian-ness. Renewed recourses to past, memoirs as revivals of a tragic past, testimonies about the 1915 deportations, and sudden discoveries of the Armenian past constitute the basic motifs of the search for roots theme.

Stylistically, the plots surrounding the theme of search for roots generally consist of rewriting the Armenian history, mental and/or physical journeys to the homeland, efforts to communicate with a family member (most probably an elder, who directly experienced/was affected by the deportations), descriptions of Armenian language, Armenian culinary culture and identity crisis. First-person narration is frequently utilized to portray the protagonists' inner (mental) and/or outer (physical) journeys undertaken to associate their past with their present. The effects of the 1915 events found their ways into the Armenian-American households as silences marked by unspoken secrets and repressed traumas, which the protagonists unearth while journeying to their roots. Epiphanic instances of self-acknowledgement frequently interrupt the silence in the family after a discovery of a secret(s) in the family history. These outlined features of the theme of search for roots contribute to the protagonist's negotiation of their hyphenated identities, ending up with the achievement of their ethnic identity (Armenian-ness): which highly contrasts with early Armenian-American publications that lacked the celebration of ethnic pride. The aforementioned stylistic features are more commonly used by contemporary Armenian-American writers like Peter Najarian. Nevertheless, the whole bulk of Armenian-American literature dealing with the search for roots theme can not be studied within the scope of this study. Therefore, my strategy involves choosing works that bear a resemblance to one another



in order to highlight their commonalities. In this sense, Carol Edgarian's *Rise the Euphrates* (1994), Michael J. Arlen's *Passage to Ararat* (1975), and Peter Balakian's *Black Dog of Fate* (1997) will provide the literary background against which the theme of search for roots will be studied in the next section of this study. In *Rise the Euphrates*, the fictional protagonist Seta, pregnant in her thirties, narrates how she grew up and then reconciled with what she inherited from her grandmother (Casard): the trauma of the deportations. Analogously, *Passage to Ararat* portrays Arlen's own discovery of his Armenian-ness due to the miscommunication between him and his father. Unlike Arlen, his father had chosen to keep silent about the 1915 events through a constant suppression. In like manner, the memoir *Black Dog of Fate* unveils the secrets of Balakian's family history. Balakian's journey to his roots finalizes with admittance of the traumatic effects of exile on his family members, that is, a connection to his Armenian-ness.

While *Passage to Ararat* and *Black Dog of Fate* are autobiographical, the plot of *Rise the Euphrates* is fictional despite bearing traces from Edgarian's real life. The literary works to be analyzed in this study are deeply rooted in history, and as they relate the history of their respective families to the deportation years, reconciliation with the 1915 events is pivotal to the protagonists' acknowledgement of their ethnicity. Another common element of the three books is the motif of shame, which is either in the form of betraying one's ethnic community by favoring American-ness over Armenian-ness, or in the form of ethnic suppression because of the 1915 events. Shame stimulates the protagonists to unearth the 1915 deportations, thereby helping themselves achieve ethnic pride. Lastly, readings from the Armenian history usually interrupt the course of events, which helps the protagonists to reconcile with their past: a fact which is frequently observed in *Passage to Ararat* and *Black Dog of Fate*. In *Rise the Euphrates*, however, history only serves as an introduction to the future events.

To conclude, I will firstly argue that the theme of search for roots in contemporary Armenian-American literature is a journey the protagonists make from their mainstream identity to their ethnic identities. Secondly, it will be demonstrated that the protagonists search for their roots to negotiate their hyphenated identities, and to reveal the wounds and secrets of the past results in an acceptance of their Armenian-

ness, their ethnic side. Lastly and taking into account the Armenian-American protagonists of this study, I will try to answer the question of to what extent contemporary Armenian-American literature is American or Armenian, whose ethnic boundaries shift between what is perceived as the United States and Armenia.

## II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### A. An Overview of Armenian History before the Ottoman Rule

Geographically, the prehistoric land of Armenia was located on the mountainous plateau of northern Mesopotamia, the borders of which are divided between Turkey, Modern Armenia, Iran, Georgia and Azerbaijan today. River Araxes, Mount Ararat, Northern Euphrates, Lake Van and Sevan make up the significant geographic components of the prehistoric region, which used to be an important passage for the Silk Road as well as for the “Royal Highway” between Susa of Persia and Sardis of Asian minor. The region was also prone to countless attacks from various tribes including Medes, Scythians, Cimmerians, Mongols, and many others in the future. These attacks determined the fate of the Armenians and the socio-economic and political structure of the region throughout the history (Kooshian 1-2).

Having hosted numerous different civilizations, Armenia’s roots have been a subject of curiosity for researchers. To begin with, the roots of the Armenian people have an ancient historical background, which is still continued to be studied in depth today. There have been numerous hypotheses about the origins of the Armenians and the foundation of their nation. However, the most common view Armenologists agree upon is that the prehistoric tribes of Urartu, Hatti and Nairi peoples in the ancient Anatolia merged in some way, giving rise to the emergence of an Armenian nation in the prehistoric Armenian plateau. James Russel explains that the word Armenia appeared in Old Persian as “Armina”, “Urashtu” (Urartu) in Babylonian and that the Greek historian Herodotus described the Armenians as “Phrygian colonists”, who spoke a language very similar to Phrygians. Such definitions from a variety of tribes around the region still seem to be problematic because it is also necessary to examine the linguistic, historical and religious relations between the Armenians and myriad neighboring ancient tribes around the region (19-20). One of these relations is narrated with the early popular myth about the story of Hayk, who is presumed to be the great grandson of Noah. He confronts the local tyrant Bel in a war and after beating the tyrant, Hayk founds the nation of *Hayastan*<sup>4</sup> around the lake of Van (Kurkjian 5-49;

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<sup>4</sup> Armenian for Armenia; meaning the land of Hayk.

Russel 24-32). Margaret Bedrosian explains the same legend in a slightly different manner:

Son of Noah and great grandsire of the legendary Hayk, respected by averting his eyes from Noah's nakedness. Progenitor Hayk was a more venturesome rebel: after revolting against the Babylonian titan Bel, he advanced northward to Ararat with his family. Here he finally defeated the pursuing Bel with an expertly shot arrow and went on to propagate the Armenian people. (5)

Some historians refer to Hayk as the constellation of Orion, while some others prefer to associate him with different mythological heroes of the prehistoric age and consider him as an influence of many other similar myths of the same ages (Ananikian 49). However, the aforementioned prehistoric legend is still a point of view with which Armenians proud themselves with because their ancestral roots are hereby associated with Noah while they still refer to their ethnic nationality as *Hayk* in their native language.

As the nation was formed, countless wars took place between Armenia and the prehistoric nations of Rome, Persia, Assyria and many others because Ancient Armenia was located on important trade routes. The story of Ara in the Armenian mythology, which also resembles the story of Trojan War in Greek mythology, is about one of these wars. The story states that Ara is a ruler known for his manly beauty, who consequently affects and arouses desires of the voluptuous Assyrian queen of Semiramis. She demands and proposes to have him as her lover but Ara refuses it for the sake of his wife Nvard. Feeling scorned by this rejection, Semiramis declares war on his nation until she captures the male beauty she desires. During the war, Ara's body falls and he eventually dies. Semiramis finds his lifeless body and attempts to revive him by pleading the gods. Despite her failure, she dresses one of her lovers as Ara and pretends this to be the fulfillment of her wishes (Ananikian 72).

In late antiquity, Armenia was either an independent nation or ruled by a stronger empire such as Rome or Persia. The zenith of Armenian history took place between 95 and 55 B.C., during the reign of King Tigran the Great, (also referred as King of Kings). The fall of Seleucids in Anatolia encouraged Tigran to extend the

Armenian Empire from Caucasus to Syria and to lower Mediterranean coast including the neighboring vassals of his short-term Empire. As the fall of the capital Tigranekert (which is around Diyarbakir in South-East Anatolia today) marked the end of his rule, Armenia was divided between Rome and Persia and other nations of the time, which, according to Armenologists, marked the early beginnings of the cultural division between Eastern and Western Armenians (Garsonian 42-60). This cultural division continued in time, leading to the emergences and destructions of many small Armenian dynasties (e.g. Arsakuni between 180 and 428 A.D., Marzpanate between 428 and 652, Bagratuni between 640 and 884 A.D.) at different times.

Before the introduction of Christianity to the Asakuni Dynasty during the fourth century, Persian culture had had a prevailing influence upon the Armenian people. In spite of such influences, indigenous and unique remains of Armenian institutions and culture still existed. *Vardapets* for instance, were officials who had the highest rank in Armenian churches. Such theological experts worked in churches, which accommodated them. *Vardapets* taught grammar, which was regarded as “the key of language”. Ani was among those popular places, where many *Vardapets* promoted religious teaching and academic learning. Nevertheless, most people were still illiterate and the economic and social structure of the country was shaped by the nobles and lordships called *nakharars*, the aristocrats ruling over the lower class masses and ruling out decisions about the fate of their serves. *Nakharars* had already existed in the Armenian communities long before aristocracy rose to power in Christian European states (R. Bedrosian 256-258, Thomson xiii- xv).

As for religion, it is interesting to note that the early belief system in the Armenian highlands was the Armenian mythology, which was both distinctive in terms of its stories and its similarity to the surrounding Greek, Assyrian, and Persian mythologies. The chief eight deities of the Armenian mythology consisted of Aramazd, Anahit, Tiur, Mihr, Baal-Shamin, Nane, Astghik and Vahagn. The author Mardiros Ananikian argues that these gods and goddesses represented solar planets, and associates them with the Greco-Roman gods; Aramazd corresponding to Jupiter, Tiur to Mercury, Baal-Shamin, Mihr to Sun and Astghik or Arusyak (meaning the little bride) to Venus, Anahit or Nane to Moon and Vahagn as the Dionysos of Armenian

mythology, who was the native rival of Mihr – the Sun. Concerning the aforementioned gods and goddesses, Ananikian states:

Of the main deities Aramazd was the most powerful and Anahit the most popular; with Vahagn they formed a triad. This preeminence of the three gods forced the rest of the Parthenon into the less enviable position of secondary deities. (13)

Apparently, one would easily correlate this type of trinity in belief with Greek mythology, which includes the same relationship among Artemis, Apollo and Dionysus. Likewise, it would not be wrong to associate the Armenian “triad” with the notion of Christianity. This similarity in terms of religion is the second noteworthy historical aspect, contributing to the making up of the Armenian identity. Today, the Armenians are renowned with the historical fact that Armenia was one of the first countries to adopt Christianity as the state’s formal religion in the fourth century following the introduction of Christianity by St. Gregory and St. Thaddeus in the region. This is also one of the main reasons why Armenians have followed the Armenian Apostolic church rather than the Roman Catholic Church (Garsonian 81-84). Bruce Masters comments on the uniqueness of Armenian Christianity as follows:

Although the Armenians were Christian, their understanding of Christ’s nature—that he was primarily divine and only secondarily human—was at odds with that of the Orthodox Christian faith, which held that Christ was equally divine and human. That combination of a distinctive faith and an idiosyncratic language, tied to a particular geographic location, gave Armenians a strong sense of their own unique ethnic identity that persevered even after their kingdom fell to the Turks in the 11th century. (51)

In addition to the distinguished nature of the Armenian religious attitude, Robert Thompson points out that Saint Mesrop Mashtots invented the Armenian alphabet around the fourth century as a consequence of this conversion in order to educate the

people about Christianity. As a result, the invention of Armenian alphabet and its distinctiveness from other existing alphabets provided an ease in the study of *Bible* in Armenian. These two events not only resulted in the growth of a separate unique culture, but they also served the emergence of early Armenian literature, which found its way in the works of Saint Mashtots' pupils; Koriun and Eznik. Of these literary figures, Movses Khorenatsi is considered to be one of the early historians in the classic sense who depicted in his famous work *The History of Armenia and Sebeos* much about the era when Armenia was separated between the oppressive Orthodox Byzantium and Muslim Persia (Thomson 200-228). Epic stories were written, such as the David of Sasun, who fought against the Muslim rulers from Baghdad and Persia. Such stories included a plot with a homeland left defenseless against the attacking enemies (Thomson 238). Such distinctive cultural developments in terms of literature and religion held the Armenian nation together for centuries despite the fact that they occurred in a time of political disintegration and dispersal given rise by the continuous wars between Rome and Persia (Kooshian 5-6). Judging from these events, it could be stated that the rise of the Armenian Church and the Armenian culture during the ancient times influenced many other cultures nearby, establishing a national Armenian unity against the destructive wars within the region.

Unfortunate as above, the nature of history does not always shine on the fate of empires and countries or provide them with long term golden ages, a fact which also applies to the Armenians. After the fall of the Tigran's empire and the small Armenian dynasties, the Eastern Anatolian region was encompassed by stronger nations. The Byzantine Empire annexed the smaller independent Armenian Medieval Kingdoms from the West for certain periods, while the Arab invasions from the South, Persian, Turkic and Mongolian invasions from the East also brought about bigger partitions among the prehistoric Armenian Plateau. Especially, Turkic and Mongolian conquests coming from the East were highly influential in determining the geopolitical status of the region. According to Robert Bedrosian, the most important of these were the occupations of the Seljuks in the second half of the eleventh century, the Khwarazmians (1225-1230), and the Timurid Mongols (1223-1247). These wars caused socio-demographic and economic changes in Anatolia. Previously, there had been many

regions where Armenians had the majority as well as the control of the economic structure of Anatolia. The aforementioned wars and the resulting new settlements by the Turco-Mongolic peoples spared few places, which still held the Armenian majority. However, the formerly rich Armenian trade route became unsafe as the caravan practice was regularly ceased by various groups and gangs. The main reason behind the conquests of Armenia was the policy of the Byzantine Empire, which favored the disposition of strong Armenian princes and nobles –*nakharars*– from their native lands. Appointing *nakharars* as governors to irrelevant locations like Cappadocia left Eastern Anatolia defenseless against the forthcoming armies, unable to resist to fall under Seljuk rule after the battle of Manzikert (Malazgirt today) (R. Bedrosian 241-243). Historians come up with different views concerning the Armenian fell under the Seljuk rule. Some state that Armenians assisted the Seljuks as they were fed up with the corrupted system of Byzantine rule and they assisted Turks against the Byzantines, while others state that Armenians helped Byzantines because of the religious kinship.

During the Seljuk domination of the area, Armenians and Turks had conflicts from time to time, yet there were times when they lived in peace. This mainly depended on the attitudes of the rulers toward the former Christian occupants of the area. For instance, Alp-Arslan, a more nomadic warlord, ruled at a time when Armenian occupied cities were occasionally sacked or looted by the new comers. However, as the rule of Alp-Arslan ended, his son Malik Shah, a more cultured and benevolent governor, was more tactful in solving the conflicts between the Muslims and the Christians. Mateos of Urfa<sup>5</sup> refers to Malik Shah as: “the fairest, the most intelligent and the most powerful that he was like a father to all people. All people in the Eastern Rome and the Armenians accepted his rule voluntarily” (qtd. in Özmenli 205 –translation mine).

The collapse of the Seljuk Empire in Iran resulted in the rise of small Anatolian *Beyliks* as well as the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum in Iconium. The new political and social structure of Anatolia was suitable for the mingling and mixing of numerous races, to which Armenians were no exception. Despite being small in number, some of these Armenians converted to Islam either willingly or forcefully, while the rest chose to remain Christian. Some Armenians even accepted the new Muslim (or Turkish) identity

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<sup>5</sup> An Armenian historian who lived during the middle ages.



sometimes out of political reasons or to save their lives. Although the Islamization of Armenians was expected to regularize the Armenian Seljuk residents, they were still not fully accepted by their Muslim coreligionists because Armenians had their own way of interpreting or practicing the Islamic religion just like the way they were used to do with Christianity before they were converted to Islam. This process of Islamization also had a counter stream which armenianized the Turkish culture as a result of this racial and cultural mixing. Emir Malik Danishmend, a famous Muslim Armenian, whose *Beylik*, the Danishmends, ruled around Sivas for about a century, and became a subject in the Turkish epic *Danishmend-name*. Despite the fact that the Danishmends were a powerful supporter of Seljuks and protectors of Anatolia against the Crusades and Byzantine attacks, their coinage were usually stamped with the sign of the Cross and/or a bust of Christ (R. Bedrosian 247-251).

Such influences of Armenian culture were not only limited to the Danismends; they were also notably traceable in Seljuk architecture. Stone cutting and Armenian style buildings flirting with Islamic motives were common in Seljuk architecture, most of which were built by Christian and Muslim Armenians. Historians regard this as the period of cultural interaction and dynamism when Armenians were active in the field of trade between the countries surrounding the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum. Such economic and cultural interactions made Armenian culture a part of the new state of Georgia, where Armenian churches and institutions were founded and leading Armenian literary artists became established (R. Bedrosian 247-251). However, the policies of the Byzantine Empire that favored the deportations of Armenians in the previous century to the Armenia Minor<sup>6</sup> around Cappadocia and Cilicia caused the last Armenian country to emerge during the Crusades period.

The Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, the last independent Armenian kingdom in Anatolia, lasted from 1199 to 1375 AD. Contrary to what is commonly expected, the Armenians had not lived in the Cilicia region before. Their settlement in Cilicia was a direct result of the policies of the Byzantine Empire. Some historians criticize such a policy, while some others justify their deportation because of the rebellions they aroused against the Turkish conquest. Whatever the reason might be, it could be stated

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<sup>6</sup> “Pokr Hayk” or Lesser Armenia.

that such policies had triggered a rise in the Armenian population. Another reason for this increase in population and migration was also the Battle of Manzikert (Malazgirt), after which the Turkish population forced the Armenians to live in the West. According to some historians though, Armenians saw Turks as saviors from the oppressing Byzantine as they enjoyed more freedom in Malikh Shah's time. In time, the more the Turkic conquests reached westward, the more the Byzantine's power declined, resulting in the foundation of Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia. The borders of the kingdom extended from the region of Cilicia to the Alanya in the West. During its early years, the Kingdom of Cilicia faced successive attacks from the Byzantine Empire. Nevertheless, the continuous failure of the Byzantine Empire forced them to recognize the kingdom as a de facto state. However, constant Turkic conquests had weakened the Byzantines, making them ask for Papacy's help to rescue the Eastern Christians and Jerusalem from the invaders. As a consequence, the first Crusade (1095-1096) was initiated under the leadership of France (Bournoutian 273-291).

Meanwhile, the peninsula of Anatolia was geopolitically divided between two opposing factions: the Christians and the Muslims. The Christian states were the Byzantines in the West, Cilician Armenia in the South, Crusader states in South East, the Trebizond Empire and Georgia in the North. The recent At this time, the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum and Anatolian Muslim *Beyliks* were also struggling to establish their authority by waging wars against the Christian and Crusader states. As a result, it was inevitable for the rising Seljuks of Anatolia to see the neighboring Christian states as a threat to their newly asserted authority. Therefore, they had to be occupied to guarantee the long lasting state of the Sultanate. Accordingly, the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia took advantage of the geopolitical situation of Anatolia in order to save itself from being occupied, establishing alliances for a policy of balance. The Mamluks, the Seljuk Turks, the former Byzantine ruling of the Armenians and the future Mongols invasions constituted threats to the existence of the Armenian state, whose policies favored the Crusaders, especially in the case of Antioch. The Armenians provided the Crusaders with food during the devastating drought in Antioch. What the Armenians had in return was the mountainous region of Cilicia. The relations between the Crusaders and the Armenians reached at such levels that the Cilician lifestyle became more Europeanized:

the adoption of the nobility titles of barony instead of the former *nakharars*, and of the use of Latin and French languages as the second language in courts<sup>7</sup>. Also Europeanized was the Armenian codes of clothing. What is more, some portion of the Armenian population even admitted to Catholicize the Armenian church. These changes disturbed some Armenians, causing them to welcome the Muslim rule over the Latin rule. As the state gradually gained its power back via its support for the Crusaders, it had to cope with numerous attacks from the Turkmen *beyliks* such as the Dulkadirogullari and the state of Mamluk, which considered the Cilician Kingdom as a threat to their existence. The loss of support from the Western Christian Crusaders during the late thirteenth-century led Armenians to establish cooperation with the Mongols, who were recently invading the East in order to defend themselves from their enemies. This was disturbing enough to alert neighboring Muslim states. A noble born monk called Hetoum describes the state as follows:

Strange destiny for an Armenian King! — to travel the whole length of Asia to meet, in the depths of the mysterious wilds of Scythia, a barbarian overlord. Fortunate it was that the Armenian monarch had contrived to form an alliance with these pagan hordes which, after devastating the land of Ararat, were now turning their armed might against the Mohammedans. (qtd. in Kurkjian 245)

Hetoum's accounts also reveals the mindset of the Armenians of the era: some of the Armenians saw the occupation of the prehistoric Armenian plateau and the destruction of the city of Ani (which was used to be referred as "city of one thousand churches") as an excuse to move down to the southern region of Cilicia. However, despite cooperating with the Mongols, the Cilician Kingdom was still losing cities to the neighbors. Soon after the Mongolians converted into Islam, the last Armenian country would have to face the inevitable. Constant Mamluk sieges and occupations weakened Cilicia, bringing the kingdom to an end. The last Armenian King Levon V was

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<sup>7</sup> Some linguists also consider this influence as the first branching of Western Armenian that was considered to be a different dialect of Eastern Armenian.

ransomed from Cairo after his capture by the King of Castile. He was later welcomed as an eternal guest by the King Charles VI of France. Subsequently, Levon also attempted to reconcile England and France to stop the Hundred Years' War. What Levon wanted was to organize a new crusade to have the Cilician Armenia back (Bournoutian 273-291; Çelik 7-8; Kurkjian 213-277).

Armenian history underwent successive changes following the fall of the Kingdom of Cilicia. It took Armenia several hundred years to be a totally sovereign modern nation. This was largely due to the fact that the Armenian sociopolitical life had been lasted under the rule of several other nations for a few centuries before the independence of the Armenian Republic. Dickran Kouymjian states that this phase can not only be identified with the rule of Ottomans only, which had controlled most of the prehistoric Armenian land since the second decade of the sixteenth century (the period of Selim the Grim). The Armenians were also ruled by other empires such as the Karakoyunlu Dynasty, Akkoyunlu Dynasty, and Safavids after the fall of the Timurid Empire, which caused tremendous troubles not only for the Armenians, but also for the Greeks and the Turks in Anatolia. Accordingly, Kouymjian identifies this part of the history as neither a peaceful nor a war time environment, referring to the countless wars between the aforementioned factions, which strived for the control of this region. Even after the *nakharar* system was abolished and a large segment of the Armenian population settled in urban centers and foreign states, the Armenians could still sustain their cultural existence through their strong religious affiliations, which were subject to change with the policies of every rules (Kouymjian 1-4). Iskandar of Karakoyunlu dynasty (1410-1467), for instance, sought to follow pro-Armenian policies:

Yet Iskandar sought to cultivate the Armenian populations, especially the feudal lords and clergy. To reinforce this policy, he took the title 'Shah-I Armen', King of the Armenians. He also had as one of his advisors, Rustum the son of Baron Bechken, the head of the Armenian *nakharar* (feudal nobility) house of Siunik. Evidence suggests that from 1425 to 1430, Rustum became the governor of the province of Ayrarat with Erevan as its center. (Kouymjian 5)

A pro-Armenian policy supporter, Iskandar was also considered to be a savior for the Armenians, who protected them against the Catholic feudal lords of Van. According to one colophon, the Muslims were praised for making repairs on an important church while the Catholics refused to. Moreover, Iskandar's advisor Rustum assisted the Armenians of Sebastia (Sivas), Tokat and Amasia in relocating in the Eastern villages around the Ararat plateau. During his successor Jihanshah's time, Armenians were also asked to support the state against the arch enemy of Akkoyunlu. This meant to guard several Armenian regions such as Siunik, Vayots Dzor, Artsakh (Karabagh) and Gugark, where most Armenian monasteries had been repaired and admitted as Armenian properties. The re-establishment of the central Echmiadzin church in 1441 was another step taken by Jihanshah. However, such favors mostly benefited the upper class Armenian leaders because the feudal system still existed. What is more, the state levied heavy taxes on the Armenian citizens. Whether it was a period of favors or not, it lasted until the crushing defeat of Jihanshah by the Akkoyunlu leader of Uzun Hasan. Like its predecessors, the Akkoyunlu state was an Oghuz Turkmen tribe, and it mainly followed anti-Armenian policies because the Armenians had supported the former dynasty. Uzun Hasan levied heavy taxes on the Armenians and restricted their church activities. In the meantime, the "Christians were required to wear a blue mark for identification" (Kouymjian 7). The Akkoyunlu dynasty also fancied removing the former semi-autonomous regions, which were then controlled by the local Kurds and Armenians. The state policy formed alliances with the enemies of the Ottomans such as the Karamanid dynasty, the Empire of Trebizond and the Venetians. However, such tactics later proved to be inefficient to overcome the rising of Ottoman power.

The death of Uzun Hasan marked the beginning of the rule of Yakub, who made successive attacks on the newly rising group of Shiite Turks, the *Kizil Bash*<sup>8</sup>, who would form a Turkmen coalition in Persia in the future with the rise of Ismail as the *padishah*. Accordingly, Ismail is known to be one of the survivors of these attacks by Yakub in Ardabil. He was saved by some Armenian monks in the Aghtamar region when he was a child. Ismail's future confederation of *Kizil Bash* – namely the Safavid

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<sup>8</sup> Redheads

Empire –had devastating results for the Armenians. Despite having Turkmen origins and speaking the Oghuz dialect of Turkish, the cultural gaps between the Shiites and the Sunni Muslims gave way to hostilities between the two religious sects. Kouymjian comments on the effects of this rivalry, stating that:

In a sense the Ak and Kara Koyunlu acted as intermediate powers in control of Armenia, Shirvan, and the Caspian region and at times Iraq, serving as a buffer zone between the Ottomans in west, the Timurids in the east, and the Mamluks to the south. That intermediary was now gone. The superpowers – the Ottomans and the Safavids – were to confront each other directly in Armenia. (9)

Before the Ottoman-Safavid conflict, however, the meeting of the Armenians and Ottoman Turks did not occur all of a sudden. Until the Ottoman conquests to the East, the Armenians were mainly living in Kaiseri, Amasia, Sis, and some other major cities of the East. The Ottomans' late arrival to these Eastern cities can be accounted by the Timurid invasions of Anatolia in 1402. The Ottoman and the Armenian encounters began soon after the Ottomans regained their power after conquering Crimea, Karamanlids and Constantinople (Kouymjian 9).

The fall of Constantinople also initiated a new era in history. Mehmet the Conqueror favored the settlement of Armenians in Constantinople to revive the city with artisans, merchants and educated people who made up most of the Armenian population at the time. A few decades after these occupations, Ottoman Empire and Safavid Persia shared borders due to the collapse of the Akkoyunlu Dynasty, whose lands extending up to Sivas were then occupied by the Safavids. The climbing rivalry between them on account of the Shiite-Sunni sects caused countless wars throughout the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries. These wars brought too much devastation as well as forced migrations for the Armenian people living in the buffer zones. Initially, these zones were mostly occupied by the Ottomans, who had a strong military power. In addition, the Ottomans gained the assistance of semi-nomadic Kurdish tribes threatened by the Shiite governance. The Ottoman occupation in the East, which culminated with

the battle of Chaldiran, guaranteed Ottoman control up to Erevan and Tabriz for about a century. However, the Safavids captured the opportunity of reconquering Erevan and Tabriz thanks to the future Jelali upheavals of the Ottoman lower class in 1605. After this, most of the Armenian properties, buildings, farms and fortresses were destroyed by Safavids in case the Ottomans regained the territory and used them against themselves. The wars lasted until the Treaty of Zuhab in 1639, which drew today's Turkish-Iranian boundary line and stabilized the peace between the two nations. Despite the fact that such wars affected the zone of ancient Armenia in quite negative ways under the Ottoman rule, middle class occupations among the Armenians increased, especially in the Western urban centers of Anatolia, which in fact formed a considerably important aspect of Turkish-Armenian relations in the Ottoman Empire in the following centuries (Kouymjian 9-21).

## **B. Armenians in the Ottoman Empire**

The completion of the Ottoman conquests in Anatolia made Armenians one of the prominent minorities within the Empire. Studies on the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire are still of significance and they draw academic attention because of the positive and negative effects of this minority community in question on the Ottoman history. For this reason, in order to study the Armenians, who lived in the Ottoman Empire, the aspects of the *millet* system, establishment of the Patriarch and the churches of other sects, *devshirme* system, *amiras*, young Armenians, and *marabas* must be elaborated here.

Firstly, the *millet* system up to the *Tanzimat* and late Ottoman eras was an important aspect, which shaped the communities within the Empire. The *millet* system was initiated by the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II and it continued until early nineteenth century. The system divided the religious communities into *millets*, such as the Muslim *millet*, Jewish *millet* or the Christian *millet*. The Sultans ordered that the Orthodox and the Armenian patriarchs would also be the representatives of their communities. As communal ethnarchs, they were responsible for managing the internal affairs of their communities such as the administration of schools, clergies, family laws and taxes (*djizyeh* and *harach*). Bruce Masters elaborates about the concept of *millet*, stating: “The Armenian *millet* served to cement the sense of a shared identity among Armenians by creating a political identity that transcended the specific location in which they lived and that linked them to other Armenians throughout the empire” (52).

In spite of this partial autonomy given to the Armenians, the construction of new churches, building church domes longer than the mosque minarets, ringing church bells and several other practices of the church were forbidden. The restoration of the old churches also required a special permission to be obtained from the Sultan, which was quite difficult. Moreover, the *millet* system allowed each sect to establish their own justice system depending upon their own laws except in cases involving both the Muslims and the Christians, which were seen by the canon courts following the laws of Islam. Testimonies of non-Muslims were considered to be invalid unless it was a case between them. Furthermore, a good number of limitations were existent pertaining to their clothing, houses, settlement areas, mounts, and churches (Bozkurt 1007-1012).



The foundation of the Constantinople Patriarchy<sup>9</sup> in 1461 by Mehmet II is another important aspect. The Sultan assigned Hovakim -the patriarch of Bursa- as the patriarch of all non-Orthodox Christians in the Empire (it included the Assyrian and Coptic Churches after Selim's Sultanate period). Such regulations made it possible to recognize the Armenians as a powerful *millet* among others. Moreover, the Armenians would be known as the most favored or loyal *millet*<sup>10</sup> in the Empire in the future. However, the importance of this Patriarchy for Armenians increased later because the regions settled by the majority of Armenian population were still to be conquered in the East by Selim. The Patriarchy still did not attribute to all segments of the Armenian population because of the very existence of the central Armenian Apostolic Church in Echmiadzin until the time of Suleiman the Magnificent. Meanwhile, apart from the fact that the Catholicos of Echmiadzin was sometimes under the rule of Ottoman Empire, sometimes Persia, and Russia (after 1828 Treaty of Turkmenchay), most Armenian Church headquarters were located in the lands of Ottoman Empire. Canan Seyfeli states that the chronological order of the religious centers which saw to the issues about the Armenians was as: (1) Echmiadzin (for the second time in 1441), (2) Jerusalem in 638, (3) Aghtamar in 899, (4) Sis in 1293, and (5) Istanbul Armenian Patriarch in 1453 up to the spread of Catholicism and Protestantism among the Armenians in early nineteenth century (135). This change in the choice of religious sects occurred as a consequence of the influences or the missionary activities carried out by the Americans, the English, the French and other colonial powers of the nineteenth century to keep Armenians in their spheres of influence. For the Catholic *millet*, the Treaty of Adrianople provided the recognition of the Catholic Armenians under a separate administration governed by an elected of a Catholic cleric, who came in force in 1830. Moreover, the Armenian Protestant community was recognized as a community in 1848. As the Sublime Porte demanded, Armenians prepared *Protestan Nizamnamesi*<sup>11</sup>. This code of regulations was highly influenced by the American Protestant Church, which was under the control/influence of the American Board of Commissioners for foreign missions. The *nizamname* was a brief text dealing with subjects other than religion. Consequently, the

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<sup>9</sup> Also known as *Patrikhane*.

<sup>10</sup> *Millet-i Sadika*.

<sup>11</sup> Code of Regulations for Protestants.

number of Protestant Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, some of whom would later set out for migrating to Britain or the United States in the future, reached to a number of 60.000 toward the end of the nineteenth century. Eventually, such fluctuations in religion opened up the way for interference from other nations into the Armenian culture, which resulted in closer relationships between the Armenians and the countries of other sects (Artinian 56-57; Erhan 338; Kentel 128-129).

The *devshirme* system, which means collection in Turkish, is also another point to be discussed with regard to the characteristics of the Armenian life in the Ottoman Empire. The *devshirme* system means the collection of young boys among the non-Muslim (mainly Christian) subjects from the European and Asian provinces by force in order to train them as Janissary troops or for higher governmental positions. It is stated that children between eight and fourteen (preferably older) were taken under this system at varying rates and that the system took place mostly in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries continuing until the Janissary, the elite troops of Sultan, lost their importance. Generally, these non-Muslim children brought to the capital were inspected, circumcised and converted to Islam. The smartest ones, nevertheless, were sent to the *Enderuns*<sup>12</sup> or to the palace to be employed in other services for the Sultan. The palace schools provided the best education of the Empire for a long time, facilitating the *devshirme* children's future appointment to more important official positions which required trust and authority. The *devshirme* system also forced some native Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire to convert to Islam in order to avoid from the collection of their children and the heavy taxes (Ágoston, 183-185). Concerning the *devshirme* of Armenians, Hammer Prugstal comments on the system as follows:

The Armenians are the only ones exempt from the annual recruitment of Christian children destined to be incorporated into the ranks of the Janissaries. They do not become Janissaries until a lapse of twenty five years . . . Janissaries were recruited by an annual levy of young boys, which after the decree (*kanun*) could take place in Bosnia, Greece, Bulgaria and Armenia. (qtd. in Kouymjian 12-13)

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<sup>12</sup> Palace schools.

Despite the fact that the Armenians were the least recruited Christians because of their most favored position in the Empire, there had been numerous important Armenian *devshirmes* in fields other than military such as Sinan the architect, Selim II and Khalil as a Grand vizier for a year (Kouymjian, 13).

Although religion was a major aspect, determining the status of *millets* in social hierarchy, there were still some Armenians, who maintained their higher social-ranks and dominated the economic life of the state. As capitalism gained momentum in Europe toward the end of the eighteenth century, these groups of Armenians undertook establishing missionary business. Most of the foreign trade, finance, banking, insurance works, commercial transportations, industrial fields and agricultural sector regarding the exports were run by these Armenians until the World War I. The Armenians were particularly active in trade and commerce in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as the Silk Road during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries due to their dominant commercial success over the agricultural products in Sivas and Tokat, wool and angora in Ankara, silk and tobacco products in Bursa. This condition continued up to the end of the nineteenth century, when the non-Muslims were also allowed to participate in the administration of the Empire, along with the Muslim citizens, as public servants either in post or tax offices or other governmental ranks thanks to the *Vilayet Nizammesi*<sup>13</sup> of 1864 (Kentel 118-125).

Armenians' admittance into the economic and social circles of the Empire accelerated their social upward mobility. Middle-class Armenians devised the word *Amira* (deriving from the Arabic *Amir*) to refer to their social class. Unlike *chelebis*<sup>14</sup>, who were more independent and heavily occupied with merchandizing, the rich and wealthy *Amiras* had close relationships with the Ottoman *pashas*. According to Barsoumian, in the nineteenth century *Amiras* consisted of approximately 165 people from Egin (Kemaliye), Sivas and Van apart from those who were already born in Constantinople (qtd. in Kentel 118). They owed their success to their technical

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<sup>13</sup> Provincial Regulations.

<sup>14</sup> A title in the Ottoman Culture, meaning educated person.

knowledge and experience. As they strengthened their social status, they began to have authority on their communities more than the Patriarch.

The Ottoman-Armenians also played a prominent role in starting overseas agencies. Highly notable was *Amiras*' commercial success in the early stages of the early Ottoman industrialization. Members of the Dadian family founded silk and cotton factories in Hereke, leather factory in Beykoz, baize factory in Izmit, and forge in Zeytinburnu. Furthermore, the Dadians began to run the gunpowder factory during the reign of Selim III (1795). Other Armenian pioneers, who were influential in Ottoman industrialization included Hagop Duzian, who controlled the market and founded a paper factory in Izmir. In addition, the Kavafian family founded a shipbuilding yard in Istanbul, Arpiarian family ran silver mines. Furthermore, the members of the Balian family highly contributed to the architecture of numerous palaces, mosques, public places, factories and churches from 1750 up to the nineteenth century. Kazaz Artin Amira Bezdjian had a leading role in the establishment of the Surp Pargich Hospital, which paved the way for the foundation of Darulaceze<sup>15</sup>, Hilal-i Ahmer<sup>16</sup> and Himaye-i Etfal<sup>17</sup> in the future. (Artinian 34-35, Kentel 118-125).

*Amiras* in the society also effected the elections of the patriarch. They took a leading role in the opening of secular schools, donating charities, sending Armenian students abroad, restoration of churches and the organization of other social activities, which strengthened their prestigious status in the Armenian community. Apparently, Armenians were an integral part of the social, cultural and economic life in the Ottoman Empire. Their achievements would also result in the opening of new commercial branches or in migrations to the United States in the future (Kentel 118-125).

Another group among the Ottoman-Armenians was the enlightened Young Armenians, who questioned the hegemony of *Amiras* in their community. They were more active in education, journalism, and literature. This young community contributed to the making of the *Nizâmnâme-i Millet-i Ermeniyân*<sup>18</sup>, which was approved by the Ottoman government in 1863. This constitution written by progressive Young

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<sup>15</sup> Poorhouse.

<sup>16</sup> Red Crescent.

<sup>17</sup> Child protection services.

<sup>18</sup> Armenian National Constitution.

Armenians consisted of articles, which were proposed by the foundation of *Azkayin Sahmanatrutyun Hayots*<sup>19</sup>. These articles reduced the power of the Patriarch. Having been highly influenced by the French Revolution and the French philosophers (Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau), some of these Young Armenians stayed in Europe and established political groups, while some others returned to the Ottoman Empire to start an educational reform in their community and limit the authority of the Patriarch. The foundation of *Araradyan Ingerutyun*<sup>20</sup> in Paris in 1849 was one such attempt aimed to modernize civil Armenian institutions. Still another was their enthusiasm in the translation of major literary and political texts into Armenian to upgrade educational life in their civil communities (Artinian 73-89; Barsoumian 198).

Thirdly, Armenian peasants constituted the last social group among the Armenian subjects in the Ottoman Empire. They made seventy percent of the Armenian population. Unlike their more prosperous and more educated Western relatives, they were heavily suffering from the feudal system of Eastern Anatolia. According to Hagop Barsoumian, the agonies among the peasants and the *maraba*<sup>21</sup> stemmed from economic exploitation, discrimination and social conflicts. As for economic obstacles, the misuse of lands, illegal appropriation of their properties, cheap labor and heavy taxes were the most important reasons for their poverty. Apart from the burden of *emlak*<sup>22</sup>, *aghnam*<sup>23</sup> and other taxes, tithe<sup>24</sup> demanded the tenth percentage of their annual income. However, the *multezims*<sup>25</sup> demanded more taxes from the Christian subjects (twelve to fifty percent). This inequality in taxing created a deep frustration among the Christian communities. What is more, Armenian peasants had to pay several taxes to the feudal lords, the *aghas* (who were mostly Kurdish), who owned the villages and provided the so-called protection and security. These peasants working for *aghas* received no payment for their labor (Barsoumian 192-194).

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<sup>19</sup> Armenian National Assembly.

<sup>20</sup> Ararat Association.

<sup>21</sup> Landless Armenian peasants.

<sup>22</sup> Property taxes.

<sup>23</sup> Taxes on animals and trees.

<sup>24</sup> Also known as *Ashar* tax in Turkish.

<sup>25</sup> Tax collectors.

Life for Armenian peasants settled in the Eastern *Vilayets* were even more difficult; Kurdish nomads, as Barsoumian states, would migrate to the North from Mosul every season to “appropriate, covertly or overtly, the products of the Armenian villagers” (193). As a result of these exploitative economic policies, many Armenian villagers lost or sharecropped their land, thereby becoming *marabas*. Those suffering from financial crisis would sell their lands to or take loans from the Kurdish *aghas* only to be forced later to toil for him to pay his debts. Such banker and debtee relationship between the Kurdish *aghas* and the sharecropper *marabas*, and the abusing tax collection of the *multezims* were only the economic aspect of the problems facing the peasants though (Barsoumian 192-194).

Armenians’ socio-cultural differences also made them a visible target for religious and social discrimination. As Masters states, Young Armenians and *Amiras* highly valued their cultural legacy. Their children spoke the native tongue in contrast to their Arabic and Turkish speaking parents. These children attended schools where they were instructed in their native language (52). At a time when illiteracy considerably prevailed among the Muslim population, the rise of a distinguished, educated Armenian population in the urban centers further widened the gap between the Armenians and the Muslims.

Religious stereotyping was another issue because religious identity was paramount in determining social and cultural subjects in the Empire. *Gavour*<sup>26</sup> was a commonly used stereotype to refer to the religious “Otherness” of the Armenian subjects, whose testimony was invalid in court cases against Muslim citizens. Therefore, involuntary conversion to Islam was one of the ways for the Armenians to be able to survive in the Empire (Barsoumian 194-195).

Lastly, social conflicts were another cause for the problems faced by the Armenians living in the East. The kidnapping of young girls by the *aghast*, who forced them to marry them along with their forced conversion into Islam were quite prevalent in the 1800s. The social conflicts accompanied by religious stereotyping and economic exploitation can not suffice to understand the Armenian Question to be studied in the following chapter. As Barsoumian states, the causes underlying the tensions between

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<sup>26</sup> Turkish word for infidel.

the Armenians and the Muslim subjects in the Eastern provinces need further analysis (Barsoumian 194-195).

### **C. Armenian Question: Conflicts of the Nineteenth Century and Deportations**

The relations between the Armenian community and the Ottomans lasted relatively peaceful until the second half of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the social and political upheavals of this century brought about conflicts, struggles for reformation, immigration, uprisings and even wars. It is important to understand the many aspects of the Armenian Question (a subtopic under the Eastern Question): the decline in the *millet* system, the rise of Armenian nationalism, the uprisings in the late nineteenth century, Sultan Abdulhamid's policies and the Deportations, contributed differently to the Armenian question.

The Armenian Question was about the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, who demanded political rights and were backed by the major European countries like Russia, England and France during the last decades of the nineteenth century. The European interference into the domestic policies of the Ottoman state started with the decline of the Empire (called as the “sick man” of Europe by then). The weakened state of the Empire encouraged the Western powers to partite and invade the strategically important lands. In short, the Armenian Question was concerned, when viewed from this perspective, with the rights of Armenians in the Empire. From another perspective, however, it was strategically developed by the European powers to exploit the Ottoman lands. Barsoumian's elaboration upon the Armenian question supports the first perspective:

Popular discontent and eventually rebellion would gradually spread among the Armenians, whose demands for better treatment, politically and economically, would give rise to the international issue known as ‘the Armenian Question,’ which became an important part of the Eastern question. (201)

Emre Kongar's approach to the Armenian question takes another route. He relates its roots to the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca, which was signed in 1774 between Russia and the Ottoman Empire as a consequence of the Russo-Turkish war (qtd. in



Şimşir 9). According to this treaty, the Ottoman Empire guaranteed that the Christians in the Empire would be protected, which gave Russia the title of protector for the Christian subjects in the Ottoman Empire and allowed her to proceed with the policy of moving and occupying the Southern frontier through a manipulation of ideas based on ethnic nationalism. This was also another factor for the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, which was shaken the uprisings in the Balkan states triggered by the Russian policy of Pan Slavism. Fearing that Russia would extend its borders by using a Christian policy, the Protestant British Empire, Catholic France and several other European states began to assist the Ottoman Empire against Russia in the wars to come. The Crimean war, for example, resulted with the Treaty of Paris in 1856, which granted these European states the title of “Collective Protectorate” for the protection of Christians in the Empire instead of the single protectorate of Russia (Şimşir 45-55). Bruce Masters points out that the Treaty of Berlin (1878):

. . . further delineated the conditions set by the Treaty of San Stefano, put the Ottoman Empire on notice that the Western powers were particularly concerned about the political and economic conditions of Armenians living in the Six Provinces. The ‘Armenian Question,’ whether the Armenians should be granted an independent state or remain within the Ottoman Empire, was becoming highly politicized and very volatile. The situation was further complicated by a new militancy on the part of the Kurdish tribes to assert their control over lands that Armenian peasants were farming. (52)

As a result, the European powers began to interfere with the domestic affairs of the Empire, emphasizing the necessity of making reforms for the Christians, especially for the Armenians living in the Six Provinces<sup>27</sup>. According to the numbers given by Bilal Şimşir, approximately 600.000 people out of 1.200.000 Armenians were living in these provinces. Şimşir states that the conversion of this population from Apostolic Church

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<sup>27</sup> Also called *Ottoman Armenia* by those European powers or *Vilayat-i Sitte* by Ottomans. This area encompasses Erzurum, Van, Bitlis, Diyarbakır, Memurtülaziz (Elazığ), and Sivas *vilayets*, approximately corresponding to 252 thousand km<sup>2</sup>.

into the other sects of Christianity by the European missionaries can be considered as a cause underlying the rebellions, which occurred in the Empire during the nineteenth century. The European interference consequently resulted in terror activities, marking the beginning of long term conflicts between the Armenians and the Turkish/Kurdish peoples (Şimşir 9-75). Çağrı Erhan explains that missionary activities conducted by the European powers further collapsed the bridges between the Armenians and the Muslim subjects:

The Americans had undertaken an effective role in announcing the national uprisings within the Ottoman Empire to the international sphere, and in providing support to the rebels from abroad . . . It is revealed that the American missionaries and Schuyler -the head clerk of US Istanbul Embassy- had been very effective in announcing the Bulgarian revolts to the world. In the same way, part of the American missionaries worked as if they had been journalists that provide news on the spot for the American and British newspapers during the Armenian incidents. It could be told that the American missionaries provided contribution in the national awakening on these two nations, either due to the education they provided in their schools, or because of their contributions in the usage of Bulgarian and Armenian languages in the field of publications. (394 – translation mine)

The decline of the *millet* system was another factor contributing to the Armenian national awakening. The waves of French Nationalism were sweeping across the world, threatening the unity of bigger Empires. For the long established Empires, making reforms was one way out of the devastating effects of rising nationalisms. Accordingly, the Ottoman state made successive reforms, which granted new rights to her non-Muslim subjects: *Tanzimat* (1839), *Islahat* (1856) and *Kanun-i Esasi*<sup>28</sup> (1876). *Tanzimat Fermani*, which was initiated by Mahmud II, admitted Muslim and non-Muslim subjects as equals in military services, taxation and before the law, *Islahat Fermani*

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<sup>28</sup> Constitution, Code of Regulations.

sought to have secularity in public regulations and laws. Despite these attempts for overcoming the effects of rising nationalisms, they failed to provide equality and solutions for the Circassian and Kurdish based problems for the Armenians in the Eastern provinces, thereby causing Armenian revolts in the region. The Ottoman government felt obliged to quash these revolts either by military force or deportations in the early twentieth century. At a time when the Collective Protectorate announced the Ottoman Empire to be the sick man of the Europe, suppressing the revolts by military force or deporting the Armenians seemed to be the only way for the Ottomans out of its political chaos, which was gradually worsening due to the upheavals in the Balkans and the Caucasus region (Kentel 115-118).

Thirdly, the rise of the Armenian nationalism highly contributed to the dissolutions within the Empire. The rising tensions between the Armenian and Muslim subjects gained momentum due to the winds of nationalism sweeping across the country. The Armenian bourgeois in Istanbul refrained from starting rebellions against the Sublime Porte since they were more interested in monetary affairs, whereas the Armenian intelligentsia, craftsmen and the peasants, who were for a revolution, contributed to the Armenian nationalist movement. This difference in attitudes owed to the Armenian cultural renaissance and enlightenment in the nineteenth century, when the Armenian national identity and ethnic consciousness were praised in the works of many artists: Migirdich Portukalian, Mardiros Sereian, and Melikh- Hagopian (Raffi) wrote about the holiness of revolutions in the Eastern *vilayets*, which considerably influenced the Armenian people, especially the peasantry in the Eastern provinces of the Empire (Kentel 135).

Accordingly, the Armenian peasants embraced these ideas, declaring themselves to be loyal to the lands of *Hayastan*<sup>29</sup>, their homeland. Emphasizing reforms and education, the Armenian peasants formed a new political group named *fedayee* in 1880s. The *fedayees* were armed revolutionist peasants, who tried to defend their folk against the Kurdish *chetes*' their loots and appropriation. According to Ter Minassan, the *fedayees* sought to help the peasants in need, educate the Christian *millet* and start a rebellion against any oppression by ways of "self defense" (qtd. in Kentel 135).

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<sup>29</sup> Meaning Armenia in Armenian.

Regarding themselves as guerilla fighters, these peasants acted with the Armenian political parties. They symbolized a new political entity based upon the principle of thwarting conflicts and the injustices inflicted upon their people.

Another factor underlying the rise of Armenian nationalist consciousness was the Empire's failure to carry out the reforms promised in the Congress of Berlin (1878). The disappointment among the Armenian subjects gave way to patriotic and populist inclinations, which reached full momentum with the Armenian nationalist movement. To make things worse, the Russian occupation of the Six Provinces had also created a grounded mistrust between the Ottomans and the Armenians. Not surprisingly, such frustrations led the Armenians to search for political alternatives. Armenakan, the first radical Armenian political party, was founded in Van in 1885. Ideologically socialist, the Armenakan party undertook to organize events against the oppressive forces within *Yergir*<sup>30</sup> through revolution. Furthermore, the party supported the armament of the Armenian citizens to achieve self-determination and to defend themselves against the Kurdish tribes. To materialize its political agenda, the Armenakan party made political propagandas via education and publishing. These initial attempts to make propaganda through social and cultural medium were soon replaced by violent acts: The Armenakan party, cooperating with the Hunchakian<sup>31</sup> and Dashnaksutyun<sup>32</sup> parties, organized uprisings in Van (1896) These parties were similar to Armenakan party in that they too aimed the "holy duty" of liberating the Ottoman-Armenians through armed force. The Hunchakian party sought independence through a union of the Ottoman, Russian and Iranian Armenians to be materialized by the liberation of the proletariat. Unlike the Hunchakian party, the Dashnaks put more emphasis on developing the condition of the Ottoman-Armenians in the political and economic spheres by granting them democratic rights. Even though the two parties had different ideologies initially, their long term goal was to achieve independence through rebellions, and thereby establishing a socialist state. For them, Socialism was a gateway to the achievement of this target. Whether they be socialist or democratic, the political activities of these Armenian parties left unerasable mark on the collective psyche of the Ottomans (Kentel 136-137).

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<sup>30</sup> Name of former the Armenian motherland, meaning motherland in Armenian.

<sup>31</sup> It means bell, the name was adopted due to the Russian revolutionary influence.

<sup>32</sup> It means federation.

Armenian uprisings had accelerated by the early twentieth century. The uprisings in Zeitun (1862), Erzurum (1863) and Van (1863) marked the beginning of many other rebellions against the Ottoman authority, all of which were quashed by the Ottoman military forces. The Zeitun rebellion has special importance in that it was one of the first collective attempts of protesting, which caused serious mobs between the Armenians and the Muslims. The Zeitunists<sup>33</sup> considered themselves to be the pure bearers of the Armenian identity inherited from the Cilician Armenians. This was in fact a big factor in this rebellion when they are compared with the Armenians working for the Ottoman government and called as *Millet-i Sadika*<sup>34</sup> (Hovanissian 206; Kentel 130-145).

Another event took place with the Hunchakian protest against Sultan Abdulhamid in the presence of Constantinople Patriarchy in 1890, which was followed by a more active protest against the Sublime Porte in 1895. Both protests aimed to convey Armenians' reform demands to the Sultan but many Hunchakians were killed because of their involvement in the protests. The protests also condemned the 1894 Sasoun conflict between the Kurds and the Armenians, which turned out to be a serious rebellion. It was harshly quashed by the Ottoman and the *Hamidiye* (Kurdish) forces. These uprisings represented a symbolic victory of the Armenians because the Hunchakians regarded themselves as the first Christian group daring to rise up against the authority (Kentel 130-145).

The bombing of the Ottoman Bank in 1896 was another Armenian counter attack against the establishment. Some historians refer to this event as the Armenian demand for democratic rights, while some others regard it as a terrorist attack. The intermediacy of the Russian embassy helped the Armenian protestants/terrorists be rescued from the state authority's punishment. Nonetheless, this attack caused a pogrom attempting to lynch the local Armenians living in the Constantinople. The European powers blamed the Sublime Porte for this massacre. All in all, Hunchakians or Dashnaks aimed to draw the attention of the European powers. What they wanted was European interference into the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire, an intrusion,

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<sup>33</sup> It means people from Zeitun.

<sup>34</sup> It means the loyal *millet*.

which they thought would help them achieve their ends. In addition, the Hunckaians and the Dashnaks delivered copies of their demands as notifications to different European embassies. European states condemned the Ottoman state through their coverage of the news as “massacres” in their press as well as their harsh notes to the Ottoman state. (Kentel 130-145). Richard G. Hovanissian explains the causes of upheavals as follows:

. . . Thus, at the time that Greeks, Serbians, Romanians, Bulgarians, and others were gaining autonomy and even independence, Armenian supplications modestly asked for security and good government. Except for the mountaineers of Zeitun and a few other isolated exclaves, the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire were not willing or able to take up arms to defend themselves. Consequently they received little attention from the European states when those powers pressured the Ottoman government to make major concessions to rebellious Balkan peoples. (206)

The policies of Sultan Abdulhamid also climbed up the antagonisms between the Armenians and the Ottoman state. Driven by a sense of paranoia, Sultan Abdulhamid perceived these conflicts as leading up to a final partition. Right or wrong, Sultan’s immense suspicion resulted in the application of strict policies against the Armenians, especially after the European interferences, and the deep mistrust caused by the former Russian occupation of the Six Provinces. Therefore, Abdulhamid quashed and suppressed the Armenian revolts in various ways. He maintained that an independent Armenia would not only be a suicide for his Empire, but also an unforgivable injustice to the Muslims of the Eastern Anatolia. Sultan Abdulhamid’s ultimate rejection to an independent Armenia also had its roots in his Pan Islamic views, which favored the interests of the Muslim subjects. To prevent attacks against his authority, Sultan Abdulhamid mobilized military force, and banned the teaching of anything Armenian at schools (Kentel 141).

Besides, the potential threats foreseen by the Sultan ended up in the creation of a cavalry militia, called *Hamidiye* by the recruitment of Kurdish tribesman in 1890s. This

exacerbated the conflicts because there had already been tensions between the Armenians and the Kurds. The Sultan's policies went even further by rocking the boat. The Muslim refugees, who survived the Balkan and the Caucasus wars, were settled in these provinces. Exiled by the Christians, these refugees were distressed with their Armenian neighbors. Obviously, Eastern Turkey was ridden with social conflicts and ethnic antagonisms. The conflict of Sasun is a good example in this case. The Armenian villagers declared that they would not pay the taxes until they were protected. The Muslims feared from a possible Armenian rebellion as was the case with the Greeks before. Soon after the violence broke out between the Kurds and the Armenians, did the government send *Hamidiye* militia to suppress the Armenian upheavals between 1894 and 1896. However, the Ottoman government could not stop the plundering and the killing on both sides. Sultan Abdulhamid was anxious about a potential Armenian threat by the Armenian nationalists. Therefore, *Hamidiye* was intervened by the Ottoman Army and the conflict was suppressed (Masters 52-53).

As the reign of Abdulhamid ended in 1908, the new progressives, called Young Turks, made a revolution and aimed to restore the constitution. This was welcomed by many Armenians because it meant the end of the oppressive regime of the former Sultan. Some Armenian political parties even shared common causes with the party of Young Turks, as well as the Committee of Union of Progress (CUP), because both sides aimed to achieve progress for the citizens subject to pressure. Nevertheless, the previous Pan Islamist ideology increasingly switched to nationalism, which the Young Turk regime supported after the wars in the Balkans. This was mainly because of the Ottoman Empire's losses in the last century, which had been agitating in the lands settled mainly by the Christians subjects. In other words, the Greek, the Serbian, the Bulgarian and other independences in the Balkans triggered the rise of nationalism in the Ottoman Empire. Waves of nationalism, which had swept across Rumelia, were now threatening the Ottoman Empire (Ágoston 53).

Finally, the deep mistrust between the Armenian subjects and the Muslims paved the way for the 1915 deportations, which have ever since then constituted the hallmark of the Armenian Question. The riots of Adana in the early 1900s had already worsened the Armenian image in the eyes of the establishment. The Empire's mistrust

of the Armenians reached unprecedented proportions when the Russians advanced and occupied some parts of the Eastern Anatolia in 1915. The Ottoman Empire suspected that the Western Armenians in the region had collaborated with the Russian forces in the invasion. Given the circumstances, it was now considered compulsory for coup to deport the Armenians to maintain security in the Eastern frontier of World War I. However, historians have held different views about the Armenian aid to the Russian forces: some argue that it was the Russian Armenians, who collaborated with the Russian army, while some others hold out that the Ottoman-Armenians were the collaborators. Whether it be the Ottoman or the Russian Armenians, what followed later initiated the centuries-long adversity between the Armenians and the Turks: Some Armenians took up armed resistance against the Turkish forces for fear that the previous *Hamidiye* raids would occur again. Consequently, the government ordered the deportation of thousands of Armenians to the Syrian Desert<sup>35</sup> between April and August, 1915 (Ágoston 53; Balakian (2003) 175; Van Gorder 1; Kentel 151; Walker 247-248). Whether the Ottomans acted out of purposes of ethnic-cleansing or not is still a controversial issue today. However, the results of the 1915 deportations were devastating for the Armenians: almost a million or so died on the way due to famine, hunger and killings. Roger R. Trask's approach to the 1915 deportations provides us with a non-partial viewpoint:

A new Ottoman effort to suppress the Armenians beginning in 1915 exacerbated anti-Turkish feeling in the United States. The Turks justified the massacre and forced migration of these people by claiming that their residence in strategic areas could cause serious harm to the Turkish war effort . . . As Professor Lewis V Thomas pointed out, 'In the long run the Turks have had no true alternatives except either to excise the non-Turks from Anatolia or themselves be excised there from. The Turks had understandable reasons for ending Armenian resistance activities, but the methods they employed were inhumane.' (20)

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<sup>35</sup> The number of deported Armenians ranges between 300.000 and 1.500.000 varying on the source.



Today, pro-Armenian historians and countries, who politically accept the term “Genocide” to define the 1915 events, hold out that the Turks’ desire for an ethnically homogenous state underlies the Armenian deportation. Counter arguments by other historians as well as by the Republic of Turkey refuse the word “Genocide,” arguing that the deportations were not meant for ethnic cleansing. Rather, they argue, the deportations had justifiable reasons due to the war time conditions from which the Muslim subjects suffered as well (Totten 53; Türkoğlu).

The United States’ response to these events carries importance because the United States embassy was still active in the region until the country entered the First World War in 1917. Henry Morgenthau, who was the United States ambassador of Turkey then, sent reports about the Armenian deportations to Washington (Payaslian 55). In the reports, Morgenthau stated that the Armenian subjects were being brutally massacred by the Turks and the Kurds, which deeply moved the American public. He described the deportation events as *Murder of a Nation*<sup>36</sup>. Jay Winter writes that the U.S. press then widely covered the deportation news. One of the 1915 issues of *The National Geographic* magazine defined the deportations as follows: “The world has never seen a more furious effort to drive out a people, or more cruel methods in their execution” (295). *The New York Times* alone made one hundred forty six different news about the Armenian deportation: “Talaat Bey Declares That There is Room Only for Turks in Turkey”, “Armenian Women Put Up at Auction”, “Armenians Thank Wilson”, “Aid for Armenians Blocked by Turkey”, “Millions of Armenians Killed Or Are In Exile: Policy of Extermination”, “Tens and probably hundreds of thousands have been butchered”, “500,000 ARMENIANS SAID TO HAVE PERISHED”, “Vultures were the only coroners” (qtd. in Winter 210 – 295).

Upon Morgenthau’s notices and the deportation news by the American press, Near East Relief foundation was established to help the Armenians in need, provided an aid more than 11,000,000 US\$ (Şimşir 300; Trask 21). Additionally, other American foundations such as Red Cross and Rockefeller assisted the impoverished Armenians by providing them with money, food, and clothing (Winter 194-195).

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<sup>36</sup> Also the name of Morgenthau’s report about the deportations.

The 1915 events were and are still catastrophic for most Armenians. Those who survived the deportations had to migrate to different countries, to which United States was no exception. Before moving on to the next chapter about the Armenian migrations to the United States, it is important to state that the depiction and/or definition of “deportations” or “genocide” vary from one historian to another. “Deportation” or “Genocide”? The controversy of these terms is still a highly political issue today. As the scope of this study focuses more on the reflections of past conflicts in the Armenian-American literary thought, the historical background has been attempted to be summarized apolitically, or in other words, non-partially.

### III. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ASPECTS OF THE ARMENIAN-AMERICANS

#### A. Immigrations to the United States and the Armenian Experience

According to Robert Mirak, the earliest recorded Armenian immigrant in the United States was Martin the Armenian, who arrived Jamestown in 1618 (qtd. in Jendian 45). However, the actual Armenian immigration to America in masses began in early nineteenth century due to different reasons. The reason behind the early Armenian immigrations was the 1830 Trade Agreement between the United States and the Ottoman Empire. According to this agreement, the American products would be distributed by the Ottoman-Armenians since the Greek independence from the Ottoman Empire at the time had created mistrust for the Greek merchants. Therefore, the Armenian merchants (Yankees of the Middle East<sup>37</sup>), due to their networks in the Eastern part of the Empire, were thought to replace the Greek tradesmen. These Armenian merchants were the first to establish trade between the United States and the Ottoman Empire (Çakıllıkoyak 116).

American missionary work was another factor underlying the early migrations to the United States. As the American missionaries aroused curiosity for the new continent, many Armenians were interested in migrating for educational purposes. Khachik Oskanian was one such Armenian, who upon graduating from a missionary school, attended the College of New York and graduated in the late 1830s. Oskanian became a feature writer of *New York Herald*, and popularized the Middle-Eastern life in his articles. He also promoted the American life in his paradise-like portrayals, which attracted large numbers of Armenians from the Empire to the New World. What is more, Oskanian offered and opened up his home, which soon became a transition point for the Armenian immigrants. The exact numbers of the early Armenian immigrants to the United States can not be concretely given due to the fact that the immigrants were, before 1899, classified not according to their ethnic roots but to their geographical origins (Jendian 45; M. Bedrosian 35).

Yet, the Armenian immigration to the United States can be compartmentalized into certain phases. The first phase of the Armenian immigration to the United States

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<sup>37</sup> The Armenians were named in this way by the Americans.

took place between 1834 and 1890. An estimated number of 1500 Armenians immigrated to the New World out of educational or business purposes promoted by the missionary activities. As Margaret Bedrosian asserts, the Armenians, who left for the United States between 1870 and 1890, were generally craftsmen, artisans or skilled workers, some of whom had their own businesses back home (37). The Armenian students, who immigrated to the United States during this period, consisted of nearly seventy people, who later returned to join the missionary activities conducted by the Protestant community in Anatolia. Some of them even participated in actions against the Ottoman state, which was not authorized to punish them because of their *protégé* status obtained through American citizenship. The first phase of the Armenian immigration was also triggered by ethnic conflicts in the Old Country, where the radical Armenian nationalist parties carried out their political agenda. The failure of the Ottoman reforms, which had diminished the Armenian hope for better lives, was also another factor in the Armenian immigration from the Old Country. Consequently, during this phase some Armenians immigrated to the United States out of political and religious reasons, whereas some others considered the New World as a shelter, hoping that it would protect them from the conflicts of the world they left behind (Çakıllıkoyak 116; Jendian 46).

The second phase took place between 1891 and 1898. An estimated number of 12.500 Armenians immigrated to the United States. As a consequence of the missionary activities and the domestic conflicts, the Ottoman government had brought restrictions to the Armenian immigration in 1892, which was, however, removed afterwards. Despite this quota, minor immigrations were common during the first half of this period. The second half of this period saw Armenians escaping from Abdulhamid's policies and the *Hamidiye* events. According to Hüseyin Çakıllıkoyak, most of the Armenian émigrés of this phase consisted of workers, peasants and craftsmen. The decrease of population in Anatolia, which was caused by starvation, hunger and wars, led the Ottoman government to bring a sizeable Muslim population from the Balkans, Crimea and Caucasians. These new Muslim émigrés entering the Ottoman Empire were

given demesne<sup>38</sup>, which left the local Armenian population in the position of tenants. Another reason for the Armenian immigration during this period was the economically impoverished situation of the Eastern Anatolia. Contrary to the coastal regions of the West, which were planted with valuable agricultural products, Eastern Anatolia suffered from a lack of agricultural opportunities. Consequently, the Armenians sought better opportunities for better lives in the New World (Çakıllıkoyak 117; Jendian 47-48).

In the third phase between 1899 and 1914, about 52.000 Armenians immigrated to the United States. The first half of this number immigrated before 1914 because of the conflicts experienced with the Community of Union and Progress, which had foreseen the former events of Adana as a threat that caused the death of 30.000 Armenians. Most of the second half immigrated between 1914 and 1915 to the United States. Other figures show that in 1914, 7785 other Armenian immigrations to the United States were reported and only 932 of them were told to have arrived in 1915 (Jendian 48-51).

The next phase lasted until the 1930s. An entry of 6382 Armenians to America was recorded between 1915 and 1920. The largest number of Armenian immigrations was in 1921, totaling 10,212 in a single year. As the Immigration Act of 1924 placed quotas for each country, a decrease in this frequency took place, reaching 10,923 between 1923 and 1931. According to Çakıllıkoyak, the total number of Armenians was approximately 100,000 in the United States after 1924, and most of them came from Turkey and the Soviet Union. Another figure shows that the population of the Armenians in the United States was approximately 190,000 in 1931. To sum up, the reasons underlying the immigrations up to this phase are to be seen in the effects of the First World War and the deportations, which increased the number of Armenian immigrants until the 1930s. (Çakıllıkoyak 118; Jendian 48-51).

The following phases show differences in the immigration rates of the Armenians. From 1932 to 1949, fewer than 3500 Armenians from different countries entered the United States according to the registration records. This low rate continued until the immigration from the Middle East in the 1970s. By the 1970s, around 80,000 Armenians from the Middle East and the Armenian Soviet Republic immigrated to the

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<sup>38</sup> Governmental lands.

United States. The 1988 earthquake in Soviet Armenia caused economic crisis, which brought about a further immigration to the United States. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990 started another immigration wave. The shift from a communist to a capitalist economy forced Soviet Armenians to seek new opportunities in the New World. The unprecedented rise of the Armenian population in Los Angeles between the 1970 and 1990 is an apt example for this late phase. The Armenian population was 18,000 in 1970; in 1990, it reached 115,000 (Jendian 52-55).

The new continent offered many obstacles and challenges rather than opportunities to early Armenian immigrants. Immigration quotas, quarantine and inspections on Ellis Island were fearsome for the new comers. External signs of any disease rendered the candidate's ineligible for entry, diminishing their hopes for a new start. A personal account from an early immigrant, Avedis Bedrosian, describes the difficulties at the first procedural stage of entering:

I stayed on Ellis Island for two weeks. I was healthy, so I wasn't worried about quarantine, but I had to be careful with questions about my birthplace and birthday. I had no papers, all I knew was what my mother used to say: 'You were born when the apricots came to blossom.' It was only after my cousin in Racine telegraphed his Congressman that I was allowed to enter. (qtd. in M. Bedrosian 37)

As the Armenians began to settle in the United States, most of them were eager to be regarded as American citizens. They regarded their immigration as their destiny to continue their culture and existence. In fact, Margaret Bedrosian relates this struggle of survival to Armenians' preexisting skills, literacy, willingness to risk, and to their realization that after 1915 it was the impossible to going back home, the Old Country. This realization pushed them to take up any chances in their new "home" (39).

The earliest Armenian settlements were mainly around New England. However, Central California later became a more popular location for the Armenian settlement. Most of the early migrants formed communal ghettos, and built their own communal institutions. The major centers, where Armenians mainly settled, were Boston, New

York, Philadelphia, Detroit, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Armenian settlement areas also included smaller cities such as Worcester, Providence, Hartford, Troy, Binghamton, Syracuse, Niagara Falls, Cleveland, Racine, Granite Cit and Fresno. (Çakıllıkoyak 119; Jendian, 52-59). Particularly, Fresno had special importance for the early Armenian migrants because it was the hallmark of the Armenian culture in the New World. The Armenian culture thrived in Fresno. Matthew Jendian explains what Fresno meant to the Armenians as follows:

Still, Fresno, as one of the oldest Armenian communities in the United States, holds a special place in the Armenian diaspora, has been referred to as ‘the capital of the Armenia outside Armenia,’ and is considered by many Armenians the cradle of Armenian culture in the Western United States. (59)

In fact, the affinities between the two geographies, Fresno and the Old World, appealed to the Armenians. The fertile lands and climate of Fresno, and the San Joaquin Valley made agriculture possible for the Armenian migrants, who had embraced the Old Country philosophy that “no house can produce a farm, but a good farm can produce a house” (Bedrosian 41-42). Melon seeds from Dickranakert<sup>39</sup> and Kharpert<sup>40</sup>, cuttings from the vineyards under Ararat valley, fig trees from Izmir, peaches, plums, nectarines, cherries, pears, apricots and walnuts from other parts of the Old World were brought to the Fresno, which transformed the fields into the garden of Eden. Until the Great Depression of 1930s, these new comers were able to achieve significant success in farming and agriculture, which contributed a lot to the continuation of the Armenian culture in California. However, the Market Crash and the Dust Bowl forced the Armenians to move into the city centers to seek new means of production other than agriculture.

The new destination, which offered new chances for the Armenians, also posed new challenges. Assimilation was but one of those challenges facing the new Armenian

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<sup>39</sup> Diyarbakır in Turkey today

<sup>40</sup> Harput in Turkey today

city dwellers, who highly valued the survival of the Armenian culture in this new, unknown land. The first wave Armenian immigrations coincided with the rise of the American melting pot ideology. According to the melting pot ideology, every immigrant was expected to comply with the conventions and values of the new continent. In other words, the new comers had to submit to an environment, which encouraged Americanism for a homogenous society. Arpena Mesrobian comments upon how assimilation constituted a serious threat for Armenian-ness:

America was their destiny and that of their children. Here is where they would build their homes, churches, schools, and community centers. The prime concern now because the perpetuation of the Armenian nation through their youth. They spoke of the new generation as though it were in physical danger and needed rescue. Indeed, assimilation was referred to as the 'white massacre.' Efforts had to be made to teach their children Armenian language and history. Trained teachers were a few and the community drew on volunteers to conduct Saturday schools for the reluctant children. (84)

The negative aspects of the New Continent were not limited to the threat of assimilation only. As in the Old World, Armenian immigrants also had to cope with the discrimination in the United States. The Armenian presence was generally dispersed among different towns, and hence they were able to remain anonymous in general. However, there were still spared stereotypes such as the archetypical Armenian rug merchant, who is portrayed as a cunning trader, a wheeler-dealer, or a person with haggling in his blood. The Armenian ghettoization in Fresno, which continued until the Second World War, caused the Armenian settlers to be perceived indifferently by the locals. The explicit discrimination they faced had labeled them as "aliens". For example, Armenians were prohibited to purchase land. The law suit of *re-Halladjian* was one such case to limit Armenian presence in the mainstream American life (Bakalian 19-20). Thanks to the expert testimony of the then well-acclaimed anthropologist Franz Boas, the court finally ruled that the Armenians were "Caucasian",



and hence liable to buy property: “It would utterly be impossible to classify them as not belonging to white race . . . Armenians are white persons within the common usage of the term, and amalgamate readily with other white people.” (qtd. in Jacobson 240). Anny Bakalian relates this ruling of the court to to guaranteeing the protection of whiteness and/or whiteness as a property, which, according to her, was more important for the mainstream American whites. Although the Armenians were regarded as “free white persons” after the case, discriminatory acts against them continued until the 1970s (Bakalian 19-20). Armenians in Fresno were still prevented from owning properties in better neighborhoods, or they were frequently denied access to white associations, clubs, and churches. Moreover, they were discouraged from finding jobs in the public sector. No Armenian teacher taught at public schools of Fresno until 1967, when the first Armenian principal named Seth Atamian was assigned to teach. Most Fresno Armenians were stereotyped as dishonest, liar, deceitful, parasitic, immoral, relying heavily on community welfare, and held responsible for most crimes in the country,. They were even called “Turks” or “Orientals”, which were the most resentful labels for the Armenians (Jendian 67).

A local Armenian paper, *Asbarez*, along with some other East Coast Armenian papers, even urged the Armenian immigrants to rid themselves of their Old World habits so that they could convince the Americans of their ability to be assimilated and become good Americans. Although this approach was helpful for the Armenian adaptation to the American mainstream life, many Armenians assimilated into the mainstream culture day by day. Contrary to what the white community of Fresno expected from the migrants, Armenians were stubborn, proud and independent. Yet they were were darker and talked in a different language like the other immigrants (Bakalian 19-20; Jendian 68). Although they avoided conflicts with the locals in Fresno, Armenian children were abused at schools either by their teachers or their classmates. Degrading labels such as “Starving Armenians”, “Dirty Armenians” or “Fresno Indians” were commonly used at schools to make the Armenian students constantly feel their “Otherness”. William Saroyan, one of the most important literary figures in the Armenian-American community, was born in Fresno in 1906 and attended Emerson

School in 1914. His experiences in this local school expose the bigotry and prejudice against the Armenian immigrants:

The kids of immigrants . . . are quickly made aware of a number of attitudes held by others about them, mainly that they are not the equal of Americans . . . First there was a nickname for each group that amount to an insult, not so much because of the nickname itself, but for the contempt with which it was frequently flung at a member of the group not only by angered members of other groups, but also by adults and teachers themselves. It was so bad that simply to refer to a boy by his nationality, as an Armenian, for instance, became the equivalent of an expression of contempt and, of course an insult . . . It was so undesirable to be what you were that many boys and girls wished to God they were something else, and even tried to pretend that they were actually not Armenian, for instance, but Persian. Or they couldn't wait to get out of the school, and out of town, so they could forget what an unfortunate thing it was to be who they were. (qtd. in Jendian 69)

The more educated people of the first generation and the second generation were a lot more aware of such discriminations and prejudices in Fresno. However, rapid Americanization minimized the differences between the Armenian immigrants and the so-called white people of the society. In an atmosphere, which imposed hundred percent Americanism, it was not surprising for the first and second generation Armenians to experience these unfortunate events (Bakalian 20-21).

From 1960s onward, most Armenians had already been assimilated; in other words, they had become American (Bakalian 21). Nevertheless, the new generations became Armenian-Americans, who celebrated a combination of both identities. This was mainly because of the civil rights movement after the 1960s, which opened up a path for most ethnic and other peripheral groups to express their differences by valorizing their cultural and historical heritage. According to Nishan Parlakian, this ethnic awakening brought about an Armenian Renaissance in the United States because

there was a renewed enthusiasm in the Armenian culture (16). At this time, a good number of Armenian-American publications wrote about numerous historical/ethnic issues such as the Genocide, and the importance of putting political pressure on the government to recognize it as a crime, and Armenian-ness in the United States.

Paul Jordan's article "Proud Armenians", which was published in June 1978 issue of *National Geographic* magazine, is another example for this new Armenian-American identity in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movements. In addition to giving spacious weight on the subject of Armenians world-wide, Jordan also writes about the outstanding Armenian-American figures of the time: William Saroyan, George Mardikian, Haig Berberian, Alex Manoogian, Mike Connors became the focus of Jordan's pen. Quoting Armenian-American experiences and stories of success in the United States, Jordan exposes new dimensions of the Armenian-American identity. George Mardikian, the owner of the famous restaurant called *Omar Khayyam*, states: "I was born on November 7 . . . But I celebrate my birthday on July 24. That's the day I began to live, the day I saw the Statue of Liberty" (853). Jordan also celebrates the hardworking Armenian-Americansü quoting from Archie Dickranian, the owner of the Premier Market in Beverly Hills; "I came to this country with nothing but faith and hope. I had been hungry as a child. I went into the food business so I could eat all I wanted. America has been a feast to me" (qtd. in Jordan 858).

Notwithstanding the older generation's fear of losing their cultural heritage, an assimilated Armenian-American generation had already emerged. Dickranian found the Armenian assimilation inevitable. The famous movie actor Mike Connors (Krikor Ohanian), on the other hand, feared that the new generation will forget their Armenian-ness:

I grew up in Fresno as an Armenian. But my children- they're half Armenian – are almost unaware except for what I tell them. I'm afraid it's only a matter of time before Armenians will be just like everybody else. I hope not for one obvious reason: This country needs its creative minorities. And indeed you can find many young people who may well retain their Armenian-ness all their days. (qtd. in Jordan 858)

As opposed to what Connors thinks, the new generation embraced their hybrid identity. Perhaps as a result of the assimilation, most of the Armenian-American diaspora comfortably indicated that they were no longer strangers or guests but that American born Armenians contented with their lives in the United States, which they would never leave for an imaginary “homeland” (Bakalian 160). The link connecting Armenian-ness and American-ness was only emotional, which finds its best expression in the words of a second generation Armenian-American’s speech delivered at the visit of Catholicos Vasken I to New York in 1987:

I am an American . . . I am not a product of separate Armenian community that happened to be located in this land. I am part and parcel of the mainstream of America. I am not a stranger or a guest or here by anyone’s sufferance. If diaspora means a return someday to another land, then I am not of it. This is home. I am American. (qtd. in Bakalian 160)

Obviously, the Armenian-American diaspora easily adapted the American way of life and accepted American-ness following the 1960s. Yet, this only applied to the children of the Armenians, who immigrated to the United States before and during the World Wars.

As for Soviet Armenian migrants, who immigrated there after the 1990s, some patterns of stereotyping were valid as well. Like the first generation Armenian immigrants in the United States, Soviet Armenians experienced prejudice and discrimination. Bakalian mentions a well-circulated rumor in California: “. . . supermarkets in Hollywood post signs saying; ‘No Dogs, No Armenians,’ presumably because Soviet Armenians are skilled shoplifters” (21). Bakalian adds that the new comers’ involvement in gang related crimes, cheating welfare systems and bribery not only blackened their names but also crowded the country jails. In fact, most of the Armenian-American community leaders opposed to the Soviet Armenian immigration to the United States because the Soviet Armenian desire to settle in the New World was interpreted as a betrayal to their nation. Bakalian relates the causes of the Soviet Armenians’ adaptation inability in the capitalist system and to the discrepancies

between their former communist mindset and the idea of private ownership. Bakalian states that this lack of experience could also be observed when Soviet Armenians had to deal with the long paper works, the waiting lists to be endured in order to be eligible for a variety of public services as well as the English language classes, houses to afford and the health care system in the United States (Bakalian 21-22).

Contrary to early Armenian immigrants and Soviet Armenians, the second wave immigrants and the American born Armenians were more educated. Most of them had middle class backgrounds after the 1960s. More proficient in English and skills, they smoothly climbed up the social ladder. Their self-confidence gave rise to the participation of the American politics especially after the 1970s. They initiated lobbying activities in 1972 with the establishment of the Armenian Assembly of America (AAA). Other Armenian political foundations included Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), Armenian-American Action Committee (ARAMAC), Armenian Information Services, Armenian Network of America, Armenian Missionary Association, Armenian Bar Association, and Armenian Relief Society to name a few. All of these foundations were unified in 1994 under Armenian Assembly of America. Today, the Armenian-American lobbying, which defends Armenia's interests, holds a quite significant place in the United States Foreign policy (Ari 273-285).

Today, the Armenian-American community is approximately around one million, and about half of this population resides in California where there exists an Armenian exclave called Little Armenia. In 1982, George Deukmejian even became the governor of the California State. Consequently, the Armenian-American community has shown significant growth and development, which they have achieved through holding onto their cultural values and establishing social institutions in the United States (Çakıllıkoyak 119; Dekmejian 434-435; Jendian, 52-59).

## **B. Aspects of Identity, Ethnicity, and Diaspora**

### **1. Identity**

The concepts of identity and subjectivity are studied together and both of them refer to regimes of truth shaping our personalities. These regimes of “truth” are about gender, race, ethnicity, religion and nationalism, which are effective in determining our different positions within the society. How we conceive of ourselves is self-identity, while how others perceive us is social identity. Therefore, the construction of identity is a reciprocal process, which is defined by both ourselves and others. What we hold and think of ourselves is not totally separate from the social and cultural productions. Therefore, identities can not remain independent from cultural representations and socialization/acculturation. Aspects of socialization/acculturation are defined by a variety of social processes (including language), which are set before our birth by the society’s shared conventions (Barker 165-167). Stuart Hall explains the dynamics within the process of socialization/acculturation as follows: “The inner core of the subject was not autonomous and self-sufficient, but was formed in relation to ‘significant others’, who mediated to the subject the values, meanings and symbols- the culture – of the worlds she/he inhabited” (1992, 275).

The significant others Hall refers to are the family members and/or the cultural milieu surrounding the individual. One acquires his/her cultural identity by learning social codes/norms and values, and behavior patterns. Therefore, identity is not a given but a social construction. However, “the significant others” and the inner dynamics of one’s identity could either be in a harmonious or a conflicting relationship. For example, one can be from a multiple ethnic or a religious background, which can conflict with each other. Thus, it is significant to view and study identity in terms of how we define ourselves and how the society at large shapes it (Barker 169).

Concerning self identity, it is constituted by the ability to sustain a narrative about the self, which builds up a consistent feeling of a biographical unity. In parallel, stories related to identity attempt to respond to those critical questions, which frequently question what we do, how we act, who we are or who we should be. Such individual attempts at self-narration struggle to construct a coherent identity. Anthony Giddens

refers to this process as a trajectory development from past to an anticipated future: “It is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography” (53). According to Giddens, identity is regarded as a project, the form of which changes depending on the circumstances in time and space. We and others create it with no certain beginning or end from past to future. In other words, identity is not a stable, fixed entity; it is always in flux.

According to the essentialist view, identity is assumed as a fixed essence reflecting upon us in all social categories, whereas the anti-essentialist perspective holds out that identities are changeable in and specific to particular moments and places, the phases of which rely on the social and cultural conjunctures. Therefore, as opposed to the essentialist view of identity, the anti-essentialist view defines identity as a discursive construction through time and place (Barker 166-167).

After all, identity is a post-modern subject, which never finishes. According to Hall, it is difficult to achieve coherence as identities are shifting, fragmented and multiple:

The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent ‘self’. Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continually being shifted about. If we feel that we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or ‘narrative of the self’ about ourselves. (1992, 277)

Michel Foucault comes up with the idea of a radically historicized subject, which is a product constructed through discursive production. Whenever subjects refer to or speak about themselves, they take up a pre-existent position subjected to a regulatory power of discourse. These discourses are produced by the mechanisms which enable the production of the subject. Organizations, institutions, schools, churches and others are the mechanisms, which put historical imprints on the core of identity. Such imprints can either be about race, religion, gender, and class. They are produced and reproduced by the dominant discourses of a given time. Therefore, in Foucauldian

terms, subject comes into being as a consequence of the historical processes and their discourses brought upon to now. In other words, it regenerates the subject through social production. Therefore, history of identities could be re-articulated in different ways depending on the power of discourses (Foucault 76-100).

To sum up, identity has a social and a self face, and it continually produces itself opposed to the essentialist view of identity as a fixed entity. According to the post-modern assumption of cultural identity, it is constantly produced by the changing circumstances, and it is only a “collective” self formed out of a common history, ancestry and set of symbolic structures. However, as the meaning of the identity is never finished or completed, it has to be unfolded and articulated continuously in a variety of ways. Rather than being a unified eternal timeless fact, identity, as Hall claims, is constantly articulated, providing a connection of and cohesion for different, fragmented, multiple and distinct elements within the same self (Hall 1994, 392-401; 1996(a), 130-150; 1996(b), 1-17).



## **2. Ethnicity**

Ethnicity, an integrated aspect of identity and culture, is defined by the concept of shared conventions, beliefs, norms and various cultural practices. The foundation of ethnic groups depends heavily on these signifiers. According to Anya Peterson Royce, ethnic identity is, "the sum total of feelings on the part of group members about those values, symbols, and common histories that identify them as a distinct group" (18). These aspects promote a sense of belonging, such as the belief on a mythological common ancestry or signifiers that connote universality, territory, and purity with metaphors of blood, kinship, and homeland (Barker 195). Moreover, ethnicity is produced by how group identities are regarded by the others, and by the degree of identification with the signs and symbols making up the concept of ethnicity. On the other hand, ethnicity is a dynamic and evolving relationship between the group structure and individual identity. Thus, as Werner Sollors states, ethnicity is based on contrast, which means that members of an ethnic group contrast themselves with the mainstream culture (288).

Ethnic groups do not necessarily rely on primitive, universal or cultural ties. Instead, they constitute broad practices, which bring about differences among the individual members of the group. These different members attempt to define the ethnic boundaries, and the problems within. Members of the ethnic groups are continuously in the process of shaping or reshaping their self-definition, which is accompanied by such external forces as the socio-economic or socio-political formations. Consequently, ethnicity and identity are similar in that both are synthesized through a mixture of self-identification and others' definition of ourselves; these internal and external forces designate a combination of how we perceive our ethnicity and how others see it or what we do not think of our ethnicity and what others do not think of our ethnicity (Barker 195; Nagel 152-154). According to Joane Nagel, this relationship between the outsiders and insiders proves to be alternating as the points of address vary depending on the situation:

Since ethnicity changes situationally, the individual carries a portfolio of ethnic identities that are more or less salient in various situations and vis-

à-vis various audiences. As audiences change, the socially-defined array of ethnic choices opens to the individual changes. This produces a 'layering' of ethnic identities which combines with the ascriptive character of ethnicity to reveal the negotiated, problematic nature of ethnic identity. (154)

Susan Keefe and Amado Padilla point out that this altering nature of ethnicity depends on three dimensions (qtd. in Jendian 14-15). As for the first dimension, cultural awareness means sharing the same culture and language with other ethnic members. This is considered to be a way of traditional cultural orientation. The second dimension puts emphasis on ethnic loyalty, which is measured against the attitudes pertaining to the ethnic culture, people of similar ethnic descent and ethnic discrimination. The last dimension is the ethnic social orientation, which reflects ethnic individuals' degree of social networks and food preferences. Of these three dimensions, immigrant generations quickly lose the cultural awareness, whereas ethnic loyalty and social orientation remain stable throughout the fourth generations. The changing circumstances of ethnicities, according to Jendian, can also be maintained by institutional completeness of ethnicities, that is, the establishment of schools, religious buildings, clubs and by the ability of maintaining group boundaries (14). The family's ability to adjust to the conventions of the ethnic group through socializing also takes part in the maintenance of ethnic identity. Thus, ethnic identity can be inherited, achieved or assigned; other social institutions render to the proper signaling of ethnicities, which requires ethnic consciousness and the ability to speak the ethnic group's language.

Another aspect of ethnicities is that they are allied to nationalisms, which envision "nation" as a shared culture. In this respect, it is only whiteness, which is taken for granted. Nonetheless, the groups outside the boundaries of whiteness are generally viewed as ethnic groups. This aspect of the outsider/insider dynamic shows the power relations between the central whites and the peripheral ethnic groups, whereby ethnic members are marginalized from the modern Western societies' perspective. The dynamic relationships between ethnic insiders and mainstream outsiders also vary depending on the point of direction. For instance, marginal groups may claim their

ethnicity as their central value or it may sometimes be of a hybrid nature. Therefore, discourses representing ethnic groups are generally associated either with a single nationality or multiple nationalities, in case of which ethnic boundaries are liable to change. Although it is assumed that ethnic boundaries do not cut across political ones, they really do so metaphorically whereas the national boundaries cause a physical division. Like ethnic identities, nation states, nationalisms and national identities are collective forms of organizations and identifications, which occur as a result of historical and social events. States gaining the right to have sovereignty over a specific location produce and reproduce political and cultural representations discursively in order to sustain the ideas of origins, continuity and tradition among the groups they govern. Like ethnic identities, national identities attempt to unify cultural differences in a constructive manner, utilizing inherently shared meanings, cultural symbols and images (Baker 196-197).

According to Benedict Anderson, language and the mechanization of print publications (newspapers, literary works, etc.) are thought to be the most significant factors for the construction of national consciousness because national languages have encouraged the creation of imaginary national communities throughout history (15-16). Nevertheless, the accelerated globalization seems to have eliminated such concepts of the previous centuries because the perceptions of national identities, which refer to a homogenous artificial national or ethnic unity, have been weakened by the appearance of hybrid cultural identities. The globalization and post-modernity enabled the expression of subjective perceptions, which used to appear stable pertaining to language, culture and identities in the past. However, contemporary perceptions oppose to the existence of strict borders considering them synthetic because of their hybrid nature (Barker 196-200).

Lastly, the hybrid nature of ethnicities is the direct result of assimilation and acculturation. Both aspects here cause the weakening of ethnic identities, which is explained by Jendian:

Acculturation typically precedes assimilation, as the people are slower to change their social structures and relationships than their cultures or

attitudes and because acculturation occurs internally at the individual ethnic person's own pace while assimilation requires external permission to enter 'American' groups or institutions. (3)

The interactive nature of the above social processes result in the formation of a weakened ethnicity, in other words, a hybrid form, which Herbert Gans names as "symbolic ethnicity" (qtd. in Jendian 25). According to Gans, ethnic culture is not practiced except through symbols, and today ethnic identity is not bound to be referring to the ethnic origin because the ethnic person can also lose the ethnic part of his/her identity anytime. Hence, symbolic ethnicity describes the cultural patterns, which are expressed by nostalgic symbols such as ethnic holidays, ethnic cuisine and identification with ethnic issues. In this case, ethnic identity is extra identity for leisure time and nostalgia (Jendian 25-28). Such an understanding of ethnic identity parallels Bakalian's views on the subject: "Rites of passage (such as births, deaths, and marriages), religious or civic holidays (such as Christmas, Saint's days, Independence Day) are occasions for enacting ethnicity with ones family and kin, often in the privacy of one's own home" (45).

Bakalian's conception of ethnic identity explains the symbolic ethnicity of Armenian-Americans best. Today's Armenian-Americans voluntarily, situationally and rationally accept their symbolic ethnicity, whereas the immigrant generation unconsciously and compulsively embraced the traditional Armenian-ness, which was ascribed to them. Proud of their origin, the Armenian-Americans carry out few actions to become Armenian. This situation shows how the meanings attached to Armenian-ness have changed since the times of the immigrant generation, that is, from that of "being" Armenian to "feeling" Armenian (Bakalian 6). Jendian exemplifies the state of feeling Armenian in the United States as follows:

An example of symbolic ethnicity is an individual who identifies as Armenian, for example, on occasions such as Armenian Martyrs' Day (April 24th), Armenian Christmas (January 6th), on family holidays, or for vacations. He or she usually does not speak Armenian, belong to

Armenian-American organizations, attend an Armenian church, live in an Armenian neighborhood, or marry a person of Armenian descent. In this case, ethnic identity is reduced to a single component of one's self concept which, in an appropriate time and place, can be brought to the fore, expressed, and experienced as a source of pride. (38)

Such acts of expressing ethnic pride by the Armenian-Americans can be considered as a way of adapting to a new culture, in which assimilation is a novel solution for adaptation. Thus, although the distinction between insiders (*hay*<sup>41</sup>) and outsiders (*odar*)<sup>42</sup> can be commonly observed among the Armenian-American community, they are free to choose between being American and Armenian, or both. Such freedom of choice inevitably connotes ethnicity's voluntary characteristic. Nevertheless, this freedom of choice was not possible for the immigrant generation because they had to come to the New World with the only treasure, their Armenian-ness, which was their single point of reference to make sense out of an unknown foreign world (Bakalian 7).

In conclusion, ethnicity describes the common values of a group distinct from the mainstream culture, which occurs as a result of the clash of ethnic values with those of the dominant culture. Ethnicities rely on the so-called common values such as language, an imaginary ancestry or a land. External and internal forces play a significant role in the construction of ethnicities. In parallel, ethnic identities are in a constant process of rearticulation. In connection with ethnicities, nationalisms also contribute to this continuous process of self-definition by using their state apparatuses to unify cultural differences. However, the borders of the ethnic are not drawn artificially as the nation states do, and this leads us to consider the ethnic as a hybrid formation caught between the past national values and the values of the mainstream culture. This hybrid formation is also referred as symbolic ethnicity, which describes a voluntary and conscious acceptance of cultural behaviors without necessarily clinging to the values of the old tradition. Perhaps as a result of assimilation, today's Armenian-Americans show similarities in behavioral patterns; they attend ethnic activities as a way of

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<sup>41</sup> Meaning Armenian in Armenian.

<sup>42</sup> Meaning Outsider in Armenian.

fulfilling their ethnic part, while maintaining their mainstream outsider values as well. Thus, such voluntary involvements in ethnic activities as well as a welcoming of mainstream cultural values unfold the hybrid/hyphenated nature of Armenian-American-ness.

### 3. Diaspora

*For American-born generations, Armenian identity is a preference and Armenianness is a state of mind . . . One can say he or she is an Armenian without speaking Armenian, marrying an Armenian, doing business with Armenians, belonging to an Armenian church, joining Armenian voluntary associations, or participating in the events and activities sponsored by such organizations.*

*Anny Bakalian*<sup>43</sup>

In the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, diaspora is defined as: “the movement of people from any nation or group away from their own country” (321). Unlike the perception of culture, which is conceived as a particular stable location, diaspora is related to the consequences of globalization, translocality and transnationalism. Therefore, the notion of diaspora directs our attention toward movements, dispersions, home cultures, and to the imaginary homelands of the past. In this sense, diaspora can be thought as both local and global, bearing the values of both home and host cultures (Barker 200). Another definition of diaspora is provided by Paul Gilroy, who holds out that diaspora is “forced dispersal and reluctant settling” connoting the “flight following the threat of violence” (318). Thus, diasporan populations try to forget their forced deportations or processes of dispersals, which is simultaneously accompanied by remembrance and commemoration. Such definitions of diaspora might have negative connotations; however, as pointed out by Robert Cohen, the tension caused by ethnic, national and transnational identities could also result in the creation of an enriched identity (24).

Despite the fact that each diaspora has its own unique values, it would not be wrong to characterize it from a general perspective. Firstly, the physical dispersal from the homeland, according to William Safran, makes diasporan peoples special

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<sup>43</sup> Epigraph from: Bakalian, Anny. "From being to feeling Armenian: Assimilation and identity among Armenian- Americans." (Paper presented at the annual meetings of the American Sociological Association, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1991. Pg. 13).

immigrants in that they retain the memory of their homelands through generations. It is though this retention that diasporans establish their institutions in the host lands, where they symbolically or practically sustain aspects of their native culture to continue their heritage. Secondly, diasporan peoples generally hold doubts about their acceptance in the hostland, which makes them fully committed to issues of survival. In doing so, they retain myths of turning back to an imaginary homeland. However, this never happens since such a homeland is only lived in their consciousness, and regarded a little more than a utopia. Different from traditional immigrants, diasporans leave their motherlands either for political or economic reasons, and intentionally accept the danger of assimilation in the new land. Nevertheless, they do not want to break ties with their homeland completely. For this reason, diasporan people move back and forth between two worlds, which is characterized by overlapping orientations toward two cultures and two states of minds. Lastly, diasporan communities commonly have religious or ethnic leaders assisting in the political or economic causes of their community to maintain their cultures and ideologies (Safran 9-18).

As stated before, it is important to share a common history or an imaginary homeland to maintain ethnic identity. Despite the independence of Soviet Armenia in the 1990s, the Armenian diaspora is also characterized by this aspect as a nation scattered around the world. As Kachig Tololyan states, the Armenians are:

. . . a *transnational nation*, that is, a nation that exists not just in the homeland but also across the borders of other nation-states, “transnationally,” and is made up of communities in thirty-four countries from Egypt to Australia, linked by transnational institutions such as the Armenian Apostolic Church, political organizations like the ARF<sup>44</sup>, and philanthropic groups like AGBU<sup>45</sup>, through which wealthy notables also exert political and cultural influence. (25)

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<sup>44</sup> Dashnaksutyun, Armenian Revolutionary Federation.

<sup>45</sup> Armenian General Benevolent Union.



Tololyan also compares traditional diasporas with the North-American Armenian diaspora, stating that they repeatedly and transnationally return their homeland through managing a circulation of people, cultural productions, financial aid and political ideas. He also adds: “Within the Armenian-American community, the ethnics are often in muted conflict with the diasporans, who range from the involved, to the committed, to a few militants on issues of culture and politics” (25).

Hence, Cohen identifies the Armenian diaspora as a victim diaspora, whose memories continue to establish links between the group members, who have survived a catastrophe that displaced them (31). Accordingly, 1915 deportations have been an indispensable element in the identity construction of the Armenian diaspora, who, traumatized by the events, consider the deportations as genocide. The catastrophe especially politicized the Armenian diaspora after the calls made by Vasken I, the Catholicos of Echmiadzin, and Khoren I, the Cilician Catholicos, in August 1964, assigning every Armenian in the world to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1915 events world-wide and to promote its world-wide recognition as “genocide” (Şimşir 373). This call from the religious authorities bonded the Armenian diasporan communities world-wide with the memories of a catastrophe. Sevinç Göral elaborates upon the importance of the 1915 events for the Armenians as follows:

The 1915 deportations had actually been a significant traumatic event for many Armenians, who did not take part in *chete* activities; not only because of the danger for the risk of being killed created by the war time conditions that they were subjected to and that they shared together with the other members of their community, but also because of the conditions created by the displacement as well as starvation and epidemic diseases. Even when evaluated in the general sense, it is not difficult to predict that the deportation of the Armenians would create trauma in such a significant depth that it would galvanize their group identity. (93 – translation mine)

Judging from above, 1915 events constitute the core aspect of Armenian collective identity and the Armenian diaspora. Deportations served many diasporan Armenians to strengthen their sense of nostalgia over a lost geography, which is not expected to be returned. The survivors perceived this as a selected trauma because they regarded themselves as weak and innocent against this, which they unconsciously transferred to their children. The survivor comes up with statements such as “Reverse this situation that cursed me” or “Mourn the sorrow that I could not lament for” (Göral 93). The following is an excerpt from William Saroyan’s “The Armenian and the Armenian”, which expresses the importance of 1915 deportations for the Armenian diasporan consciousness:

I should like to see any power of the world destroy this race, this small tribe of unimportant people, whose wars have all been fought and lost, whose structures have crumbled, whose literature is unread, whose music is unheard, whose prayers are no longer uttered. Go ahead, destroy this race. Let us say that it is again 1915. There is war in the world. Destroy Armenia. See if you can do it. Send them from their homes into the desert. Let them have neither bread nor water. Burn their houses and churches. See if they will not live again. See if they will not laugh again. See if the race will not live again. For when two of them meet, anywhere in the world, see if they will not create a New Armenia<sup>46</sup>. (Saroyan (1984) 7; Armenian Museum)

In addition to the significance of the 1915 events as a binding force for the construction of Armenian identity, Saroyan’s emphasis on the creation of New Armenia(s) implies the Armenian immigrants’ smooth adaptation to the host culture(s). According to Jendian, this adaptation process has three stages. The first stage is ‘Substitution’, where the immigrants create substitutes or copies of home culture not to be haunted by their displacements. Hence, the theme of this stage is “we are still there”. Ethnic exclaves

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<sup>46</sup> The first edition of this text does not include the last phrase “New Armenia”. However, the 1984 *Ararat* magazine edition and such contemporary editions include this phrase. The first edition can be found as: “The Armenian and the Armenian.” *Inhale and Exhale*. New York: Random House, 1936. Pg. 437-438.

like “Little Italy”, Little Armenia”, and “Chinatown” in the United States are the products of this initial stage. “Destitution”, the second stage, is about homelessness. It means having no place to stand on. “We are nowhere” is the feeling underlying this stage. Members of the diasporan community feel that they neither belong to home nor host society. This condition implies the disconnection of the member from both sides. The final stage is “Institution”, which says “we are here”. Denise Aghanian and Hall state that this transition creates a synthesis of old and new traditions, which is called “the evolution of cultures of hybridity” for the diasporan cultures (qtd. in Jendian 2). Consequently, Saroyan’s statements about the 1915 events define the process of transition from being an immigrant (Armenian) to adapting an amalgamated/hybrid ethnic identity (Armenian-American).

Although the deportations still serve as a common value sustaining the Armenian-Americans collective identity, it should be noted that not all Armenian-Americans shared the same collective experiences with those, who experienced the 1915 deportations, or who were negatively affected by the event. Tololyan elaborates upon the subject as follows:

Yet the Armenian Americans have been, and are, composed of segments that had different collective experiences. For example, most of those coming from the Iranian primary diaspora are not descendants of genocide survivors. At minimum, they feel differently about this and other unequally shared experiences, or, alternatively, they contest meanings assigned to shared experiences, for example, the relationship of diasporans with the host land’s majority people. (24)

Lastly, the foundation of the Armenian Republic in 1991 also changed the diasporan discourse of being in exile. Today, the discourse of the Armenian diaspora has shifted from struggling for Armenian independence to surviving the nation of Armenia. The foundation of the Armenian Republic started the redefinition of Armenian-ness, strengthening the Armenian identifications with their sense of locality about their homeland. Today, the Armenian diaspora is more interested in lobbying for

the national interests of the Republic of Armenia. This is because an independent Armenia means the end of being stateless, and confirms the construction of Armenian identity (Schwalgin 82-87).

Susan Schwalgin states that the act of identity construction is common to the diasporan Armenians, who travel to Armenia. During their journey, they contemplate about the ideas and ideologies formulated by the Dashnak Party and its organizations, which construct the global meaning of being Armenian. In a sense, traveling to Armenia leads the diaspora Armenians to affirm their ethnicity while constructing the meanings of their Armenian identity in their assimilated minds. Traveling to Armenia also illustrates the difficulty for the diaspora Armenians because they struggle to reach the ideal of “pure” Armenian identity. The citizens of the Armenian Republic take the Armenian identity for granted, whereas the diasporan Armenians have to struggle to achieve Armenian-ness. Moreover, diasporan Armenians sustain this struggle in a host culture, which poses the danger of assimilation into the respective mainstream cultures; in other words, they are obliged to sacrifice themselves to maintain their ethnic identity (82-87). Whether such a struggle for ethnic maintenance is successful or not, diaspora Armenians continuously construct their identity over and over again. Nonetheless, William Safran puts forward that the crucial markers for maintaining the homeland culture in the diasporan mind (such as language and religion) have been weakening in the recent decades as a result of assimilation (21).

#### IV. THEMES AND ISSUES IN ARMENIAN-AMERICAN LITERATURE

*They bring me raisings, figs and dates,  
and press me to the wine.  
They see my father in my face  
And ask of home;  
give strange answers.*

*Katchik (Archie) Minasian<sup>47</sup>*

Armenian-American literary thought as we know it today has a long political, cultural and historical background, against which it evolved over time. Fearing assimilation, ethnics generally want to exclude themselves from the mainstream so as to maintain their identity through emphasizing collectivity by simultaneously seeking difference and sameness, the act of which pushes them to participate in the host land's culture (Tololyan 19). This brings us to the initial participations of Armenians in the American culture by establishing their own institutions such as churches, schools and their own press. Early Armenian-American publications were mostly periodicals and newspapers, the language of which shifted to English over time. In most of the early press from the 1890s to the 1920s, when there were only a small amount of the Armenian population in the new continent, the content of Armenian publications were mostly in the form of essays, columns, patriotic verses, poetry, short stories, autobiographies and memoirs written mostly in Armenian language. The wide-circulation of these publications can be accounted with the high literacy rate of the early immigrants, who both feared and were fascinated with their encounter with the *odar* (the other) (Tololyan 23). What is more, the Armenian press in the United States was effective in stimulating Armenian nationalism in the diaspora. For instance, *Hairenik*<sup>48</sup> was published in Armenian. Besides, the paper also included topics about human

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<sup>47</sup> An Armenian-American writer and poet. Epigraph from: from "They Bring me Raisins." *Forgotten Bread: First Generation Armenian-American Writers*. Ed. David Kherdian. Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2007. Pg.178.

<sup>48</sup> The earliest Armenian-American journal. It means homeland. It is still active today and it was established in 1899 as a political organ of Tashnag Party,

relationships, lifestyle, and publications reincarnating the homeland. Other early examples of early Armenian-American publishing in Armenian are *Asbarez* (1908-Present), *Nor Kir* (1936-1954, New York), *Puinik Monthly* (1918-1920, Boston), and *Paykar Daily* (1922-Present, Boston). From the 1920s onward, the Armenian publications in English gained more popularity. *Ararat* (1960- Present), *Armenian Review* (1948-Present) and *Raft* (1987-Present) appealed to the English speaking Armenians. Such proliferation in the circulation of journals and newspapers acted as a springboard for the popularization of Armenian writers and their literary works in the United States. As the Armenian immigrants gradually gained more competence in English, the publishing industry reached larger segments of English speaking Armenian readers. This trend gained momentum especially after the 1960s as the Anglophone Armenian writers also put their efforts in translating works from the literature of the Old World, or in publishing memoirs of their grandparents so as to keep their community informed about their ethnic values and history (Perroomian 2005, 194; Tololyan 22-27).

Among the pioneer writers and poets of the Armenian-American literature are from Leon Serbian Herald, Emmanuel Vardanyan, William Saroyan, Richard Hagopian, Peter Sourian, Diana Der-Hovanessian, Michael J. Arlen, Peter Balakian, Peter Najarian, David Kherdian, and Arlene Voski Avakian. Although it is not possible to strictly categorize Armenian-American authors according to the themes and issues they deal with in their works, a general overview of the common themes in Armenian-American literature can be provided. Lamenting the lost past, immigrant life in the United States, humanism (war is bad) and search for roots. As a contemporary theme, search for roots is an antithesis of the themes common to Armenian-American literature, among which the outcomes of 1915 deportations, melancholic yearning and feeling exilic in a foreign land are the most frequently studied ones: As Rubina Perroomian explains:

The genocide of 1915 cancelled all existing conventions and a priori assumptions. Cut off from the homeland and deprived of a collective national existence, Armenians in the diaspora struggled to survive and perpetuate as a nation in exile, a predicament conducive of a particular

literary milieu with particular social, political, and cultural determinants reacting on the artist's individuality, intellect and creative mind. The pre-genocide literary milieu had evolved into its antithesis in the post-genocide diaspora . . . it was between 1920 and the 1930s that the final dispersion of the Armenian people became a reality. . . this period also coincided with the loss of the short-lived Armenian independence (May 1918-December 1920) and the realization of having been denied the freedom to live as a nation . . . The outcome was a unique psychological state that transferred into nostalgic literature permeating pathetic sentimentalism, which stemmed not only from yearning for the homeland, but also from that strong sense of inhibition Armenian immigrant writers experienced in foreign, unfamiliar environments. (2005, 191)

Lamenting the lost past is one of the themes that characterized early Armenian-American literary writings. According to Perroomian, the American scene was mostly absent in the earlier publications, which created an "uprooted" literature reluctant to take roots in a new environment (2005, 191). In other words, some of the early Armenian-American writers narrated the sufferings and the pains of the Armenians, who deeply felt homesick due to their exilic status. This feeling of being in exile was reflected in lamenting the lost past, which mainly focused on the early immigrants' nostalgic feelings of leaving behind an Old World following the deportations. Armenian-American authors, who lament the lost past generally use the following motifs in their works: pastoral descriptions and definitions of their homelands, nostalgic remembrance of Old World culture, people's interactions in towns no longer inhabited by them and the oral stories, which dictate the teaching of the Old World values.

Born in a no more existing village within the province of Erzincan, Turkey, in 1894, Leon Serabian Herald's poetry and prose exemplify lamentation of the lost past. In "Memories from My Village", one of the stanzas portray the poet's nostalgia for his village:

God Aringe has lost his power,  
And our village has been annihilated  
Some day I might be found, still dreaming somewhere;  
But who will tell me, tell of your whereabouts? (Herald 7)

The poet is lamenting for the loss of his village and his people. He is mentally “returning” to his village through his virtual dreams despite being aware of the fact that it no longer exists. Herald’s other poems and stories heavily focus on lamentation along with the pastoral depictions of the homeland as in “The Moon in 1915”, or in his short story “Power of Horizon”.

Another Armenian-American writer employing the theme of lamenting the lost past is Leon Surmelian, who was born in Trebizond in 1907, and arrived the new continent at the age of seventeen to study agriculture in Kansas State University. Surmelian’s tender nostalgia can be observed in his essay “Armenia”, which resembles to “What is an American” by J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur in that he, like Crèvecoeur, attempts to define Armenian-ness and the mental boundaries of Armenia through providing geographical, historical, agricultural, social and cultural information. His essay begins like most Armenian folk tales do: “There was there was not<sup>49</sup>” (Surmelian 68). In fact, Surmelian simultaneously refers to the existence and non-existence of his homeland at the same time. Moreover, the reader is informed about Surmelian’s family, their business as well as their social interactions with the locals, the depictions of towns with the *hamams*, *simitjis*, bargainners shouting “Hamsi!” along with the culinary customs such as cooking lamb during Easter. In one part in this his essay, Surmelian strikingly emphasizes the significance of such national symbols like Mount Ararat for the Armenians:

Said a Turk to an Armenian: ‘By what right do you use the picture of  
Aghri Dagh<sup>50</sup> on your state seal when you don’t own it?’

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<sup>49</sup> The correct English version is “Once upon a time” for this phrase.

<sup>50</sup> Turkish name of Mt.Ararat.



The Armenian shot back: ‘You show a crescent on yours. Do you own the moon?’ (Surmelian 77)

Surmelian’s essay “Armenia” monotonously valorizes patriotism but also touches upon nostalgic feelings of the Armenian immigrants’ feeling of nostalgia in the United States by using Armenian cultural symbols. Toward the end of his essay, Surmelian warns against the danger of assimilation in the new continent, and adds that Armenian souls might unite the world under peace against the clash between the Western and the Eastern nations (83).

Richard Hagopian’s “Saint in the Snow” is also another story, in which one can observe the theme of lamenting the lost past. In the short story, the writer as a child is awarded with an interesting tale from an old neighbor, Garabed Agha, in exchange for serving water to him. The old man mentions about the difficulty of maintaining life economically in the homeland. He tells about a village priest in the Old World, who ignored a local’s funeral because of his poverty. The villagers try to help the poor man’s wife by raising money for the funeral expenses. To raise money, the villagers sell their wine. As the drunken villagers carry the dead man on their shoulders up to the mountain, they drop the coffin and keep their journey, leaving the coffin behind. Only after reaching the peak of the mountain do the drunken villagers realize that the coffin is missing. The carriers make up a lie to explain the situation and then return to their village. They state that the old man has turned into a Saint and risen to the sky. This surprises the wife, while it makes the mean priest suspicious. After the snow melts, the body of the deceased is found in front of the mean priest’s church. As Garabed Agha finishes his story, he states:

. . . the same priest who had refused to bury him. ‘A miracle!’ cried the people of the kugh<sup>51</sup>. ‘St. Sukias has descended to give the old scoundrel a lesson. Ignore the poor, build new houses for yourself, eat and grow fat while others starve,’ they cried. ‘God bless St.Sukias. He will protect the poor.’ (Hagopian 149)

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<sup>51</sup> Village, *köy* in Turkish.

The story points out to the importance of caring for the poor in the Armenian community, who experienced poverty when they arrived in the United States. Obviously, the oral stories of the Old World reconstruct the image of the motherland. Furthermore, these oral stories represent the lamentation of the Armenians, who are removed far from their homeland. Therefore, the Armenian-American literary writings that cultivated this theme lacked American settings. However, this can be regarded as contradictory because while the early immigrants feared assimilation into the Anglo-Saxon culture, they sacrificed their mother language for the sake of gaining popularity.

Immigrant life in the United States is another common theme in early Armenian-American writing. As stated before, Armenians had overwhelming difficulties during their immigration and arrival to Ellis Island. Finding jobs and surviving in a foreign land were the major problems facing them. Another problem was the cultural differences that alienated the Armenians to the American settings. Overt discrimination and racial stereotyping were yet other problems. Therefore, the theme of immigrant life in the United States deals with the Armenian immigrants' adaptation process to a new and alien environment, which feverishly championed the melting pot ideology then. Full Americanism was expected.

David Kherdian (1931- Present), whose parents immigrated to the United States from Adana during the deportations, was born in Wisconsin. Kherdian was not only a writer, but also a poet, editor and translator of numerous works. In most of his works, the reader witnesses the writer's struggle to connect with his father and his culture. In his story "Our Block", the writer presents the difficulties of the first wave immigrant Armenians in interacting with the non-Armenians. As Kherdian begins to describe his neighborhood, we come to learn that the writer and his playmates speak Turkish accented Armenian among themselves, which unite them around a common cultural signifier, that is, their native language. Kherdian's parents speak Turkish only when they need to hide something from their children. The same logic of using a foreign language (Armenian) appears when the Armenian children want to keep a secret from the non-Armenian playmates. The writer also writes about the Armenian culture, in which he grew up: the cultural aspects of his childhood such as sleeping under

*yoreghans*<sup>52</sup>, respect for the elderly, honesty, valuing education, family solidarity and love of God became patches of nostalgia stitched together with the love for a missed “home”. However, his experiences in the New World are disappointing because the non-Armenians (the Americans) referred them as “dirty” or “Harmones”:

. . . The latter expression both pained and confused me. Why dirty, when our living habits . . . were far cleaner than were those of the Americans, who weren’t defeated by poverty, and were - very often - the last to own radios, telephones, refrigerators, and other ‘modern’ appliances . . . I finally concluded that it we because we were dark, and dark in their minds meant dirty. (Kherdian 329)

Apparently, Kherdian’s childhood innocence is interrupted by racial insults. As the story goes on, Kherdian tells about a popular sportsman- Tyrone Power, who is an Armenian immigrant admired by the American society. He questions why the Americans still dislike the Armenians and concludes that: “We could maybe change the color of our hair, but never the color of our skin” (329).

Surmelian’s “Sombrero” is another short story exemplifying the theme of immigrant life in the United States. In the story, the writer narrates one of his experiences in a Nebraska summer, calling it his “first American summer” (Surmelian 62). When the writer goes to a barber shop for a haircut, the shop keeper responds to him: “We don’t cut Mexicans’ hair in this shop” (64). Because of the author’s sun tanned skin, the sombrero and the rough looking beard shape, he is mistakenly taken as a Latino, another ethnic group which were facing discrimination when Armenian immigrants were settling in the United States. As the barber orders him to get out of his shop, the author becomes silenced, and expresses his feelings in the following monologue:

And maybe the wrong country. I wanted to tell him I was not a Mexican, but I was too shocked to say a word . . . But again, I couldn’t not say a

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<sup>52</sup> Turkish word for quilt

word. I did not want to tell him – and these other men – my nationality. I did not want this barber to touch me. (64)

Feeling alienated and estranged, the writer even refrains from stating his nationality because of his sense of dignity. Realizing that he could never look like an American, he tries another barber shop for immigrants. Writing about his university years, the author later tells how he gradually felt more American. The story ends with a summer rain, which he considers as a baptism, making him feel more and more American: “I no longer felt like a stranger in a strange land, no longer alien” (68). Apparently, Surmelian is more hopeful about the acceptance of Armenian immigrants by the dominant culture through adaptation to the Anglo-Saxon culture.

It was not always the Armenians, who were being discriminated though. The Armenian community also had its own ways of keeping the outsiders out for fear of assimilation into the mainstream culture. *Odar* – is an Armenian term, which means non-Armenian, or lacking Armenian virtues and cultural values. *Odar* surfaces in most of the major Armenian-American works to explain the outcasting of the whites from the Armenosphere.

Marjorie Housepian, whose parents came from Smyrna with four of her siblings in 1921, was born in New York, in 1923. Her short story “How Levon Dai Was Surrendered to the Edemuses” is about an Armenian-American family living in New York. Levon Dai, son of the family, is pitied by other family members because he seldom writes from Iowa to his family living in New York. As the family members talk of him, one of them (Kelesh) states: “Levon is perhaps becoming Americanized . . . Americans do not admit relationships with cousins after the age of sixteen” (Housepian 201). Kelesh further suggests that the family should arrange him a girl for marriage in New York. Some time later, the family receives a letter from Levon Dai, who announces that he is getting engaged with Shirley Adams – an American girl. Having heard the news, the family is both shocked and disappointed. They try to think of ways to explain this unfortunate event to their grandmother –Marta Mama. A family member (Hadji) arrives with a pack of *lochum* candies and pistachio nuts to break the news to

the grandmother. Hadji changes Shirley Adams to “Shiran Edemus” not to bother the grandmother with the fact that the bride-to-be is an American:

‘Edemus – Greek name, isn’t it?

‘It must be,’ said Hadji, avoiding my eyes.

‘Eh,’ said Marta-mama, ‘we can not be old-fashioned about these things.

The Greeks are fine people. They cook much the way we do.’

(Housepian 208)

Marta-mama’s conception of *odar* is to be found culinary practices other than Armenian. Since culinary practices can not be thought separately from cultural identity, Marta Mama does not consider Shirley/Shiran as an *odar*, threatening Armenian cultural values. Early Armenian-American literary work is replete with Armenian-American immigrants’ fear of amalgamation through intermarriage between the Armenians and *odars*.

Humanism (War is bad) is another common theme in Armenian-American literature. This theme celebrates human life, criticizes the effects of war upon civil people, and stresses attaching something for dear life, in other words, *carpe diem*. While the previous aspect is a little bit more with regard to the pessimist portrayal of the effects of war on people, the latter aspect contrastingly portrays humorous images, or narrates optimistic stories with universal messages on the commonness of all people.

Born in 1902 near Urumia, Iran, Emmanuel P. Vardanyan represents physical violence as a beast in most of his works. In *The Well of Ararat* and *The Moon Sails* he describes bitter human conditions, which make the reader sympathize with the characters living in horrible conditions. Vardanyan’s autobiography shows us how he was psychologically distressed by the war. He joined the army at the age of 14 (pretending to be 16) to fight against the Turkish forces during the World War I. He was also a cultural advisor of the US forces in the Middle East during the World War II. The former soldier -Vardanyan- puts special effort into leaving the war behind. His stories are replete with the binary oppositions of war/peace, joy/misery, and beauty/ugliness, juxtaposing what man has with and without war (Ward 27-29). In his Faulkner-like

short story “Death is an Empty Coffin”, for instance, the protagonist Paul Victor is a Westerner in a Middle Eastern town by the Tigris River, which is occupied by the Western military forces. In the town, Victor is in a desperate quest to make sense of life despite the local honor killings, hatred for the non-Muslims of the city and religious fanaticism (Ward 28). The opposites of the story are represented by the antagonist Mullah and a poor orphaned child Salim. Mullah kills Salim’s mother because of her relations with foreign soldiers, and thereby dishonoring herself. Mullah here is a religious fanatic wishing to wipe out all non-Muslims and foreign soldiers in the city in the name of Allah (Vardanyan 38). The child, Salim, on the other hand, feels old like an “empty coffin” due to his painful memories such as witnessing his mother’s punishment by Mullah, and many other people’s death. The statement “Death is an empty coffin” is repeated throughout the story as Salim states his wish to die constantly. Victor tries to encourage the child to be hopeful; however, he is also ironically aware of the difficulty of enduring so much pain. In one of his monologues, Victor states:

He had reasoned out: *Certain things have to be killed and buried, like in war, otherwise one would rot his soul and die ignominiously. Ashes and dust of moldering bones are good only as fertilizers for new seeds.* Though on occasion death had the fascination of a mistress, he did not want to unearth the buried relics of the past, for himself, for the boy . . . Sometimes they sprang up unexpectedly, in strange situations and relations, and haunted them like ghosts. (51)

Listening to Salim’s past and trying to understand how he has endured all these, Victor tries to reason what to do in such a situation. Ironically, after helping Salim financially, giving him food and a bed to sleep, the protagonist finds himself dead in the bed muttering “Death is an Empty Coffin”, as if acknowledging Salim’s pessimism. What is implied here is that life is harsh when there are bigotries and wars. Therefore, it is better to live without “unearthing” such traumas despite the constant urge to do so<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> The case with the first generation Armenian immigrants in the United States who struggled to reconcile with the 1915 events.

Obviously, Vardanyan tries to bury his past of wars, avoiding the exposure of the details of the wars he was engaged in. Rather, he chooses to use images and binary oppositions that condemn wars.

The optimism of the theme of humanism (War is bad) finds its best expression in William Saroyan's writing. Born in Fresno in 1908, Saroyan is one of the pioneering figures of Armenian-American literature. The publication of his work "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze" in 1934 was a breakthrough, which established him as one of the most celebrated authors in the United States. His play *The Time of Your Life* won him the Pulitzer Prize, which he rejected because he found it no more different than his other works. The themes in his prose and poetry are mainly dominated by humanism, which he explains as follows: "When you laugh, laugh like hell. And when you get angry, get good and angry. Try to be alive. You will be dead soon enough" (Arax, 94-95). In other words, Saroyan advises to squeeze everything out of life for the sake of living. Saroyan's optimist approach in many of his works contributed to the popularization of the Armenian-American literature. Saroyan's creation of the "mad" joyous Armenian character was another factor contributing to this popularity. According to Tololyan, this mad Armenian self was a medium for recoding alienation in an environment, where prejudice against the Armenians prevailed. Saroyan represented the "mad Armenian" in lovable and eccentric ways, implying a suppressed melancholy (28). This mad Armenian archetype is in fact the every person of every place. This mad joyous Armenian is proud of his ethnic identity at the beginning of Saroyan's works. However, ethnic pride is replaced by a celebration of "double-consciousness", of hybridity near the end of Saroyan's stories. What Saroyan once said justifies this celebration of being of two worlds and humanism: "I love Armenia and I love America and belong to both, but I am only this: an inhabitant of the earth" (qtd. in Tololyan 28). In this sense, Saroyan's insistence on humanism and celebration of the multiplicity of identity before the post-modern theories of subjectivity can be regarded as the textual existence of a "humanist utopia" in Derrida's terms (qtd. in Tololyan 29-31). Saroyan suggests solving the dilemma between ethnic retention and assimilation through the articulation of Armenian-ness and American-ness with the same linguistic medium: English. Saroyan's approach to identity issues materialized in his narration style and

technique as the “Saroyanesque” style in literature, which would influence the American literary writing in the following decades (Arax 95).

*My Name is Aram*, a popular collection of Armenian immigrant stories, is one such work written in the Saroyanesque style. The protagonist of the stories is Aram Garoghlanian, who tries to survive in the midst of many adversaries facing him. In this sense, Garoghlanian is like Mark Twain’s Huck Finn, who narrates his ironic and humorous experiences in the American West. The story “The Pomegranate Trees” is about Aram’s uncle Melik, who, strangely enough, tries to plant pomegranate trees in the middle of a desert. With the help of Mexican workers, water is brought to the desert. His unyielding work and dedication finally brings the uncle success: Pomegranate trees grow in the desert. However, there appears to be another challenge facing Aram: he can not sell his pomegranates to the Americans even for a low price. In fact, the Americans of his time are not familiar with this Old World fruit. Finally, Melik ends up in selling his field, asking the prospective buyer to keep his pomegranate trees if possible (Saroyan 23-38). Most of Saroyan’s mad characters fit into this pattern of humor and “madness/craziness”.

In his short story called “Gaston”, Saroyan writes about a father and a daughter, trying to reach a conclusion about a peach worm, Gaston, named by the father:

‘Aren’t you going to squash him?’

‘No, of course not, why should I?’

‘He’s a bug. He’s *ugh*.’

‘Not at all. He’s Gaston the grand boulevardier.’ (Saroyan 114)

The daughter tries to encourage the father to kill the worm while the father, as the “mad” character, refuses to do so to prevent the bug from losing his “home”. The father even goes to the grocery shop to buy more peaches so as to provide “Gaston” a better house. Encouraged by her mother on the phone, the daughter kills the worm. The father returns home only to find out that “Gaston” is dead. With the bag of peaches in his hands, the father tells his daughter that he feels “like a Gaston on a little plate” (118). The character Gaston is likely to be a representation of those selves in exile



without a sense of belonging. At first sight, the father's willingness to provide a disgusting bug a home might seem to be crazy, but in fact, it is a symbolic representation of humanism.

Saroyan's "The Humming Bird That Lived through Winter" is another story, in which one can trace Saroyanesque humanism in his crazy characters, who, ironically and humorously, try to save a dying humming bird in cold winter. "Seventy Thousand Assyrians" is another story by Saroyan, which the writer dedicates to the Assyrians and other suppressed peoples of the world (Kherdian 97-118). In short, humanism serves with different ends in the works of Vardanyan and Saroyan, the former being pessimistic due to its criticism of wars while the latter's writing being more optimistic and hopeful with its crazy characters having multiple identities.

The accumulated bulk Armenian-American literature was shaped by the aforementioned themes that came to be popularized in the United States after the 1960s. Parlakian defined the post 60s and 70s as Armenian cultural renaissance. This was mainly because of the effects of civil rights movements in the United States, where ethnic minorities like the Armenians were no longer ashamed of expressing their pride over their ethnic identities. Such political and cultural changes brought about new understandings in diasporan literatures, and the Armenian diaspora was no exception to this radical change. According to Perroomian, the politicization of the diaspora in the late 60s paved the way for the second and the third generation Armenian-Americans' reconciliation with 1915 events. Upon the calls by Catholicoses Vasken I and Khoren I in 1964, the worldwide 1965 commemoration of the Armenian Genocide became a turning point for the Armenian diaspora because it triggered a huge bulk of Armenian writing including translations, reproductions of the survivor testimonies, stories, and memoirs of deportation (Perroomian 2003, 163-167; Şimşir 373). Most of the writings by the Armenian-Americans focused on the search for roots as their central theme, aiming to raise Armenian consciousness about their ethnic identity. Most of the time, this search for roots was realized through inner-journeys ending with self-recognition, self-valuation and self-knowledge. Just like other American minority literatures, African-American, Chinese-American, Native-American among many others, Armenian-American literature prioritized identity politics and valued self-definition and

self-understanding through connections with the cultural past. Peroomian elaborates upon the theme of search for roots in the Armenian-American literature as follows:

Then, there is a vague image of a lost homeland that kindles a sense of deprivation even in the most integrated or acculturated Armenian in the diaspora, a homeland never seen but still somewhere in the unconscious. This phenomenon has grown deeper under the influence of the general trend in the United States in the late 1960s and 1970s to search for one's roots, a sense of belonging, an identity connected to the past, to history, and other members of the group. (2003, 166)

The theme of search for roots highly surfaces in the literary writings of the third or the second generation Armenian-Americans, who struggle to connect to the Old World to achieve ethnic subjectivity. Renewed recourse to past, memoirs as revivals of a tragic past, testimonies about the 1915 deportations, and sudden discoveries of the Armenian past constitute the basic motifs of the search for roots theme (Peroomian 192-201).

A common theme in the Armenian-American literature, search for roots also consists of rewriting the Armenian history, mental and/or physical journeys to the homeland, efforts to communicate with a family member (most probably an elder, who directly or indirectly experienced the deportations), descriptions of Armenian language, culinary culture and identity crisis. Armenian-American literary works about search for roots generally use first-person narration to tell about the protagonists' inner (mental) or outer (physical) journeys made to connect with their past and their present. The protagonists' search for roots is generally triggered by the miscommunication among family members, who could not recover from the traumas of the 1915 events. This silence in the family is usually interrupted by epiphanic instances of self-acceptance preceded by a discovery of a secret(s) in the family history.

More contemporary Armenian-American writers like Peter Najarian and Peter Sourian, commonly use this plot structure guided by the influence of search for roots theme. Diana Der-Hovanessian, for example, in her prose writing and poetry makes frequent returns to the "homeland" through flashbacks to the deportation years. Her

poem “We are Children of DerZor<sup>54</sup>” conceptualizes the diasporan generation as a collective unity, labeling them as the survivors (Perroomian 167). In Peter Najarian’s *His Daughters Memory* (1986), the protagonist Zeke travels to Turkey, and talks with the Armenians taken as orphans by the Turks. Concluding that the people he met are no different than the other people of the world, Zeke proposes moving beyond the past traumas by acceptance of equality of all humans (Tololyan 35).

The whole bulk of the Armenian-American literature dealing with the search for roots theme can not be studied within the scope of this study. Therefore, major Armenian-American works by prominent authors will be the main sources of reference to elaborate upon the search for roots in Armenian-American literary writing. Carol Edgarian’s *Rise the Euphrates* (1994), Michael J. Arlen’s *Passage to Ararat* (1975), and Peter Balakian’s *Black Dog of Fate* (1997) will provide the literary background against which the theme of search for roots will be studied in the next section of this study.

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<sup>54</sup> The Syrian Desert, to which Armenians was deported in 1915.

**V. SEARCH FOR ROOTS IN CAROL EDGARIAN'S *RISE THE EUPHRATES*,  
MICHAEL J. ARLEN'S *PASSAGE TO ARARAT* AND PETER BALAKIAN'S  
*BLACK DOG OF FATE***

**A. Carol Edgarian and *Rise the Euphrates***

*For my unborn child, I am after hope. Hope, and the chance for a new story that will put to rest the lies and shame. And so I listen cautiously to Casard, who says: To make a new life, you must hope for the future, and you must remember what has already been.*

*Seta Loon – Rise the Euphrates*<sup>55</sup>

Published in 1994 and having received the ANC Freedom Award in the same year, *Rise the Euphrates* (1994) is an exemplary work, which portrays the inward journey of an Armenian-American. A contemporary Armenian-American author, Carol Edgarian depicts the coming-of-age story of Seta in her critically acclaimed novel *Rise the Euphrates*, in which the grandmother's (Casard's) trauma of surviving the deportations of 1915 is inflicted on the future generations, namely Araxie (her daughter), who constantly denies and suppresses her mother's experience to continue her life, and Seta (the grand-daughter), who is expected to heal the wounds of the grandmother's past. The course of the plot begins with a death, but does death create something new?

It all starts with Garod's (meaning yearning) childhood in Harput during 1915 deportations. Garod's mother – Seta- drowns in the Euphrates River while marching in the Syrian Desert. Garod never forgives herself for having let her mother's hand go and left her drown in the river instead of dying together with honor. Because of this, Garod believes that she is cursed and her mother took away her name, which is considered to be one's honor and dignity in the Armenian culture. Garod loses her name. The French nurses in the orphanage call her Caford, the French word for melancholy. After she immigrates to the United States, she is mistakenly registered as Casard on Ellis Island.

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<sup>55</sup> Pg. 8.

She gets married to an Armenian man, whom she met on the way while crossing the Atlantic. The Russian-Armenian Vrej (meaning vengeance), learns all about Casard's painful story, which she refers as "indignities", on their way to the New World. The couple moves to Memorial in Connecticut and has a daughter called Araxie, who is later informed about the indignities by her father since the proud Armenian mother always refrains from taking about it to protect her honor. Burying her mother's pain inside her, Araxie pretends to have forgotten all about it and continues her life. However, the legacy of resolving this conflict, finding Casard's real name, is transferred to the poor grand-daughter Seta, who is also named after her grandmother's mother.

The story is narrated by thirty three years old Seta, who is expecting a baby: "There are things that were not lost. My name is Seta Loon" (3). Seta's self-assertion signals her desire for self-knowledge, which she acquires through self-narration. The reason for choosing Seta as the narrator can also be accounted by Edgarian's belief that the best story tellers happen to be children placing a sentimental effect on the reader (Edgarian, "Letters to a Young Writer"). Despite the characters' fictional nature, it is important to note that the novel also has biographical traces: Both Seta and Carol Edgarian were brought up in Connecticut, both of them continued their lives in California, and both grew up with a brother and a sister. The autobiographical aspects of the novel can better be realized in Edgarian's own words:

. . . Casard, actually came to me at a time when I came down with a horrible flu and had a very high fever. And I started hear this woman's voice . . . I'm half Armenian and half Swedish. It's my father's side that is the Armenian side and I had never been that close to those roots . . . It was, for me, a process of discovering that world and through that world those characters came to me . . . I've spent a lot time in the Library of Congress looking at the original telegrams from the Genocide and hearing stories. I learnt to speak Armenian just so I could hear the cadence in my ear. I spoke it when I was very little, my grandmother spoke it. But no, it's a made-up story. But I think every book comes from a certain urgency that the author has . . . For me the question behind that

book was what gets passed on from generation to generation, the unfinished work of one generation becomes something inherited in the next generation . . . But you know there's been so much denying of that part of history. That's its own unending story. (Edgarian's speech)

The importance of Self-realization and self-knowledge on the part of the uprooted Armenians is emphasized by Seta, who remembers what Casard had once said: "To make a new life, you must hope for the future, and you must remember what has already been" (8). Nevertheless, for a second or third generation Armenian, it is quite difficult to identify with a catastrophic past, which he/she has never experienced. Therefore, the search for roots will connect these uprooted Armenians to their past, to their Old Country and enable them to reconstruct their past and hence their present as well.

A third generation Armenian, Seta's struggle to know and understand herself via connections with the Old Country constitutes the central theme of *Rise the Euphrates*. Although an American with Armenian roots, Seta sets out to find her Armenian self in her past: Her description of Harput in 1915 is but one such attempt to find her Armenian self in the Old Country:

Dusk brought out the bright flags of Harput. Garod eyed with curiosity and amazement the colorful pageant of villagers and city folk, both Muslim and Christian, hurrying by her, heading from central markets toward various quarters of the city. To the south went the tiny Tiriki Kurds, their richly colored vests billowing in the warm afternoon breeze; the tall pinched-featured Zasa Kurds pushed overflowing carts as Arabs zigzagged about then, calling out one another. A group of Turkish gendarmes from 11<sup>th</sup> Army Corps rode by on horseback, as several Yezidis, thought to be evil worshippers, with their long dreadlocks, stood to side and let them pass; American missionary, probably a teacher at Euphrates College, dressed entirely in white, then crossed the street like a billowy sail. On all sides, the Armenians –intellectuals, tradesmen,

farmers- talked excitedly (they never seemed to stop) as they passed through the streets, the farmers in brightly colored homespun, the intellectuals, like Hayrig<sup>56</sup>, in European dress. (16-17)

Surprisingly enough, one would expect such a detailed description of Harput in 1915 by a first generation Armenian rather than the third-generation Armenian Seta. Never does the reader witness one single moment when Seta is provided with such information. Only when Seta is baptized as a baby, does the grandmother tell about her traumatic experience: how she lost her name. Casard does this by whispering into Seta's ear in Armenian, which Seta can not speak even when she is a grown-up. Then, how could it be possible for Seta to have acquired such detailed information about Harput in 1915? Why are the Turks portrayed as members of an army? Why is "white" color chosen for the American missionaries? Why are the Armenians depicted as talking intellectual issues in European dresses? Tololyan discusses that: "Fragments of memory and synthetic imagination 'reconstruct' and 'recover' the past" (36). In other words, Seta's reconstruction of the past is but a struggle to heal the wounds of her grandmother's past. Seta's recovery of past leads to reconciliation, self-knowledge and self-valuing, which will take place after settling the past accounts of the family (Toloyan 39).

Casard stands out as the non-hyphenated Armenian, who guides Seta in her search for roots. A pure Armenian, Casard is the representation of Armenia in the eyes of Araxie and Seta. With her language, posture, physical appearance, cultural and religious values, Casard constitutes a bridge between the Old Country and the New World for those looking for their cultural past.

Seta states that Armenia was not independent when she was growing up, which she learns from Casard as a child: "And if asked, Where is this Armenia? Casard taught me to spit in my hand and answer, *Gunatz, Gone*" (6). Apparently, the Old Country surviving in the imagination of the third generation Armenian-Americans is embodied by Casard in the novel. Therefore, Casard is not only a mother and a grandmother, but also a metaphor for the Old Country. During a visit to Mrs. Vartyan's house with Casard, Seta feels alienated when the other two speak Armenian. Mrs. Vartyan asks

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<sup>56</sup> Father in Armenian.

Seta how the Armenian stories start before she tells a story from the Old Country about an Armenian priest killed by Turkish men in a church in Bitlis. Seta shrugs and feels ashamed:

Mrs. Vartyan tsked, eyeing Casard. 'Don't you teach her nothing?'

Casard pursed her lips. 'She knows. She knows. She's just wants to be lazy.'

I glared at my grandmother, my cheeks on fire.

Mrs. Vartyan studied me. 'Seta, honey, it's *Gar oo chugar*. There was and there was not. All our stories begin: *Gar oo chugar*. (117)

Obviously, Casard's mission is to transfer the cultural and historical heritage of the Old Country, which was not located in any map then. Casard and Mrs. Vartyan are the cultural and historical bridges between the late Armenian generation and the Old World, which the third generation Armenians, like Seta, have never known.

Vartyan tells Casard and Seta how she has been teaching her daughter about the Old Country because she thinks that her daughter might go back there one day:

'Where?' Casard asked.

'Home, to Armenia.'

'Psst,' Casard hissed. 'What Armenia. Point it on a map.'

'Theresa, get down the book.'

'Ahhh, Book-shmook.' Casard waved Theresa back into her seat. 'The Armenia we know sits here,' Casard tapped the side of her head. 'After us it's gone. These children, they don't know.'

'So we teach them.'

'Teach them what, about our shame?'

'It is the Turks who should be ashamed,' Mrs. Vartyan boomed.

'You tell that to the Turks,' Casard said.

'How can you just give up? How can you not teach this girl to dream of the day when Mount Ararat will be again free?'

'Dreamers, what good are they?'



‘What about hope?’

‘Hope,’ Casard repeated the word sour in her mouth. ‘Hope. The young children, I’ve seen ‘em, all little blondes. Little Englishes, the whole bunch.’

Mrs. Vartyan shrugged. ‘So it is America. We all melt’. (118-119)

Casard and Mrs. Vartyan differ in their perceptions of Armenia, of home. For Vartyan, home is the Old Country, where she hopes to go back one day. For Casard, on the other hand, home is in your mind, home is where you feel wholesome and peaceful. Casard’s pride dictates her to forget the indignities inflicted upon the Armenians and abandon hopes of going back home one day. So Vartyan’s and Casard’s Armenia can only live in their minds; for the young generation. “Little Englishes, the whole bunch,” as Casard puts it, there appears no hope of knowing and understanding what it is to be an Armenian because the younger generations have already been acculturated. The young Armenian generation represented by Seta can only have a vicarious contact with the Old World through the stories of their elders, who teach them the values of their ethnicity: “. . . one must devote one’s life to building a new Armenia, in which Armenian language, food, education and – the final imperative – Armenian marriage was preserved” (90). A respected member of her community, Casard does so by teaching Armenian to peer Armenian-American students. Furthermore, she survives the Old World culinary customs with the cleanest kitchen and her deep connections to the Apostolic Church. Casard’s excessive sense of pride prevails throughout the novel. When Seta and her siblings want to attend the Martyrs’ Day on April 24<sup>th</sup>, Casard does her best to prevent them from going, considering the day worse than filth: “But each year Casard refused to participate in a public display that she perceived as toxic, worse than public toilets and public buses, worse than money tainted by ‘people’s’ hands, worse than dirty feet on bed” (131). Her excessive pride is explicit when Seta asks Casard if there are any Dr. Pepper sodas in the fridge, calling them DPs. Extremely frustrated, the grandmother responds: “You filthy Turketa . . . Grandma names you special, after my own holy

Mayrig<sup>57</sup> and what is my thank-you? Shame. Filthy-dirty-shame” (88). It never occurs to Seta that for Casard, DPs mean Displaced Persons, which refers to the ethnic immigrants excluded from the mainstream white society when she first came to the New World. Casard remembers how the whites taunted the foreign-looking Casard, saying “You tell your DP man to keep his ass out of sight” (89).

For an immigrant like Casard, it is essential to sustain her pride, which finds its best expression in Seta’s words: “Shame could kill a person; shame could force a person to leave and never return” (88). Consequently, Casard’s sense of dignity even prevents her from reconciling with the Old World “indignities”, which the second generation have already forgotten and the third generation struggles to discover. As the Old World culture dictates: “A person’s greatest possession is his name, and his honor is keeping it” (47). Therefore, Casard protects her honor by keeping the traumas in a closet and sustaining her cultural pride.

Casard’s excessive pride can be related to the motif of *Amot* (shame), which also applies to other characters in the book. *Amot* constitutes the third feature of the search for roots theme. As a motif running throughout the novel, shame seems to be implanted in the characters; the grandmother, the mother and the daughter. Internalization of shame results in betrayals against the Armenian community in different ways: Casard betrays her mother by letting her drown in the Euphrates River, and refers to her shame as something she could carry with (346). In fact, Casard does not betray her mother only. She also betrays her community, which dictates her to die with honor as Casard’s father orders at the time of the catastrophe: “No crying . . . No victims” (31). As a defense mechanism, Casard chooses to hide her shame behind the mask of excessive pride and struggles to protect Armenian cultural values as a mother and grandmother. Nonetheless, Casard’s suppression of shame causes chain reactions among the next generations, which is foreshadowed by her best friend Poppee: “. . . No matter what it always comes back to the mother” (49) or “The mother, the daughter, they’re the same-always connected” (181).

Like her mother, Araxie betrays her community in a similar way after she inherits the shame of past traumas. The Armenian culture in the United States forbids

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<sup>57</sup> Mother in Armenian.

marriages with *odars* but Araxie does not conform to this rule imposed upon her by her mother: “Mind my words, Araxie . . . Marry an odor, and you’ll have misfit children” (51). Refusing to take after her mother’s Armenian-ness, Araxie insistently disobeys this prohibition. The mother’s constant pressure only makes Araxie desire the “fair-headed” *odar* more (53). Araxie marries an American- George Loon, which ruins Casard:

Casard peered at her daughter swaying like some fool whimsy in the doorway, the small diamond on her finger. Casard had been sitting in the dark when Araxie appeared before her in a vision, surrounded by blonde children. But that was not the worst. The worst was that the odor had won, and in her mind it became another victory of Turks. (61)

The discourse of the author is a crucial marker here. “Victory of Turks” equals to the betrayal of one’s Armenian-ness. Casard’s fear of assimilation and losing her culture in the hands of “blonde Americans” is totally ignored by her daughter. Poppee, who is a highly respected member of the Armenian community, tries to console Casard. However, when Poppee is alone, she ends up feeling “thanks that at least her girls were not taking up with odars” (59). Again, Poppee’s reaction to this event demonstrates how important it is for the older generation to conform to the customs and to the values of the ethnic circle so as not to risk being outcasted. True, Casard fails to prevent this unapproved union yet she never accepts the *odar* – George Loon. She cleans and cooks for the couple, who stay with her for some time until they move out. Meanwhile, Casard neither looks the *odar* in the eye nor calls his name (65).

Another betrayal by Araxie takes place when Casard dies. The Armenian customs decree “that the family of the deceased must not cook for one week” (169). This custom is ignored by Araxie, who, in a way, acts like her mother in a sense by not accepting victimization or by sustaining her pride. She cooks with Seta despite the list of dishes having been divided among the ladies of Armenian Relief Society. Her pride exclaims: “I’m the cook now, I am gonna keep moving and get through this . . .” (170). Like her mother, Araxie is stubborn, and wants to serve the guests herself. The ladies of

the community, nevertheless, bring their food in different containers and trays, disapproving Araxie's attitude. These ladies, including Poppee and Araxie's close friend Archie, try to stop Araxie acting against the Armenian social codes. However, Araxie gets furious and harshly moves them out of the kitchen. Seta narrates her mother's betrayal as follows:

I sat forgotten among the whispering ladies and it suddenly occurred to me that I was witnessing a kind of betrayal: the women were planning a dinner for Casard without first clearing it with Momma. I knew that in her current mood Momma would not want a banquet for Casard; it would strike her as too public. Listening to the women, it occurred to me that with Casard gone, and Momma placing herself on the outside, there was nothing left but history to bind any of them to us. Little by little, the women would turn away from Momma; they would turn away from me. (185)

Seta finds herself in the middle of a clash between two opposing worlds; one represented by her Armenian ethnic dignity, the other by her mother who violates the Armenian social codes. The shared stubbornness of her grandmother and mother results in excessive pride and ignorance, disrupting the possibility of any healthy relationship among the people around Seta. Conformism meant acceptance by the ethnic insiders, while the inherited betrayal, which has prevailed through generations, meant exclusion from the ethnic community. Not knowing which side to take, Seta now realizes that she must find out about Casard's lost name.

As a third generation Armenian-American, Seta's double orientation is characterized by the juxtaposition of two worlds -one Armenian, the other American- in the novel. Seta sees herself as "half Seta, half Loon", the former referring to her Armenian-ness and the latter to her American-ness (7). Descriptions of physical appearance, such as "my hair was blond then, but at the roots it was already turning dark", dominate the story and further strengthen Seta's in-betweeness (87). What she reveals after a church congregation also reveals Seta's sense of displacement between

her American-ness and Armenian-ness: “At the door, I kissed my maas and placed it on my tongue. As it dissolved into my stomach, I made a wish, I wished that I were pure Armenian” (97). Although, the word “pure” refers to her affinity to become Armenian, she is aware that she is not. This orientation in her statement shows us that she was born American but she has to struggle to be an Armenian. What she has to do is to free her exilic self through negotiations between her Armenian-ness and American-ness.

This in-betweenness also exists in language. Armenian and English serve for different purposes in Seta’s life. From her birth onwards, Seta has spoken English as her mother tongue. However, Armenian is a language she has learnt from her ethnic circle, particularly from her grandmother, who communicates her truths in English and Armenian: “In Armenian it was food, greetings, songs, days of the week. In English she taught me atrocity, Indignities and Turk, her word for butchers and thieves” (90). This duality in language even causes Seta to feel estranged when she meets a Turkish person in her future life. Seta is surprised to see that it is just another common person in this world unlike her grandmother’s implantation of her negative emotions. In addition to different uses of Armenian and English, the reader often witness the repetition of the phrase *Gar oo chugar*<sup>58</sup> throughout the book, along with italicized words in Armenian or Turkish followed by a comma and their English equivalent. If it were solely written in English, we would conclude that the novel addressed to the readers of the Anglophone world. The same would be true for the Armenophone reading public in the United States if it were written in Armenian. Why, then, does the author use two different linguistic medium to mean the same meaning? Such an attempt on the part of the author can be interpreted in two ways: either the author wants to introduce culturally coded words signifying ethnic identity to the mainstream American culture to politicize her identity or it might be seen as an unconscious attempt made to negotiate the ever warring sides: Armenian-ness and American-ness.

Differences in language and in culinary practices between the two cultures further strengthen Seta’s feelings of displacement. Comparing Casard’s kitchen and American food practices, Seta says: “Packages entering her home were scrutinized, anything fresh-frozen, concentrated or vacuum packed never found the promised land of

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<sup>58</sup> Meaning “there was and there was not”, “once upon a time” in mainstream English.

her kitchen” (47). Such differences in food habits also cause conflicts for Christmas celebration rituals. At Christmas dinners, Casard is irritated by the serving of American foods like Jell-O, which she uses to mock George’s American-ness. (101). In fact, Christmas celebration is itself a conflict for the Armenian-American children in the novel because they celebrate it on a different day upon Casard’s insistence, as Seta explains: “pure Armenians celebrated on January 6” (93). Again, Armenian purity is something Seta will never have despite her constant attempts to achieve it. Although George acts like a mediator, and tries to console his children by telling them how lucky they are for having double Christmas celebration with double cuisines is a big dilemma for Seta, who feels in-between.

Religion is another cultural signifier underlying Seta’s division between her Armenian and American identities: “Casard wanted us raised in the Armenian Apostolic Church, while Dad and Momma agreed we were Americans first” (91). Religion is not only a matter of faith but also a cultural determiner in the Armenian ethnic circles. It is central to how one celebrates special days, and perceives the world around him/her. Therefore, Seta’s division between the Armenian and the American religious practices makes her worse because choosing a particular side among these two means the deprivation from the other.

Differences in social manners and the cultural mind-set also add up to Seta’s feelings of homelessness. Seta reflects upon how her romantic Armenian mother and her rational American father are far removed from each other in their cultural perceptions: Seta’s mother Araxie dreams of buying a house with a Ferrari red door, while George’s approach to buying a house is more moderate:

George could not see Araxie’s dream. For him, it was enough to witness her joy and manage the steady accumulation of funds in the bank. . . But George was a realist, and what he could not reconcile himself to was a future he imagined just beyond the headlights, a future where he and Araxie would have to compromise compromise compromise and Araxie, being such a dreamer, would wind up disappointed. (75)

Differences in social manners also appear during Casard's funeral, when George plays "Moon River" on the piano to cool down the tense atmosphere caused by Araxie's insistent behavior. However, George's well intentioned behavior triggers back since the women of the Armenian Relief Society present at Casard's wake express their discontentment with their despising looks directed at George. The women of the Armenian Relief Society start singing "Mer Hairenik", the Armenian national anthem<sup>59</sup>, counter attacking George's "Moon River". Such cultural challenges make Seta feel lonesome and disappointed in her struggle to find her "home": "I thought: they will never own me, not the Armenians, not Dad or Momma- not anyone" (187).

Another challenge facing Seta is to make her Armenian self acknowledged by the white society at large. At a dinner with her boyfriend Frank's family, Seta feels her "otherness" in the eyes of Mr. and Mrs. Agostini, Frank's parents. The Agostinis imply Araxie's separation from her husband and her affair with an Armenian: "It is such a shame what's happened, Seta. Mr. Agostini and I think it's a real shame. You hear about these things but what can you do? . . . We want you to know that you are welcome in this house anytime" (327). Treated like an orphan by the "happy American family", Seta again feels lost. Juxtaposed against her broken home, this "happy American family" makes Seta feel that she is not one of them. The same orphan-like treatment is also experienced by Casard, who was outcasted by the whites when she first came to the United States, and by Araxie as well, who submitted herself to white culture by rejecting her mother's cultural impositions. Such feelings caused Casard and Araxie to behave with excessive pride. As for Seta, who does not want to inherit the "indignities", this case is resolved differently.

Seta also tries to prove herself to the white students at school. One of her Armenian friends, Theresa, is outcasted by the popular white students of the school. Theresa's early physical growth during her adolescence and the smell emanating from her body become a matter of mocking by her popular white peers. For fear of being outcasted by her white peers, Seta betrays Theresa by gossiping around her affair with a man older than her, Bob. Furthermore, Seta deciphers how Bob called There as

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<sup>59</sup> "My fatherland". Armenia was not independent during this time. However, the national anthem was retained from the pre-Soviet independence of Armenia, which has also used the same anthem after 1990s.

“Suzane”, which, in fact, referred to Theresa’s Armenian name “Shushan”. After Seta discloses her friend’s secret, the whole town starts gossiping about Theresa’s affair. Taking up sides with her American friends, and betraying her Armenian peer soon disturbs Seta, which finds its expression in the Biblical story of Abel and Cain: “And in the land of Haiastan, Abel’s blood cried out from the ground: *Murderer! Oh, vile wicked brother! Hear the cry of my blood and know that you have betrayed me!*” (245). Seta explains that the story of Cain and Abel portrays the duality of human nature, which is both “good and evil, conscious and unconscious, prodigal and lost, heaven and hell” (246). What she had done to Theresa causes Seta to feel a deep sorrow and regret, which brings about self-questioning. The story of Cain and Abel guides Seta to contemplate and then conclude why she had committed such a betrayal: “We can not help yearning to forget, while recalling with subtle fondness that in every murder there was a bit of love and in every love a bit of murder” (246). Committing something against her community, Seta correlates her betrayal to a murder arousing from love, which is inevitable to forget. This brings us to Casard’s former emphasis on the importance of remembrance and continuity. Previously, Seta’s mother and grandmother had consulted to suppression as a way of resolving their betrayals. Casard’s suppression had manifested itself with her excessive protection of Armenian cultural values to maintain her connection with Armenian-ness, whereas Araxie had preferred choosing *odars*. What conclusion does Seta infer from her betrayal then? The answer can be found in Theresa’s facing Seta about her betrayal:

*Toon al.* It touches you, too.

As I bowed my head she, who had always been ahead of me went on to name the thing I lacked.

‘You have no one,’ she declared. (259)

Upon Theresa’s reaction, Seta acquires self-realization when she states, “thing I lacked” – referring to her loneliness. Previously, this “lack” is also mentioned in Casard’s funeral when Seta expressed her fear of not belonging to anyone or anywhere. Seta’s feelings of displacement are associated with the dilemma between her Armenian-ness



and her American-ness, which caused her to betray Theresa. Like Casard and Araxie, Seta felt the obligation to choose a side. She has been unable to comprehend the meaning of betrayal and why this chain reaction has persisted through generations. Now that she has committed a betrayal like Araxie and Casard, Seta, triggered by the realization that she has no one, reaches a conclusion for resolving this legacy.

Seta's inner conflicts, that have their roots in her mother's and grandmother's excessive pride, in her growing up with double-consciousness, and in her fear of taking after the betrayers are resolved in a symbolic epiphanic dream, in which she dreams of a parade of Armenian women around the river Euphrates. One of these women is Araxie, who states that she is bound to carry the shame she inherited from her mother. Another woman explains Araxie why Casard left her mother: Casard wanted to live for future generations. The crowd demands Araxie to get on with this. Meanwhile, an unknown voice is heard, and it says: "Over the bridge the Unborn will rise, she will conduct a symphony" (346). Theresa completes this prophecy: "Then we'll rise" (347). In fact, Seta's unborn child is the main force behind the search for roots, who will finally resolve the conflicts Seta had inherited from her ethnic past.

Consequently, Seta wakes up to a reconciled past. She declares her grandmother's real name, Garod. Araxie nods and this brings an unprecedented relief for both the mother and the daughter alike. Seta states that she could almost fly since she has finished her work, and the weight of keeping the grandmother's name (yearning) as a secret has been finally lifted from her shoulders (348). Now that she is free of the curse, Seta dreams of new places to live, new journeys to make, and new lives to lead. The last chapter of the novel, "Unborn", is about Seta's new life: Seta now lives in California. She has an extramarital relationship with Lou and she is pregnant. On a visit to the hometown Memorial in Connecticut, she contemplates about what she will pass to her child. At least we know that Seta will not pass the wounds, sorrows of the past to her unborn child. Forgiveness of her mother during this visit is vital to coming to terms with her past. Knowing that Casard died without forgiveness, Seta says: "Momma, it takes a long time, but I think it is possible to forgive one's parents" (363). During the visit, Seta also dreams of Armenia, where two people talk about the shame of being Armenian: "Why – O God – are we always the martyrs? . . . If you see

yourself as one, so you will be” (367). In addition to Seta’s epiphany in her dream, these two quotations portray forgiveness as a proposal for continuing one’s life in the last chapter. The purpose of this whole resolution is crucial for an Armenian-American to continue his/her life for their children to be born. The same idea is supported by a Turkish columnist, Ayşe Hür, who relates the content of the novel to the following message: “You have passed all your pain to your children. I don’t want to pass my pain to my children. I don’t want my children to host the wounds of our history” (Hür – translation mine). As opposed to her family’s traumatic past, Seta also hopes to create a hopeful future by giving birth to her unborn baby, who essentially serves as an important motive for search for roots:

In my belly, you kick and then turn. I feel the spiraling – the wondrous spiraling – I have waited for all my life . . . What will I give you? How will my song differ from Araxie and Casard? What burden will I pass on? . . . And I wonder, what do you know of your grandmother and great-grandmother, and what do you know of me? I wonder, which part of me will you cleave to. . . daughter of Araxie, grand-daughter of Casard – who dreamed of Turkish blood swords and a muddy river and a hand letting go . . . I can almost hear Lou calling ‘Are you ready?’ (370)

To sum up, *Rise the Euphrates* epitomizes the theme of search for roots in contemporary Armenian-American literature through its portrayal of the relationships between three successive generations. The story-teller Seta’s relationship with her mother and grandmother crucially determine her identity construction. Seta constructs a self narrative, her story through negotiating her Armenian-ness and her American-ness. Seta searches for her roots in 1915 deportations, in her relations with her grandmother - the epitome of Armenia, in her in-betweenness (*Hay* vs. *Odar*), and in the inherited traumas and wounds of the past. Now that Seta has made a contract with the Old World, she now knows how to deal with her in-between position. Seta realizes that she will constantly have to reconstruct her identity between her Armenian-ness and her American-ness to feel at “home”. This self-knowledge and self-realization acquired

through forgiving the past and living with hope for the unborn generations of the Armenian-Americans, is announced to other Armenian-Americans to encourage them in their search for roots when Seta asks: “Are you ready?”

## **B. Michael J. Arlen and *Passage to Ararat***

*'Fathers and sons are always different . . . But they are also the same . . .'*

*William Saroyan – Passage to Ararat*<sup>60</sup>

The son of the Armenian-British writer Dickran Kouyoumdjian, Michael J. Arlen was born in London and migrated to the United States during the 1940s. After graduating from Harvard University, he became a reporter for *Life* magazine and then worked as a TV critic for *The New Yorker*. His two famous works, *Exiles* (1970) and *Passage to Ararat* (1975), deal with Armenian themes, in which Arlen's complicated relationship with his father highly surfaces. Arlen's grandfather, Sarkis, who was very active in Armenian issues, fled from Turkey to Bulgaria and then to England during the early 1900s. In England, the father Kouyoumdjian tried to fit in the society as a popular literary figure during the 1920s by suppressing his Armenian-ness and adopting an English name and surname (pseudonym Michael Arlen). In most of his father's works, the Armenian themes are observed quite rarely, which is generally regarded by literary critics and his son as a suppression of his Armenian identity. However, the junior Arlen tried to understand his Armenian-ness by exploring his relationship with his father in *Exiles* for the first time, questioning ethnic awareness with regard to the family problems he went through. The Anglo-Saxon, cool and analytical personality of the father prevailed in most works of Arlen. As opposed to his son's celebration of Armenian ethnicity, the father adopted an English name and expressed his gladness over this change, an indicator of refusing Armenian pride as stated in *Exiles*. This complicated relationship between the father and the son also appears in *Say Goodbye to Sam* (1984) (Calonne 299-301). According to Margaret Bedrosian, the exile status of Arlen's parents makes the young writer disoriented and causes him to carry out his half finished report on effacing the unresolved ethnicity by writing *Passage to Ararat* (126-127). This book appeared at a time when ethnicity began to emerge as a way of

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<sup>60</sup> Pg. 54.

expressing ethnic pride because until the 1970s, it was common for foreigners to change their names and family names so as to assimilate into the Anglo-American culture in the United States (Calonne 301). *Passage to Ararat* is one of the first Armenian-American novels, which pioneered the tradition of searching for roots as a central theme, portraying the protagonists' self-quests for ethnic identity formation. *Passage to Ararat* is an autobiographical work, whose story line is highly infused with new historicism: The book gives historical information about the Armenians from a variety of sources, among which we can see Xenophon's *Anabasis*, Movses Khorenatsi's *History of Armenia*, Dickran Boyajian's *Armenia: The Case for a Forgotten Genocide*, Robert Curzon's *Travels in Armenia* and Avedis Sanjian's *Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts, 1301-1408* - to name a few (Calonne 301). The plot begins with Michael Arlen in New York, at the age of forty. In the opening lines, Arlen declares his purpose: "At a particular time in my life, I set out on a voyage to discover for myself what is to be Armenian" (3). This journey of self-discovery is initiated by an interest aroused by the father's detachment from his Armenian-ness. Thereafter, the protagonist, for the first time, makes contact with the Armenian communities in the United States, followed by his travels between Armenia and Turkey. The story ends back in New York with Arlen's inner monologues about identity construction. The theme of search for roots runs parallel with the plot. Arlen's relationship with his father, his attempts to mentally define the boundaries of Armenia, his reflections on historical events, his identity schisms and solutions are tactfully incorporated into the plot structure.

Arlen's relationship with his father constitutes the first stage of his search for roots. His relationship with his father is of vital importance since this relation is at the center of Arlen's attempts to find his "true self". Many canonical authors such as D.H. Lawrence, Franz Kafka, Charles Bukowski, Thomas Wolfe put emphasis on the meaning of fatherhood as explained by Henry Miller below:

Why is the Oedipal so dominant in Lawrence's work . . . Because it is the central theme of the artist's conflict with life, the root pattern of his struggle to emancipate himself, to raise himself to fatherhood – that is to restore the great religious motive of life . . . This search for God and

fatherhood is only the expression of the search for one's true self. (qtd. in Calonne 299)

Accordingly, the relationship between the writer and his father is repeatedly explored throughout the story. Like Seta's grandmother (Casard) in *Rise the Euphrates*, the father here serves as a connection with the Old World, enabling Arlen to find out about the deeper meanings of his ethnicity. However, Arlen's situation contrasts with Seta's in that Arlen feels detached from a grandfather he already lacks since the grandparent is expected to teach him the Old World values, for which his father has no admiration: "'Your grandfather,' an elderly Armenian once told me, 'was very active in Armenian affairs.' Sometimes it was hard to believe that my father had had a father – this more distant father I had never seen" (190). Arlen's unfamiliarity with his grandfather underlies his detachment from him, whereas his alienation to his father stems from the father's suppression of his Armenian-ness, like Seta's mother Araxie in *Rise the Euphrates*. The father's situation can be explained with the concept of "Destitution", the second stage in the immigrant adaptation process: Destitution refers to the immigrant's status of feeling nowhere (refer to diaspora section).

In the first chapter of his book, Arlen gives details about his father's detachment from the Armenian subjects, which arouses more curiosity about the reason of this suppression on the part of the writer. Arlen states that the father "had been Armenian" referring to his switch from Armenian identity to the English (later Anglo-American) identity through citizenship (3). The father never speaks Armenian at home, nor does he write anything about the Armenians in his works. During Arlen's childhood, the mother calls his father with his original name "Dikran". The author finds his father's original name strange, guessing that it might be kind of private name. The father thinks his Armenian name is "ridiculous and unpronounceable" and Arlen states that his father's Armenian-ness had always been a "hazy and remote matter" (4). Moreover, the father frequently associates Armenian-ness with negative behaviors: "Why can't these Armenians ever do things simply?" or "Now isn't this just like an Armenian!" (8). He even goes further saying that Armenian is an "impossible" language to teach when his visiting brother asks why he didn't teach Armenian to his son (8). Arlen's father also

avoids any issue related to the 1915 events. When Mr. Hagopian, an Armenian professor, wants to discuss a literary project with the father, he keeps ignoring his phone calls, pretending to be out: “He’ll only talk about Armenian problems . . . He’ll go on for hours. They end up boring to you death . . . They are a sweet people, but you can’t let them get too close” (11). Besides this cultural detachment, the father’s funeral is held at a Greek church instead of an Armenian one, which is also a sign of his religious alienation. Arlen’s Greek mother also states that the father always wanted to be free of the Armenians (12). The father’s alienation to his Armenian-ness is stimulated by his fear of being different than the mainstream American life. His father’s alienation stirs different feelings in Arlen; hate and love at the same time (12). Arlen deeply wants to resolve the mystery of his ethnicity because he feels “haunted” by the Armenian issues (11). “We were strangers” says Arlen, referring to his relationship with his father (12). The author finds it essential to fulfill this gap created by his father, who did not teach his son anything about his Armenian-ness.

Secondly, Arlen’s curiosity urges him to explore the boundaries of Armenia so as to identify his ethnicity. Initially, the author imagines Armenia as a “fragile network of restaurants inhabited by people who seemed to live elsewhere-in somebody else’s country” (10). This is because the Armenian restaurant, Golden Horn in New York, seems to be the only place where his father feels comfortable with his Armenian-ness; there, the father socialized with Armenian people: “Say hello to him from me!” (9). The writer notices that this is not the usual way of having conversation between Americans, relating this to his father’s slight affections for the Armenian background. The restaurant also serves Armenian dishes such as dolmas and kebabs. However, to Arlen’s surprise, he later finds out that they were mainly Turkish. The Armenian restaurant determines the initial boundaries of the Armenian sphere in the imagination of the writer with its decoration: the picture of Mount Ararat and a photograph of Saroyan and the father, Armenian customers as well as its cuisine and ways of socialization.

The Armenian boundaries are further defined in the writer’s mind by way of Arlen’s interactions with his wife. The writer states that his American identity seemed, on the surface, as a satisfactory way of living with children, career and a wife at the age

of forty. However, his wife's inquiries about the Armenian culture push him more to discover his ethnic side:

My wife said, 'Did you know that Mr. Ararat was in Armenia?' She had been reading one of my new Armenian books.

I said I knew.

'Do you suppose Noah was Armenian?'

I said I didn't think it worked that way.

Later, she said 'Tell me about the Kings of Nairi'

'I don't know about them,' I said.

'It says here they were your ancestors . . . ' (15)

His wife's inquiries make Arlen aware of his lack of knowledge about his ethnic identity. This situation, however, annoys the writer especially when his wife makes a list of famous Armenians. Arlen wants his wife to stop listing these people because he resembles this act to making a list of "famous graduates of a small out-of-the-way college", and considers it as an "Armenian" thing to do (24). In the long run though, he admits his ignorance and reads a lot about Armenia: how Armenia was founded out of the mingling of Nairi, Hittite and Urartu peoples in the ancient Anatolia, the language, Biblical information on Mount Ararat and the existence of Armenian Kingdoms in Persian texts. His inner monologue, which marks his discovery of the history of his ethnicity, ends up with more curiosity: "Were they noble or ignoble? Winners or losers? What kind of a Crazy nation was that: Were the kings of Nairi winners or losers? . . . Had they always been part of someone else's story? They seemed to swim beneath the surface, far away in eddies of time" (20). Obviously, the wife's encouragement of Arlen to discover his ethnic identity brings about more questions to be answered for the author. These questions and their answers are vital to the story telling since Arlen raises these questions both to himself and to the reader to find out whether a country like Armenia ever existed at a time when it was ruled by the USSR. Given that physical and metaphysical borders of ethnicities are central to the construction of identity, Michael



Arlen, by narrating Armenia's history over and over again, relocates the borders of Armenia in his mind, which is in fact a search for his roots.

The Armenian borders are further defined when Arlen interacts with the Armenian community in the United States. There, he encounters two different groups of Armenians: One of them is deeply involved in the Armenian issues, whereas the other community members are, like his father, are living assimilated and unconcerned about anything Armenian. Arlen's initial encounter with the first group occurs when he is invited by an old Armenian man to the Armenian cathedral. Arlen chats over coffee with the Armenians and feels "there-wherever there was", referring to the Armenian sphere (14). When Arlen meets the man the second time in the old man's apartment, he witnesses how these people feel about the deportations in the Old Country: their traumatic experience is echoed when the same old man says: "My father committed no crime . . . had done nothing wrong" (25). This outcry is repeated throughout the story. Feeling annoyed, Arlen hates to recall these outcries repetitively:

Later, I thought, this can not be Armenia, this can not be what it is. Tears. Stories of evil times. Dark interiors and the croon of old men. 'My father had committed no crime.' But he was killed, wasn't he, and his brothers were killed, and his sisters were destroyed, and this old man – this boy-had been made to run and hide and to become small in his fear. What kind of son was that? What kind of father? (23)

Shocked by what he hears, Arlen deeply resents his father, who has never told him about such matters. Instead, Arlen's father has tried to bring up his son in the Anglosphere so as to keep him away from such issues. Arlen is deeply moved with his newly acquired knowledge about his Armenian past, and this makes him further question his father's alienation to his Armenian identity. Arlen can not bring himself to believe that this is the only representation of his ethnicity: "I know that somewhere there exists a different type of Armenian, prosperous, vigorous, robust type of Armenian, who does not live in dark rooms and weep about the past" (24). The "different type of Armenian(s)" are but those who constitute the second type of

Armenian communities in the United States. The author meets them at a concert event in the Armenian cathedral, where he sees more robust Armenians in a Bohemian fashion with drinks being served and conversations taking place in a decoration adorned with expensive paintings. In the event, Arlen meets an Armenian named Bud and he later finds out that Bud is originally Yeprad, meaning Euphrates in Armenian, and that his parents came from Marash in the Old Country. Bud states that he is not as active in the Armenian matters as he “should” be. Unlike the first group of Armenians, this second group consists of the assimilated Armenians, who neither recall the deportations, nor ever weep over it. Arlen is even doubtful about the existence of such Armenians, when he asks himself “Were these the Kings of Nairi?” (26). After experiencing the two faces of the same community, Arlen’s urge to discover his roots is further stimulated by his curiosity about the wide cultural and political gap between these two groups of Armenians. Consequently, Arlen’s encounter with different Armenians communities in the United States helps him not only draw the mental borders of Armenia, but also understand what it is to be an Armenian.

Traveling to Armenia is another way for Arlen to draw his mental borders. Before setting out for Armenia, Arlen has a friendly conversation with the famous Armenian author, William Saroyan. They talk about Arlen’s father and why he had been so detached from the Armenian issues. Saroyan answers that everyone has different paths to take and that he should go to Erevan (52). Before long, Arlen sets out for the Old Country with his wife: “All my life, Armenia and Armenians had been part of a dream; it and they were *out there* somewhere, hazy, nearly invisible. Now I was traveling into the dream. I would see what I would see. I would find what I would find” (56). Arlen’s emphasis on “out there” connotes the author’s desire to define the borders of his imagination about his ethnicity. Yet, seeing Armenia in person triggers ambivalent feelings in Arlen. When he first encounters Mount Ararat, Arlen says: “You can’t *own* a mountain like that . . . I am not of those Returning Sons” (60). Arlen is torn between the denial and admittance of his heritage. He declares that Mount Ararat has no meaning for him while he is trying to hide his tears. Arlen feels in-between with his two identities. On the one hand, he is an American detached from the Armenian issues. On the other hand, he longs to feel his Armenian-ness. When he sees people speaking

Armenian and walking on the streets, he has a strange feeling that he wants to embrace the locals. However, his Anglo-Saxon rationality asserts that these people are also strangers to him. These mixed feelings find their best expression in the following monologue: “You have come this far. You must make a connection” (63). Nevertheless, the author is unable to make that connection at first.

Traveling to Armenia, Arlen and his wife meet a local called Sarkis. Sarkis constantly talks about the victimization of Armenians or tries to prove that Armenian people are good: “Armenian men make wonderful fathers” (66), “We have some great writers” (80), “The suffering of the Armenian people has been enormous” (69), “We Armenians are peaceful people” (91), “Armenian blood does not incline to violence” (92), “The Armenians did nothing . . . They were the slaughtered” (126). The writer finds Sarkis’s reflections on Armenian-ness no different than those he heard in the United States. In fact, the author is extremely annoyed: “Sarkis has been trying to *define* me as an Armenian – but a certain kind of Armenian. Those damned massacres, I though. That chauvinism, such a chauvinism of misfortune!” (79). Obviously, Arlen’s attempt to define Armenian-ness is far removed from the one, which the mainstream Armenians, represented by Sarkis and the diaspora communities in the United States, usually define. Arlen feels estranged, deeply frustrated and disappointed, calling such agitations the “Armenian refrain”, which is supposed to evoke compassion. However, he is unable to feel it due to his feelings of shame (126). In like manner, when Sarkis asks Arlen to place a flower on the Martyrs Monument on their first arrival, Arlen does not meet his expectations from an Armenian. Sarkis’s constant agitations over those who were killed in 1915 convey no meaning beyond “roar(s)” in Arlen’s ears (72). Deeply disturbed by such negative definitions of Armenian-ness, Arlen feels that it is very strange to “have no country” (73). He feels distanced from such matters like his father, whom he once blamed for the same detachment. Later, troubled by his guilty-conscience, Arlen tries to make sense of his estrangement as a way of turning against his father, which relates to the Biblical story of Abraham and Isaac<sup>61</sup>: “My father never raised his knife over me. I am no Isaac and he was no Abraham” (110). This is mainly because Armenia represents his father in the subconscious; “Fatherland, father. It is the

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<sup>61</sup> A biblical story, in which God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac, on Mount Moriah.

same thing” says Sarkis to underline this correlation (136). Arlen expects Sarkis to set a good example of Armenian-ness for him, in other words, he wishes to find in Sarkis what he could not in his father. Meanwhile, Arlen realizes that “Even Armenians don’t seem to know about Armenians” (103). So far, Arlen has met the Armenians in the United States and has been to Armenia to dig into the surface his father had created by suppressing his Armenian-ness. However, he has been unable to find a good ethnic example, whom he can learn from. Sarkis and the American-Armenians are what he calls the weeping type, whereas Arlen’s term for the other group “Nairi Kings”, including his father, are suppressed and assimilated. Consequently, Arlen’s trip to Armenia and his experiences with Sarkis galvanizes Arlen’s urge to search for his roots (the father) because Arlen has been feeling indifferent to both groups. Apparently, his search for roots will take other routes in the construction of his Armenian identity.

Having been to Armenia, Arlen is torn between feelings of resentment and love for his father. Accusing his father of having depriving him of his history, his culture, Arlen states:

My secret is that I have always hated being Armenian. I haven’t ignored it or been shy about it – I have hated it. Because I was given the values of Europeans, *they* despised the Armenians. And I have hated my father not, as I have thought all these years, for being too strong a figure or too authoritarian but because he, so to speak, stepped back and gave me to the Europeans . . . And then, the rage had burst, I thought, Ah fathers! How hard it is to be a father. And I thought of mine: his cool, elegant, impassive face, the face that sometimes smiled in public but rarely in private; the sad eyes; the English manner; his care that I become English, American—anything but Armenian. (102-103)

According to David Stephen Calonne, this monologue indicates Arlen’s attempt to free himself from the Armenian self-hatred, which alienated him to his ancestral past and heritage (302). Obviously, the narrator feels caught in-between. He is frustrated against his father’s suppression and submission. Yet, he also tries to empathize with him and

overcome the difficulties of being an Armenian in a foreign country, where the stereotypes of “merchant” or “starving” wounds one’s dignity. Under such circumstances, one would even change his/her name. Despite his rage, Arlen, looking at Erevan’s sky at night, becomes merciful and forgives his father, saying “I love him anyway” (110).

In Armenia, this forgiveness is extended with the author’s epiphany about the behaviors of all Armenians, including his father and himself. This epiphany is ignited with Sarkis’s personal observations of the writer’s initial detachment from Armenian issues. As Arlen firstly distances himself from these subjects and asks questions about Turkey and the Turks, Sarkis gets frustrated and says, “You want to tear down your father” (136), “You are very analytical you know. You have this detachment . . . You must respect your father” (138). This recalls the concept of shame in *Rise the Euphrates*: any objection to the ethnic values or alternative points of view possesses a threat to the survival of ethnic culture. This is regarded as a betrayal to one’s ethnic group. Since Sarkis represents the Armenians in the eye of the writer, Arlen is reminded by a significant other that he is betraying his community. Feeling this way, the author contemplates on the ups and downs of this matter with monologues. While Sarkis’s words still echo in Arlen’s mind during a spontaneous visit to an Armenian museum, the writer sees a portrait called “Merchant of Erzurum”. Arlen considers the merchant’s posture as dignified and elegant, assuming that he must have been a communal leader. At this specific moment, Arlen can not help wondering whether the merchant had good relationships with the Turks, whether his son was called an “infidel” by the neighbors, or whether he had any saying in an authority, which suppressed Armenians. This questioning leads Arlen to imagine his father in the same blue velvet hat the merchant wears, bringing an out epiphany:

And it came to me then and there that, all long, the two sets of mannerisms had been a variant of a single response – this cool, ‘un-Armenian’ control and the shrill, ‘Armenian’ excitability. They were twin symptoms, one bursting wildly outward, the other absorbed coldly inward. The merchant, my father, Sarkis-and how many others? –were

the same. . . I realized at that moment that to be an Armenian, to have lived as an Armenian, was to have become something crazy. Not ‘crazy’ in the colloquial sense of quirky or charmingly eccentric . . . But crazy: crazed, that deep thing- deep where the deep-sea souls of human beings twist and turn. (142)

Arlen’s epiphany is crucial because he now diagnoses what it is to be an Armenian. These “twin symptoms” of Armenian-ness make up a unified Armenian identity despite their different ethnic performances. The term “craziness” was foreshadowed by Saroyan before (48). In fact, Saroyan was the person, who told Arlen that it is a “must” to go to Armenia (50), making Arlen realize its existence: “I found out that there was an Armenia . . . but it *is* there; it is something” (51). Arlen’s epiphany makes him empathize both with the suppressed/assimilated Armenians (Kings of Nairi he calls) and weeping types, which he previously referred to as “the chauvinists of misfortune”. Arlen’s empathic approach now unifies his torn identity, whereby he puts himself in the place of different types of Armenians: “I, too, was the man in the blue velvet hat” (144). Arlen realizes that he has been behaving like his father with his Anglo-Saxon detachment but feels sorry as well for those who went through the unfortunate experiences during 1915. Through these realizations, the author accepts his hyphenated identity. Even before leaving Armenia, he wishes to embrace Sarkis, calling him “an alien face that I wished to embrace”, and puts a flower on the Martyrs Monument saying: “I thought suddenly that I was at home . . . It was the flattest, simplest, lightest of all feelings” (254). The author also finds out that Sarkis and himself “were both Armenian” and that he was going “home – to another home” (259). To conclude, Arlen’s journey to Armenia is also an inner journey made to determine the mental borders of his Armenian-ness. His visit to Armenia, connects his “homeland” and the Old Country, whereby negotiates his American-ness and Armenian-ness. This negotiation also results in Arlen’s acceptance of his hybrid identity: the rational and detached Anglo-American and the “crazy” nostalgic Armenian.

The mental drawing of Armenian borders is further extended by Arlen’s visit to Turkey in the story. On the way back home, the couple spends a few days in Istanbul.

There, Arlen tries to find Armenian traces through interactions with the locals. In some cases, he is disappointed to find out that the locals refrain from acknowledging Armenian contributions to the society. It is only the Dolmabahçe Palace, where the writer sees an acknowledgement of the Armenians in the works of the architect Balian. However, in most of his interactions, Arlen wants to know about anything Armenian around. Responses like “There is nothing Armenian around here . . . It is Greek”, makes Arlen frustrated. He assumes that “Armenian connection had been erased” (273). Nonetheless, he also criticizes his Armenian urge, defining his frustration as a “barely suppressed chauvinism in Istanbul”, and resembling himself to the former Armenians he had met (275).

The writer is further disappointed after he and his wife pay a visit to an Armenian school and church, where the priest avoids discussing how it is to be an Armenian in Turkey (277). One can still interpret Arlen’s recurring ethnic shifts when he refers to himself as an American due to his growing up in the United States. After talking to the priest at the Armenian Church, Arlen relates the priest’s avoidance of the Armenian topics to his growing up in Turkey because Arlen considers the priest as a Turkish citizen like he considers himself as an American there (277). Interestingly enough, Arlen also finds someone, who has the same name and surname with his father –Dikran Kouyoumjian- on the phone book after leaving an “unwanted” conversation with two professors who support the Turkish view about the 1915 deportations. The writer finds out that they share same roots from Bulgaria. Moreover, Dikran states that he is learning English to immigrate to Australia because he feels outcasted by the *gavur* labeling and adds: “Turks are nice people, gentle people . . . But sometimes they have a craziness” (286). Arlen’s conversation with the ‘artificial’ father makes him realize that Turkish-Armenians feel suppressed like his father used to be. Arlen’s attempts to relate every experience to his father’s suppression can also be traced in his accounts of the successes of Dikran’s son, who is in Australia (287). The same attitude occurs when Arlen meets the locals of Armenia and asks them questions, trying to find out Armenian traces about father-son relationships in their community. Again, visiting Turkey and trying to find out Armenian traces there helps the author draw the boundaries of Armenia in his mind.

Arlen's reflections on the Armenian history are another way for his search for roots. During his travels and interactions with people, the author breaks the story line, inserting historical accounts into the story line. He restates the history of the Armenians and their relations with the Ottomans: A brief history of the Ottoman Empire and the 1915, Armenian deportations are reflected upon, citing a variety of sources such as Robert Curzon's *Travels in Armenia* (165), in which the Armenians are referred to as "niggers" of Turks; Arnold Toynbee's reports (157), in which Armenian instincts for being a merchant and tradesmen are mentioned; Bernald Lewis's *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (134), in which segregation of the Armenian *millet* is the main topic; James Bryce's *Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire: 1915-1916* (219), in which the relationships among the *millets* are mentioned; eye-witness accounts during the deportations (226-229) and various others. These historical elaborations also surface in the inner monologues of the writer, who is in search of his father. In one such monologue, Arlen comes up with logical reasoning and understanding to elaborate upon his ethnic history: "Such is life. Such surely are the facts of life and human condition – of the universal context of pain and misery. Has there not always been torture and mass murder?" (242). Arlen's American side views the experience of deportations as a natural part of history. Nevertheless, his Armenian side is deeply touched by the losses during the deportations, which becomes evident when he says: "What happened can not be understood from history, political or technology" (246). The author finds all the written and the prescribed descriptions of the traumatic Armenian experience insufficient. He tries to find out about the reason(s) of the 1915 deportations in his monologues because Arlen considers that "the question of what happened was to be answered for the living" if there was such a question at all (246).

Through his historical evaluations, Arlen is connected to his ethnic identity and his father. He feels that recreation was essential for the Armenian nation after the historical consequences of successive losses and that self pity was of no use. The author concludes that unfortunate historical events brought about an ingrown anger, which sometimes resulted in immature/chauvanist behaviors as in the case of Sarkis or with self-deception (detachment) in the case of his father (241). The writer further explores this historical imprint on his father's psyche, remembering how he emphasized the



importance of self-defense, saying: “you have to know to defend yourself” (191). What Arlen learns from the historical sources helps him empathize with his father, who had a broken connection with his son. Therefore, Arlen concludes that he understands his father very well because he is a silent and a helpless man in the “blue velvet hat”, like the man in the merchant portrait. Arlen diagnoses the Armenians with “self-hatred”, which, as he explains, stems from Armenians’ low self-esteem due to their losses in the history, and their internalization of being labeled as *gavur*, both of which gave way to inner suppression. Furthermore, Arlen believes that most Armenian sons, like his father, are abandoned from their Armenian-ness as a result of their historical psyche ridden with guilt and anger (250). To summarize, Arlen’s forays into the Armenian history in *Passage to Ararat* also help him understand his father and find his roots through a constant re-articulation of his Armenian-ness.

Arlen’s double consciousness, Armenian and American, and his attempts to find out about himself can also be discerned in his social interactions. During his school years in England, Arlen is inquired by a Scottish boy about his nationality:

‘Are you French, or what?’ MacGregor asked me one day.

‘Of course I’m not French,’ I said.

‘You have to be French. You live in France.’

‘I’m English,’ I said.

‘You *can*’t be English!’ said MacGregor.

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Later, in our small room, MacGregor glanced up from the comic he was reading. ‘Har-meenian?’ he said. ‘What kind of sports do they play there?’

‘I don’t know,’ I said. ‘I’ve never been there. Probably the same sports as here.’

‘Not cricket,’ said MacGregor.

‘Yes, cricket,’ I said. ‘Anyway I’m English.’

‘You can’t be *English*,’ said MacGregor. (5-6)

Similarly, on a trip to Armenia, Arlen encounters an English tourist, who again asks where he comes from. Arlen replies that he is American and asks the English tourist what he thinks about the locals – the Armenians. “They are really quite charming . . . Of course, I wouldn’t *haggle* with any of them if I were you” answers the tourist, which further complicates Arlen’s sense of identity (114). In addition, Western stereotyping of Armenians as merchants and traders problematizes Arlen’s self-definition, which is evident when Arlen inquires Sarkis: “Have you ever thought of yourself as a trader? . . . In other parts of the world, Armenians are often thought of that way – as traders. Buying, selling . . .” (116-117). His search for roots is in fact a journey he makes between his Armenian-ness and American-ness. What Arlen realizes is that he is neither American nor Armenian but an amalgamation of both. In other words, he acknowledges his hybrid identity, thereby negotiating his Armenian and American selves: “The texture of my life is American. My kin are the Armenians” (290). Such self-identification once again connects Arlen to the Old World and his father.

To sum up, Arlen’s willingness to understand his father’s (Dikran/Michael) detachment from his Armenian-ness, and thereby his own alienation to his cultural roots paves the way for his search for roots. Arlen constructs a mental map of Armenian-ness through his social interactions, his visits to Armenia and Turkey, and his constant re-significations of what it is to be an Armenian. This mental map provides Arlen with self-knowledge and self-understanding. His forays into the Armenian history guide Arlen to see into the reasons underlying the Armenian suppression. Such epiphany also helps him understand his father’s detachment, which leads him to empathize with the father’s life-long denial of his Armenian identity. Arlen’s physical journeys between the United States and Armenia are paralleled by his inner journeys between his two selves, one Armenian, the other American. Journeying back and forth between these two identities, Arlen constantly negotiates and reconstructs his subjectivity. This is an unending process, which Arlen has to go through for his self-integrity and self-knowledge. It is this process of traveling between the borders, which enable Arlen to accept and make peace with his Armenian self.

### C. Peter Balakian and *Black Dog of Fate*

*There is a cloud in the air—  
Is it smoke?  
Over there is Moush  
And the road is lumpy  
Whoever goes is not coming back—  
What's going on?*

*A Common Armenian and Turkish Folk Song – Black Dog  
of Fate*<sup>62</sup>

Traumatic historical memories leave their stamp on the collective psyche of their witnesses and survivors, who consciously or unconsciously transfer their nightmarish experiences to their descendents. The resulting reaction to this transfer is that the descendents attempt to uncover (returning) the mystery of those as a way of reconciliation. The Armenian-American poet, writer, translator, editor and professor, Peter Balakian is one of these contemporary Armenian literary figures, who have taken up this thematic pattern in his works. Balakian spent his childhood in the quiet suburbs of New Jersey with his Armenian family in the 50s and the 60s without ever learning anything about Armenia's tragic history, and hearing about the stereotype "starving Armenians" in the United States (Balakian 52). After earning his M.A. in New York University, he completed his dissertation studies in Brown University, and then started working in Colgate University in 1980. He is now a professor of Humanities in the department of English, and the director of Creative Writing in the same university. Balakian is renowned with his poetry books as well as *Theodore Roethke's Far Fields* (1989). He is also the author of the critically acclaimed memoir *Black Dog of Fate* (1997), which became a *New York Times* Notable Book, and won the PEN/Albrand Prize. *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response* (2003) also brought him the 2005 Raphael Lemski Prize. Moreover, he is the co-translator of

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<sup>62</sup> Pg. 186.

the book of poems *Bloody News*<sup>63</sup> *from My Friend* (1996) by the Armenian poet Siamanto, as well as of his uncle Grigoris Balakian's memoir: *The Armenian Golgotha* (2009). Many of Balakian's works appeared in major academic publications, and were translated into different languages. The famous Armenian-American figure also appeared in many radio and TV programs, in which Balakian frequently talked about his publications as well as his political views about the 1915 events (Balakian's official website).

Most of Balakian's works are based on the reflections of his inherited Armenian past and Armenian-American identity (see the essay on his poetry in Bedrosian M. 191-206). In this sense, the writer's memoir, *Black Dog of Fate*, appears to be one of his most important works with self-reflections upon his ethnic identity. Balakian refers to the memoir as a "polyphonic, multilayered memoir" in which "personal discovery and history merge" (qtd. in Perroomian 163). Hoving Tchalian elaborates upon Balakian's act of becoming Armenian as follows:

Uncovering the past, as in Balakian's phrasing, has an entirely different valence. As the speaker of his memoir, Balakian uncovers – in effect, unveils – his Armenian heritage. The sense is of something already there that needs to be identified or revealed. The analogy, in this case, is not of an expedition but of recognition. Balakian is "born" Armenian. But in the course of living his suburban New Jersey life, as the memoir tells it, he makes the requisite effort to find out about his Armenian heritage. (web)

*Black Dog of Fate* is a memoir about Balakian's search for his roots. With recourse to Balakian's childhood memories, to his discovery of a hidden truth and a subsequent trip to Syria and Lebanon<sup>64</sup>, the memoir is about Balakian's coming to terms with his ethnic identity and finding out about himself.

Balakian's family members have a leading role in his search for roots. The grandmother, especially, is central to Balakian's urge to unveil the secrets of his

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<sup>63</sup> Also a chapter's name in *Black Dog of Fate*

<sup>64</sup> The chapters about the trip to Syria and Lebanon were added in the 10th anniversary edition.

ethnicity. For the young Peter, the grandmother is the embodiment of Armenia. Balakian's relationship with his grandmother – Nafina (Armenian version of Athena) makes it possible for him to connect to his Armenian past, and to his cultural roots. During his childhood, Nafina represents a strange, unknown world for the writer. The young Peter, as an observer, is unable to understand his grandmother's behaviors, which are originated from a world foreign to him and which the writer would later correlate to the deportation experience of his grandmother. Nafina's constant overaffection with Peter, for instance, is one thing the young Peter can not make sense of. Nafina constantly asks Peter how he is or what he wants:

But she hovers around me, forever asking how I am and what I want. She keeps repeating an Armenian word, *eench*. It means "how" or "what," and is fraught with solicitousness, concern, anxiousness; and if you add all these things up in Armenian, it means love. *Eench. Eench. Eench-eh*: What's the matter? What is it? Are you OK? *Eench gooz-es*: What do you want? *Eench gooz-es oud-es*: What do you want to eat? *Eench, eench, eench. Eench* is always followed up with *yavrey*, her vernacular for the Turkish word *yavros*, which means "my little one" or "beloved," or *hokeet seerem*, which means "I love your soul." As she runs her hands along my shoulders, she tells me I'm as skinny as an unfed bird. Because I feel a bond of affection I can't explain. (4)

As the grandmother unyieldingly keeps "*eenching*" the son, Peter finds this excessive affection and care meaningless at first. However, when he is of age, Peter understands the reason underlying Nafina's then incomprehensible manners: the importance of the new generations for the Armenians:

I did not understand then what the presence of a new generation meant for a culture that had been nearly expunged from the planet only forty five years earlier, I felt strange dotting power of the word *eench* . . . Was I

sick? Was I dying of some secret disease my elders knew about and were keeping away from me? (5)

Peter also finds this overinterest of his grandma a little embarrassing, especially when he considers the possibility of being seen by his American Little League friends, and thereby being marked as a “hopeless sissy” (6). Apart from the masculinity issues here, this embarrassment is because the grandmother represents a country, which is unknown to the Americans. The environment out of Peter’s home is completely American, which is cut off from Armenia, her culture and language. Whenever the subject is the Old Country, Peter asks about its location but his parents change the topic (16). The young Peter feels totally like an alien whenever he has access to the Old World through his interaction with his grandmother (18). The Old World, which was, for Peter, “another world” then, is identified with Nafina: “. . . the old country came to mean my grandmother. Whatever it was, she was” (17). In other words, Nafina, like Seta’s grandmother in *Rise the Euphrates*, represents Armenia. Nafina is portrayed in detail by way of her posture, physical attire, language, cooking and religion. She is the legator of the Armenian culture in Peter’s Americanized Armenian family. She is the wise Old World figure with her big brown eyes (5), her cane (24), and with her ivory pipe, which frightens Peter until Nafina explains that smoking pipes is a sign of wisdom in the Old Country (16). The grandmother frequently leaves out articles and adds Armenian vocabulary when she talks in English (12). Her hands are associated with the smell of fresh lemon rind<sup>65</sup> (35) while she enthusiastically performs the cooking skills required by the Old Country’s culinary skills for her beloved grandson, such as serving *dolmas* or preparing *choeregs* together (6). Nafina also knows the Bible by heart because she used to attend one of the missionary schools in Diarbekir, where the nuns would make her clean the school whole week if she failed to recite from Bible (7). Nafina also makes cross signs and gives religious cries in Armenian, *Der Voghormya*<sup>66</sup> or *Sourp Asdvadz*<sup>67</sup>, when she feels unsafe (like her panic during the Cuban Missile Crisis) (16). All of these cultural traits of Nafina add up to Peter’s feelings of estrangement.

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<sup>65</sup> An aspect, which also applies to Casard in *Rise the Euphrates*.

<sup>66</sup> Armenian for “Lord have mercy”.

<sup>67</sup> Armenian for “Holy God”.

Nafina's Old World stories, which start with the typical Armenian phrase *Djamangeen gar oo chagar*<sup>68</sup>, further strengthen the writer's alienation, making him feel like a complete outsider (9). Of these Old World stories, the *Black Dog of Fate* is pivotal to the writer's future realization of his ethnicity. According to the story, everyone is expected to meet Fate once in his/her life. In the story, a rich beautiful woman, dressed in white silk dress with pearls around the neck, prepares the best lamb of the village for offering Fate. She stuffs the lamb with almonds and pilaf, apricots and pomegranates on the top and puts rubies in the eye sockets before offering it to Fate. After the woman knocks the door three times, Fate opens the door but refuses her harshly. Fate shows the woman the way, stating that she does not want to be bothered. Then, a very poor woman, who lives in a hut without a dime, cooks a dead black dog with wormy rotten apples to offer it to Fate. Dressed in black and smelling like rotten milk, the poor lady meets Fate. Fate tells the old woman that she had been waiting for her for a long time (9-10). After telling the story, the grandmother nods her head to confirm Peter's comprehension, but it ends up with silence because Peter, as a child, is unable to understand the point Nafina has been trying to make: "Gran, these stories of yours-they're weird, and I don't get them. . . What is fate, Gran?" (10). Nafina explains that *Pakht* (Fate) represents destiny, something unexpected, in store for him and a force bigger than himself. However, Peter can not understand what grandma has been trying to tell him until he grows up and unveils a family secret brought upon him by Fate.

In fact, these Old World stories are allegories of what Nafina experienced during the 1915 events. However, Balakian realizes the meaning(s) of these symbolically embedded stories only when he comes of age: "I would come to understand them as a part of my grandmother's story, but only after I came to understand what happened to her in 1915" (25). After Nafina's death, Peter concludes that there are two kinds of memories; one for the personal web of sensations (present life) and the other for a connection larger than life (what fate brought for the writer from the past) (28-30). In other words, the author is connected both to the present (what is experienced) and to the past memories (what was inherited); the present is embedded in the past, out of which he tries to make sense of by way of resolving its mysteries, its secrets. This connection

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<sup>68</sup> "A long time ago, there was and there wasn't."

between the present and one's inherited past makes Balakian aware of the role Fate has brought upon him:

. . . my grandmother was a strange shadow appearing now and then to remind me that there was something else I needed to know . . . She had become my *pakht*—the force of fate that called on me, whether I was ready or not, and who, like Lady Fate, was indifferent to my present moment, my station in life, or my need for security and comfort. She was history knocking on the door of the heart, and when she came knocking, her message often was opaque, symbolic, evocative. I was left to make of it what I could, but I could not escape the intrusion. (31)

Balakian feels that his grandmother has transferred her fate to himself, like the transfer of the unfinished business in *Rise the Euphrates* onto the next generations. The transfer of fate takes place a day before Nafina's death. Narrated through a flashback, the grandmother's deportation experience is let out one night when the young Peter feels delirious with fever; her husband Hagop is dead next to her, the Turkish gendarmes slap her and whip her in front of her children as Nafina says: "I saw the woman in blue. *Der Voghormya*" (35). The woman in blue represents the hope Nafina retains to survive her deportation trauma, which is symbolized with another story about *Elk*. According to the Armenian religious mythology, *Elk* is Adam's first wife, who becomes monstrous after her dismissal from heaven. As Adam is matched for Eve, *Elk* comes to hate every woman, and seeks revenge by haunting them at nights to eat their livers from their mouth. According to the grandma's story, a woman in the Old Country is haunted by *Elk*. The victim is offered help by a woman in blue, who asks her to come to her church to banish the curse of *Elk* forever. Nafina calls the savior woman in blue as *Mairig Asdvadzadzeen*<sup>69</sup> (22). This woman in blue symbolizes Nafina's hope for escaping from the burden she had previously imagined at the very moment of torment. Nevertheless, it takes the author quite long to associate such stories and Nafina's strange manners with her deportation experience. Unable to make sense out of the stories, Peter, as a child, can not only explain such things to himself, but also to his

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<sup>69</sup> Armenian for "Notre Dame, Our Lady".



American social circle: “How could I explain my Armenian grandmother to her<sup>70</sup>, when I didn’t understand Armenia myself?” (35). Balakian’s state of confusion lasts until the final chapters of his memoir when he correlates his grandmother’s condition to the fate of Armenia and the Armenians, who had no reparations for their losses but just silence after the deportations: “Her fate was the fate of Armenia in the first part of the century” (294). Balakian’s desire to unveil the secrets of his inherited past is further strengthened by way of dialoguing with other family members. This enables the author to find out more about Nafina.

The daughter of Nafina and Balakian’s mother, Arax Aroosian, is one such character in the memoir, who contributes to the writer’s struggle to establish ties with the Old World. As a typical Armenian mother, her mission is to protect and continue the cultural Armenian heritage in the family. Assertive in her ethnic identity, Arax feels anxious about her son’s ignorance about his ethnic roots. While living in the Jewish quarter on Dickerson Road, Peter covets being Jewish: “I spent half of my early childhood wanting to be Jewish. . .” (42). As a child, he finds it strange to be a Christian when all his friends are Jewish: “It was strange to be Armenian on Dickerson Road, because we seemed like we should be Jews” (44). Peter even finds Jewish features in his physical appearance. When he naively questions why his family is not Jewish, Arax responds as follows:

‘Because we’re Christians,’ she answered.

‘Why are we Christians?’

‘Our people decided to follow the teachings of Jesus.’ She paused.

‘There’s a legend that Noah’s Ark landed on Mt. Ararat in Armenia. That makes Jews and Armenians cousins.’

‘What’s Mt. Ararat?’

My mother exhaled as if she wished I would go away.

‘Mt. Ararat is one of the highest mountains in the world; it’s snowcapped; it’s our national symbol.’

‘The symbol of America?’

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<sup>70</sup> His childhood American girlfriend then.

‘No. Of Armenia.’  
‘Where’s Armenia?’

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My mother exhaled again. ‘It’s in another country.’

‘Armenia’s in another country?’

‘No, Mt. Ararat . . . well, both. Armenia and Mt. Ararat are in other countries. But, we’re American. That’s the main thing. We’re not like other Armenians. They’re too ethnic.’ (44-45)

The above dialog between the mother and the son exposes how they perceive their ethnic identity. Arax’s complicated answers make things worse for Peter, who is already confused about his identity. The son’s confusion can be traced from the way he associates Mt. Ararat with America instead of Armenia, the subject of which is avoided by the family. Although Arax’s Armenian heritage is well and alive, it is understood that she has accepted her American-ness over her Armenian-ness. In fact, such a preference of American-ness over Armenian-ness is but a way of circumventing the past traumas of the Armenians. As the mother further explains that Mt. Ararat is in Turkey, and Armenia is in the Soviet Union, Peter feels even more confused: “If only we were Jewish, I thought, things would be better” (45). Peter’s lack of knowledge about his ethnic roots as a child also extends to the level that he has no idea about the language and the history of Armenia. The ideas of the Jewish neighbors about Armenian-ness also trigger Peter’s self inquiries about the constant avoidance of the topic in the family: “He’s Armenian, but they are really one of the lost tribes” (48). Feeling humiliated, Peter exclaims his so-called Jewishness once the family decides to move to another neighborhood:

‘I’m a Jew,’ I said. My mother was silent for a moment and then replied,  
. . . “*Ghe khent tatz ness.*” (You make me crazy.)

‘I’m running away. You stink!’ I was shouting now.

My mother then said something that struck me as strange. ‘Don’t get too attached to places in life, Peter.’ (49)

For Peter, choosing Jewishness is an easier way of providing a sense of belonging than being Armenian with its unresolved mysteries of the past. Peter's denial of his ethnic identity forces Arax to assert and claim her Armenian heritage no matter how difficult and painful it is for her. Additionally, the author correlates the last words of the mother to the holocaust experience of Jews and Armenians as "the real kinship", which is a reason why the mother finds it necessary to move on from the topic of ethnic controversies as an advice (49).

Arax becomes more adamant in her Armenian-ness as the family moves to Crabtree Lane, a more WASP quarter, as Peter puts it: "I felt strangely more American and more Armenian" (50). This is because the WASP culture of the neighborhood pushes the mother to be more critical about the American way of life. Unlike what she said before about her American-ness, Arax now disapproves the American family structure: "there is no parental guidance" (60). In addition, she starts underestimating the American cuisine: "If the Americans want to eat that way, let them" (57). She gradually distances herself from the dominant WASP culture, saying frequently: "The Americans" or "typically American". Arax's constant othering of the Americans further confuses Peter, who inquires: "Weren't we Americans? . . . What were we?" (57-58). The more Arax distances herself from the Americans, the more her Armenian habits come out of her ethnic closet. In fact, his mother's obsession with home decoration is but what she inherited from her family, it is "the Aroosian passion for the decorative world", as Peter puts it (51). This obsession also shows itself with the mother's cooking practices when she combines the Armenian and American cuisines: "Perhaps the most interesting things my mother did in the kitchen were hybrids of southeastern Armenia and North America" (54).

Arax's obsession of perfection reaches its peak when the family goes to France to see Peter's brother. At a French restaurant, Arax, with her college French, refuses to eat the dish, pretentiously insisting that it is not fresh (55). As the chef comes and shows them the way out, the mother refuses to pay and is arrested by the police. After the conflict is resolved, Peter calls the event as "the first time since our ancestors were sent out into the desert to starve in 1915 that any members of our family had gone to bed without a dinner". Yet, the mother still insists, saying: "We are alive and well; things

have order; the world has grace and style” (56). After this unfortunate experience, Arax seeks even more perfection in her Armenian cuisine: *bamiya*, *imam beyeldi*, *enguinar*, *pilaf*, *paklava*, *kadayif*, and *sujuk*, which Arax finds superior to the American dishes, are prepared and served enthusiastically in her kitchen (56-57). Balakian refers to his mother and to the rest of the Aroosians (the grandmother and the aunts) as the “queens of the aesthetic domain” (65) to emphasize their obsession of perfectionism.

Whenever the Aroosians go out to order or buy something, their never ending dissatisfactions frequently take place: “How tasteless”, “That shirt looks sleazy”, “Silk will last forever if you treat it well”, “poor seams”, “wrong kind of buttons”, “You just tell them that we won’t pay for lamb like this” and more frequently, “They have some nerve” (65-68). The grown up Balakian associates these memories of the Aroosian passion for perfection with the history of his mother’s family, stating that the Aroosians (mother’s paternal side) and the Shekerlemedjians (the mother’s maternal side) used to be silk growers, merchants and refiners back in Diarbekir (66). Peter’s maternal grandfather (Bedros Aroosian) came to the United states in 1903 to work in the silk mills, while the maternal grandmother (Nafina Aroosian) survived the deportations and worked as a tailoress in Aleppo in 1916 (67). Balakian relates the Aroosian perfectionism in the New World to their experiences back in the Old Country: It is their perfectionism, by means of which they suppress their inferiority complex stemming from the traumas caused by the 1915 deportations:

There was something vicarious, voyeuristic, and sublimated about their harsh opinions of what were to them clear failings of the houses of northern New Jersey. Or was it that nothing in the material world was good enough for the heiresses of the family silk fortune lost to the Turks when the Armenians were driven from their homeland? (69)

Lastly, Arax’s overt ethnic assertiveness comes out with the “*odar* syndrome” as Balakian calls it. According to Balakian, his mother sometimes values her American-ness over her ethnic identity, and despite finding Armenians “too ethnic”, she asserts her Armenian-ness when it comes to the issue of her son’s girlfriends. According to

Arax, Peter's American girlfriends are *odars* (others): "Even then, girlfriends were greeted with a cool disdain, dismissed as 'ridiculous,' 'silly,' or 'sweet but dumb.'" (132). Arax believes that a girl should have the Armenian virtues of being *jarbig*, which means having wit; and being *achgapatz*, which means keeping the gate of the family as the protector of sacred things. These qualities are the basic tenets of Armenian womanhood for Arax. Balakian views his mother's ethnic chauvinism with humor and finds her ethnic anxieties unnecessary: Arax even attempts once to check on Peter and his girlfriend in his bedroom one morning. Nevertheless, she is shocked when she sees her famous guests, Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky, in the same bed during an (implied) intercourse. What she does not know is that Peter gave his room to the guests the previous night (133). Consequently, Arax's situational assertiveness of her ethnic identity, her constant reluctance to talk about Armenia, her obsession with perfectionism, and her overprotectiveness help Peter solve the complexities of his ethnic past.

Balakian's relationship with his father also pushes him to search for his roots. Balakian considers his father as a man detached from the family and himself – like the father figure for Arlen in *Passage to Ararat*. The father Balakian is a doctor, who is mostly occupied with his work and therefore is unable to communicate frequently with his son. As Balakian puts it: "Men were scarce in our family, and it made my father's remoteness from me more complex . . . So when my father was remote, he left me to the women, and the women had tireless passion for me" (95). Because the father suppresses his ethnicity with his perfect Manhattan American accent and because of the father speaks English only at work, Balakian tries to find out more about the psychological motivations underlying the father's suppression: "The more aloof, distant, and disapproving my father became, the more I thought of him as Armenian" (80-81). Although the father was born in 1920 in one of the Prince Islands in Constantinople, he demands his tombstone have the epigraph "born in New York city" (80).

The father's biographical information and suppression pushes Balakian to imagine the historical aspects of the Constantinople/Istanbul. For instance, Balakian cites the names of two Armenian restaurants in New York, which were named after Constantinople's Armenians: the Dardanelles and the Golden Horn. Influenced by his

father's biography, the author provides information about the landmarks Constantinople/Istanbul: from Haghia Sophia to Blue mosque as well as the city's conquest by the Turks. He also quotes from Gostan Zarian's<sup>71</sup> 1922 diary records, noting that the Armenians existed no longer in the city (83). Balakian's forays into the family history also reveals that his paternal grandfather worked as a physician for the Berlin-Baghdad railway construction, and then had to migrate to French Alps in 1922 with the passport of a country (Armenia), which no longer existed by then (84). Deeply moved by what his paternal grandmother said to Balakian's father to cool his father's fear down at the beginning of this risky journey, Balakian wishes that he had never heard it at all because the author relates this experience as a dream and/or fear about death. Balakian's grandmother tells his father: "When the train starts the lights will go out. Don't be scared, we are right here" to comfort his father at the beginning of this bleak journey (84).

The father's detachment from the little Peter can be observed in another memory Balakian conveys to the reader. One day, the father and the son exceptionally go to an Ivy League football match. Before the match starts, they see a man collapse and hit the ground, covered with blood. The father gives the man a kiss of life. Curiously enough, Peter asks his father: "Dad, did the man die?" (76). The father clicks his tongue idiosyncratically to say "No Trespassing", to little Peter. This tongue clicking by the father occurs at several other instances whenever Peter seeks answers to his questions. Tongue clicking becomes the crucial indicator of the distance between Peter and his father. Because the father avoids the topic of death, Balakian innerly asks: "You, Dad, who put your lips to his mouth. Did you taste death? What was it like?" (77). Balakian associates his father's avoidance toward death with what he experienced in the Old Country.

As Peter grows up, the father thinks that his son is taking a misguided path and embracing American materialism. He refers to Peter as, "a creature of rock 'n' roll" (98). Therefore, the father considers it to be a chance for Peter to find out more about his ethnic roots when Peter is assigned a project about the Near Eastern Culture at school. After the father's encouragement to work on Armenia, Peter finds out that there

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<sup>71</sup> A famous Armenian writer.

are only 200 words for the word “Armenia” in *World Book*, which reminds Peter about how his father had formerly been disappointed to find little information on Armenia in 1960 edition of an encyclopedia. Reasoning that Armenia was once in what is now Turkey, Peter decides to prepare the project on Turkey. Reading books about Turkic migration from Mongolia to Anatolia, Ottoman History and the foundation of Turkish Republic, the author never comes across with any reference on Armenia (99). He is further confused when he compares the Armenian absence in the Turkish history to the Native-American presence in the American history books he browses: the American-Indians, who were the natives of the New Continent before the Europeans, are in the course books, but why not the Armenians in the Turkish history books? Finding this situation odd, Peter submits his work about Turkey and receives an A grade from his teacher:

‘So what have you found out about Armenia?’

‘I wrote about Turkey,’ I said.

My father stared at me, and silence hung over the table.

‘What?’ His voice cracked as he lingered on the *t*. ‘You were supposed to write about—’

‘I know,’ I cut in, ‘but I couldn’t find anything.’

He was shouting now. ‘Don’t you know what the Turks did to us?’

.....

‘Would your Jewish friends write about Germans like this?’ (100)

Peter only heard the word “massacres” once or twice in the family conversations and he can not figure out the reason of this reaction by his father, who does not consider his son’s work as a serious evaluation of Turkish history. What Peter feels now is but anger because his father had never told him anything about his ethnic background: “why hadn’t he said, ‘Here, Peter, read this,’ or ‘Son, did I ever tell you about what happened to Armenia?’” (101). What the father says makes the little Peter becomes ashamed to discuss further. However, it also makes the son aware that his father bears an inner suppressed silence. At this time, Peter feels even more distanced from his father because, as an adolescent, he was unaware of the deeper meanings of this for his

ethnicity: “. . . my father became even more alien to me” (101). The father and the son do not speak for a long time, and the father decides on the fate of his son by choosing a school for his son. Peter finds this imperative unacceptable and reacts furiously, considering that his father has “a disgust with his world” (102). Thus, Peter escapes from the house secretly to hang out with his friends, which ends up with an unfortunate car accident that injures Peter seriously. Deeply ashamed of himself, and touched by his father’s silence, Peter concludes: “. . . my father’s silence was Old World disgust for the eldest son who had disgraced himself” (109). Like the motif of shame in *Rise the Euphrates*, Balakian’s failure to function as an ethnically moral person is mediated by his desire to participate in the football team, which is welcomed by the father (104). After seeing his father’s patience and keeping the subject of football as a mediator, the son begins to see how Balakians survived from the trauma of deportations. Once his father begins to approve his actions by saying ‘Good Job’, Balakian contemplates:

. . . sometimes I think he would like to hug me or just put his arm around my shoulder, but he never does—can’t, it seems. Just as when he lay dying in his hospital bed, his heart damaged beyond repair, his face ashen, and I wanted to kiss him and put my arm around him and tell him I loved him; I couldn’t . . . And I love to talk with him for hours about particular plays of the game, about the opposing team, about our game strategy. During these moments his Armenian silence and formality dissolved, and we expressed our love for each other. (112)

The father also has obsessive behaviors like the mother. As a doctor, the father’s obsession is his belief in excessive hygiene: asking his children not to eat certain kinds of things or constantly warning them not to shake hands. The father even wipes the door knobs with alcohol or forbids everyone at home to drink from each others’ cups. This “germ madness” as Peter puts it, is related to a “pathological fear of losing” the loved ones, as in Nafina’s “eenching” (94). This fear is also associated with the paternal grandfather, who was obsessed with hygiene in the same way. Peter’s grandfather obliged his children to wash their hands constantly, which, according to Peter, was a



subconscious trait: “I recalled what Freud said about hand washing—a compulsive reaction to death. A ritual to ward off death” (236). In other words, the father and the grandfather’s subconsciously display a behavioral pattern, which implies the fear of losing a family member. According to the writer, the reason of this fear originates from the 1915 deportations, causing family members to act with deep anxieties for their beloved ones.

Balakian’s father, therefore, is a man detached from the family. Although he has never fully informed his son about how to act according to his ethnic Armenian identity, he is bothered from his son’s assimilation into the American culture and his ignorance about Armenia. Peter, as an adolescent, has no knowledge of his past background and ethnic history, which is why he can not make sense of his father’s suppression, obsession and harsh reactions. Football as a subject mediates the fierce father-son relationship. However, the father still carries a “suppressed ethnic silence” in the eyes of the son, according to whom it is a way of escaping from reconciliation.

Balakian’s aunts Anna and Nona (father’s sisters) are the other family members, who are also pivotal to Peter’s foray into the depths of his unresolved ethnicity. Unlike Arax’s suburban background, the paternal aunts are intellectual. Peter considers the two aunts as inseparable. The Balakian sisters usually underestimate the Aroosians for being “banal and philistine”, while the Aroosians proud themselves with their sentimentality and being “champions of Protestant Christianity” (88). This tension between the paternal and maternal sides is also to be observed in the aunts’ disapproval of the union of Peter’s parents: “. . . my aunt staring with her fierce disapproval at my father, seeming to say, why did you marry her and come to these suburbs?” (42). In addition to this, Peter also explains the rivalry between her aunts (especially Aunt Anna) and the mother:

Literary Romanticism versus middle-class Protestantism. Democratic suburbia versus high culture. The Aroosian women and the Balakian women fired their opinions back and forth across the symbolic bridge of the dinner table. Each camp defending its side of the George Washington Bridge with vengeance and pride, and at some level of their cultural beings they seemed to be guarding their territories like Old World

Armenians defending their particular province or city. The Aroosians, wealthy merchants from the Armenian hinterlands of Diarbekir, would not be upstaged by the intellectual Balakians of Constantinople. Country fierceness and Cosmopolitan arrogance. (90)

As for Aunt Nona, she was born in a Turkish army base while her father was working as a doctor for the Turkish army. She had been a fragile émigré in the United States after 1915 deportations because of her physical deformity, which is never spoken about in the family. Granted a scholarship from Horace Man School, Nona majored in English and then became a reviewer for the *Times* (144). Through Aunt Nona's intellectual circle, Peter gets acquainted with the leading Armenian-American artists, some of whom are Nona's colleagues: William Saroyan, Michael Arlen, Peter Sourian and many others. Once, Peter has the chance to meet Saroyan, whom he likens to an Old World peasant (138). When asked to recite one of his poems to Nona's guests, Peter acts hesitatingly, confessing to the reader that he does not like his attitude or the Saroyanesque style (140). However, Saroyan means a lot to Nona because his style, as Peter puts it, parallels his Aunt's literary conception of exile: ". . . William Saroyan defined my aunt's notion of the hybridization of literature and her feeling about the meaning of exile" (144). After Saroyan's death, Nona also reveals her ideas about the Armenian-American literature, the Saroyanesque style: "We have a dream instead of a country . . . The more our geography shrinks, the more our imaginations expand, the more we're like owls flying in the dark" (145). What Nona means is that the boundaries of Armenia is retained in the imagination of the exiled ones, who, by then, had sense of belonging to nowhere, but to an imaginary space. Therefore, Nona's statement implies the hybridity of identities as narrated in Saroyanesque works.

Unlike Nona's and Saroyan's literary emphasis on imagination and ethnic hybridity, Peter's poetry focuses more on his family history because he wants to know more about his roots and to reconcile with the past. As Peter becomes famous with his poetry, he begins to oppose to his aunts' and Saroyan's conceptions of literature, considering them as mere escapism. In other words, Peter thinks that it is essential to make the Armenian history central to his works, which frustrates Aunt Anna:

‘Why are you writing about Armenia?’ she asked, her voice welling up with anger. ‘Why?’

I felt stuck. I really wanted to say, ‘If the extermination of a million and a half people and the erasure of a three-thousand-year old civilization isn’t important enough to write about, what the fuck is?’

‘This is not what poetry is for!’ She was shouting now. . . . (234)

A professor of French in the Romance languages department of NYU, Aunt Anna is a fanatical supporter of Romantic and Surrealist literature with her publications (86). Peter finds Anna’s understanding of literature escapist, as he did with Aunt Nona. According to Aunt Anna, no aspects of history should surface in poetry. Peter relates the aunt’s anger, and suppression of the Armenian past to experiences of the Balakian family in 1915, when Anna was born in Constantinople. He associates this suppression from the accounts written by Gostan Zarian, who considers Istanbul Armenians as victims of unfavorable circumstances (235). During the Balakian family’s migration to the New World, their visas were rejected by the Swiss. They were accepted by the French with passports of a country (Armenia), which did not exist anymore then. Moreover, Anna’s husband was born in Smyrna and she had to watch the famous historical fire in 1922 on a French Steamship before migrating to Europe (86). Thus, Anna’s interest in French surrealism began with the influence of these past accounts, as she explains:

It demonstrated the transcendence of the spirit in a burgeoning materialistic world. It opened the doors of the imagination to expand reality beyond the bourgeois compromise . . . I focused on literary figures who did not dwell on national elements but on universal issues. I felt that after World War II there was much too much national polarization and emphasis on ethnicity, whereas I had been reared in the spirit of one-world internationalism (257).

Belonging to no country, nor to a social space, Aunt Anna, with a “mythical passport”, had disposed her cultural heritage after being highly influenced by French surrealism.

(258). As Balakian explains, French surrealism was, for his aunt, the zenith of European culture and the way to self-salvation. As Aunt Anna quotes from the Futurist poet Marinette, Peter is further convinced that Aunt Anna holds onto French Surrealism to shackle the burdens of her past; dispersion, exile, homelessness: “. . . we cannot carry the cemetery of our ancestors on our backs” (257).

Peter resists this by objecting to his aunt’s way of escaping from reconciliation. At a time when the winds of change were sweeping across the United States in the 1960s, it was unacceptable for Balakian to deny his ethnic identity. The motto in the air was ethnic pride, which finds its expression best in Balakian’s exclamation: “How can one deny the cemetery of one’s ancestors?” (258).

Balakian’s aunts’ differing afflictions with literature, Nona reserving the Saroyanesque style, and the latter ultimately rejecting her Armenian past and heritage, are but their ways of dealing with their troubled past. Peter finds Nona’s excessive pride over her intellectuality and Anna’s surrealist escapism as superficial and baseless. Except for Nafina’s transfer of fate to him, Peter, as he grows up, can not tolerate neither the Balakians’ nor the Aroosians’ self-denials and ethnic suppression.

As a renowned writer now, Balakian regards his ethnicity and his historical background inseparable from his art, his poetry: “The journey into history, into the Armenian Genocide, was for me inseparable from poetry. Poetry was part of the journey and excavation” (146). Peter’s self-identification with poetry starts when he rejects to join Nafina’s *hokee hankisd*<sup>72</sup> for the tenth anniversary of her death. Peter’s conscious is troubled with shame when his mother exclaims: “Have you forgotten how much your grand mother loved you?” (147). This incident becomes the turning point in Peter’s life: he spontaneously writes a poem dedicated to his grandmother. In his poem called “Words for My Grandmother”, Peter intuitively writes about the “half-confessed past” and “the arid Turkish plain” although, at the age of twenty-three, he still knew nothing about 1915 (148-149). Apparently, Peter’s spontaneous and intuitive poetry marks the beginning of his journey into the depths of an unknown past, to his unveiled side:

Mostly, I was happy about the poem, not because I thought it was great  
but because it had done what art can do: bring lost things back into your

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<sup>72</sup> Memorial Service.

life. My poem brought my grandmother back to me, whose love, perhaps, meant more to me than anyone's. She was my friend and nurturer again, now in my adult life. And with the poem's final image I had placed her at last: in the Old World, the arid Turkish plain, lost Armenia. Now I would have to go and find out what that lost place was. (150)

Peter starts his journey to the lost Armenian roots and to the family secrets as a way of reconciliation by providing the reader with the Armenian historical accounts in depth through reading reports from *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*. Subjects such as the problems of the Abdulhamid era for the Armenians, the stereotyping of Armenians as infidels, the deportation policies of Talaat, Enver and Djemal pashas, the author's association of pan-Germanism with Pan-Turkism, detailed experiences from the deportees, and others are mentioned and they are evaluated negatively by Balakian (153-180). The origins of Armenians from Urartu civilization to becoming an Ottoman minority also add up to the course of such historical events.

While reading the above historical accounts, Balakian recalls heartbreaking stories told by his grandmother, which leaves him speechless and bewildered. In the story, Hadji Ovan, an Armenian, goes to Constantinople for a trip and he hears from one of his villagers in the same city that he lost his family and all his properties to the Turks: "But when I left the village, the Turks were tilling the soil where your house once stood" (170). Again, the above historical accounts also make Balakian remember about what his friend Jimmy formerly told him:

'You know, Armenian, Jimmy, I'm Armenian.'

'Peeta, Peeta, Peeta. The starving Armenians.' Jimmy said it smoothly, like it was an old campaign slogan. 'When I was growing up in Charleston, if we left a green or some gravy on the plate, my mother would say, 'Remember the starving Armenians.'

.....

'Did you know what 'starving Armenians' meant?'

‘I knew the Armenians were massacred, starved to death, almost wiped out.’ Jimmy made a broad X sign with his index finger.

‘By the Turks. They don’t fool around, those Turks. Like the whites in the Old South.’ (173)

Balakian trip to see his aunt Gladys in France, where he also visits his brother Jim and the tomb of King Levon of Cilician Armenia, constitutes another stage of the journey he makes to his exilic origins. Like Nafina, Aunt Gladys greets Peter with “eenches of affection” and serves him Armenian foods (182). Balakian learns from Aunt Gladys about how Nafina, with the two year old Gladys herself, and the infant daughter of Alice, was deported and how Nafina was infected with cholera because of the miserable conditions of the deportees, who, as Gladys states, had not used the term genocide by then. The rest of the story proves no better than what Balakian has heard so far: After recovering, Nafina worked as a seamstress in Aleppo to support her children. Luckily, Nafina got back one of her valuable carpets, stolen by Turks in Diarbekir, and sold it to buy tickets to America (189-190). Peter is puzzled to hear this: ‘So a rug got us here.’ (190). Nafina’s nightmarish experiences of the deportation follow her to the New World; as Gladys states, Nafina was still traumatized to the extent that she would cry out, “They’re coming, they’re coming again”, when the United States faced the Pearl Harbor and Cuban Missile crises. Despite receiving electroshock treatment, Nafina never recovers from her fears. Aunt Gladys further explains that Nafina associated Hitler’s devastating policies with her personal experience of the deportation: “Translating it into Turks massacring Armenians” (188). Feeling overwhelmed and stunned, Balakian leaves the house, and finds himself writing a poem called “The History of Armenia” at a French café (192). Upon finishing the poem, Balakian contemplates about grandma: “I realized that she was my beloved witness, and I the receiver of her story. When I was a boy, she had showered me with love; now as a man, I could return that love” (195). Apparently, Balakian feels that he owes respect to his grandmother, an appreciation for her wisdom and endurance, which he materialized in his poem.

The memoir is replete with many other historical events and documents, which further locate Balakian in his ethnic past: Nafina's claims, as a U.S. citizen, to her properties lost to the Turks in the Old Country (copies of these documents are displayed on the book pages); Lu's cousin Dovey's bitter experiences of witnessing her people being killed and tortured in Diarbekir, and their deportation; the experiences of the grandfather; a secret book by the famous Bishop Grigore Balakian, who writes about his experiences of 1915<sup>73</sup>; and the Bishop's testimony for the murderer of Talat Pasha in Germany (198-272). Consequently, Balakian, who is immersed in his ethnic past via myriad oral and written histories, acknowledges his ethnic origins, and comes to terms with his Armenian-ness, which materializes in his poems. Now that he realizes who he is and where he comes from, Balakian writes:

I had little affection for nationalism, and I had been raised so outside of Armenian ethnic life that my life had become a hunt to find out about the past. I found myself pulled by the catastrophe that had happened to Armenia and to my family, and by the universal, moral issues the Genocide represented. And so I had written a book of poems about things I could lay claim to. Armenia had become an Atlantis to my imagination. Lost Armenia, where my family had lived only seventy years ago. Armenia, whose misfortune had helped to define modernity, as Michael Arlen noted, because 'the harnessing of modern technology for mass murder began with the genocide of the Armenians'. (274)

Commemorating his ancestors, who experienced the traumas of 1915, Balakian now gets rid of the feelings of shame and guilt that have been troubling his conscience for so long, which results in self-acceptance, and self-value. Balakian's newly acquired sense of origins and his awakening to the long-suppressed aspects of his identity are paramount in a speech he delivers in the Times Square for the seventieth anniversary of the Armenian genocide. When his wife tells Balakian that he would feel guilty if he had not made the speech, Balakian responds: "*Bad* meant 'guilty,' and guilty is a mode of

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<sup>73</sup> Also a translation work by Peter Balakian.

being in Armenian culture, a way we check our individual egos against the collective will” (275). Apparently, Balakian feels that he owes respect to his ethnic community, and hence tells about his grandmother’s traumatic experiences in his speech to achieve a kind of atonement and reconciliation (282).

It is important to note that Balakian’s celebration of his ethnic origins is not a turning away from his American-ness. Contemplating about the Armenian assimilation into the mainstream American culture, Balakian states that the Balakian family transferred their Armenian heritage into the middle-class Protestant American values, bringing up their children as Americans first: “Perhaps that was a gift my parents gave us. A gift that enabled me to discover the past for myself from the secure vantage of my upper-middle-class American life” (297). The author also considers this as an advantage for, rather than an impediment to his search for roots: “. . . I think of how easily we joined mainstream America. Perhaps our utter assimilation was best symbolized by our country club membership.” (295). Also the author now realizes why his family would insist to be silent about their past: their past traumas was impossible to be explained to their children, and by choosing to be silent, the parents did their best to prevent this trauma from haunting the minds of their children: “. . . they found rootedness, home, belonging. Yet, the past was a shadow that cast its own darkness on us all. *The old country*. I realize now that it was an encoded phrase, not meant for children.” (300). Concluding on the reasons of his family’s silence, Balakian also understands that Nafina’s way of articulating her stories was actually an inward silence, which the author resembles to an intrusive past. This causes Balakian to sympathize and/or empathize with his grandmother: “I was he companion, her captive audience, her beloved witness” (301). Consequently, the family’s ethnic suppression and Nafina’s articulation of her troubled past serves the author’s reconciliation:

Psychologists, psychiatrists, and those who study trauma agree about the importance of coming to terms with loss and grief in order to regain health did each of my grandparents live close to disintegration, collapse, and breakdown? Outwardly, they carried out productive, humanly



engaged lives. They enjoyed their work, raised families with gusto, and found life in America good. (298)

The author's visit to Syria and Lebanon constitutes the final destination of search for roots (these chapters are added for the tenth anniversary edition of the memoir). When Balakian arrives in Aleppo, Syria to give a lecture, he meets Bishop Shahan. The Bishop tells the author that they kept the records of Diarbekir Armenians, including his grandmother's, to form a new Armenian community again in the diaspora: "... in her lawsuit against the Turkish government that you wrote about, she listed her residence in Aleppo" (319). The author is also given a photograph of a group of students at a school, and he is asked to identify Alice and Gladys in the photo (320). The Bishop also provides the letters of the grandmother, which are written in Armenian. In one of the translated version of the letters, for instance, Nafina asks his brother to send her money (326). Upon observing the letters, Balakian learns his grandmother's address from the registries. He goes to 45 Ghuri Street, where Nafina used to live: "My grandmother's home in 1915. A place never spoken of, never mentioned in her next life in New Jersey, the life in which I knew her" (328). Balakian wishes to inspect the house but, overwhelmed by such intense emotions, he can not do it. Facing the vicinities of such memories helps the author reconcile with his troubled family past. While visiting such places, imagining how his grandmother and the Armenians were in the past serves as an instrument to this reconciliation. In Syria and Lebanon, therefore, Balakian's reconciliation only takes its route through his imagination because Balakian has neither heard of these places in the family conversations while growing up, nor he had experienced the traumatic consequences of the 1915 deportation.

The narration is again replete with historical aspects during the process of such imagination. When Balakian goes to the desert Der-Zor, for instance, he resembles the place to the "endless plains" of T.S. Eliot's "Waste Land", associating it with the Jewish concentration camps: "For Armenians, *Der Zor* has come to have a meaning approximate to Auschwitz" (324-325). Likewise, Balakian provides statistical records of the Armenian deaths during the deportation and the living conditions of the deportees by quoting information from Grigoris Balakian's diary (his great uncle) as well as

correspondences from other sources made during the time of deportation (321-323; 334-344). In Lebanon, the author also attends a private dinner with the Catholicos of Cilicia, Aram I. The Catholicos awards him a medal for his works and tells him to give a speech to the Beirut Armenians, seminarians and clergymen at the dinner after receiving the medal (347). The award honors the writer for services to his community and thereby completes Balakian's journey to his Armenian past. Balakian, with pride, returns home with the tokens of memories that he collected from the desert as he says: "As I sat watching baseball clips on ESPN before boarding my flight to Syracuse, I felt the bones jostling in the plastic bags in my pockets" (348).

To conclude, Peter Balakian's search for his roots in *Black Dog of Fate* is a manifold process, inextricably intertwined with his family members' ethnic suppression, with the Pandora's box of exile, full of childhood fears, repressions, secrets, neuroses and traumas inherited from the past. Balakian traverses a wide spiritual and physical geography in order to be gleaned from this dislocation of exile. The memoir ranges widely across space and time to trace the author's identity negotiation between Armenian-ness and American-ness: a journey from the past to the present. This journey also represents an encounter with the past directed at healing the historical wounds of the family, which will help the writer negotiate his hyphenated identity during his struggle to achieve Armenian-ness. As an American, Balakian is finally proud of his Armenian-ness after unveiling and reconciling with the inherited effects of 1915 events on his family. The course from his childhood ignorance to adult self-knowledge is but a consequence of his interactions with the family as well as their historical accounts, finalizing this search in Syria and Lebanon – the places closest to what Balakian perceives as Armenia. The jostling bones in his pocket evoke a mystical feeling of his healing achieved through a return to the Old- Country, that is, his roots.

## VI. CONCLUSION

*Is literature written by Americans of Armenian descent “ethnic” only when certain concerns about identity and hybridity, the master figures of contemporary ethnic criticism, are central to the context and articulated in ways familiar to the contemporary critic? What particular constellations of origin, language experience, figure and theme qualify a work as “ethnic” and as “literature” in this or any other context?*

*Kachig Tololyan<sup>74</sup>*

The hegemony of the American mainstream culture was broken to smithereens with the 1960s social movements, enabling the minorities to speak out for themselves after a long silence. Since then, American ethnic groups have become more confident in speaking louder against the voice of the mainstream culture, which had persistently othered and silenced ethnic voices in the United States. 1960s phenomena inevitably influenced minority literatures, to which Armenian-American literature was no exception. Until their popularization, the Armenian-American literary works, from the early 1900s to the 1960s, mainly consisted of the writings of the exiled Armenians, who, uprooted from their motherland, carried the traumas of the 1915 catastrophe in their luggage. Therefore, the Armenian-American literature frequently cast its anchor on the themes of nostalgia, immigrant life, Old-World patriotism and other issues, which almost lacked American scenes. The American was, therefore, the *odari* - an alien for the Armenians, whose ethnic identity was humiliated and othered by the WASP culture. Over and above, forced assimilation was conceived as “white massacre”, the threat against the Armenian ethnic heritage. Thus, the Armenian-American literature, before evolving into maturity, was inevitably more Armenian and more ethnic.

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<sup>74</sup> Epigraph from: Tololyan, Kachig. “Armenian American Literature.” *New Immigrant Literatures in United States: A Sourcebook to Our Multicultural Literary Heritage*. ed. Alpana Sharma Knippling. USA: Greenwood Publishing, 1996. 19-40. Print

Therefore, my study involved works written in the post 1960s era because the Armenian-American literature after the 60s became highly politicized, putting emphasis on ethnic pride, and identity negotiation with the traumas of the past rather than on nostalgic longings for a lost home. Contemporary Armenian-American literature objects any form of ethnic suppression and shame rooted in the traumas of the Armenian past. Through search for their roots, the protagonists learn not to be ashamed of their Armenian-ness as well as to acknowledge their family histories marked by losses and psychic wounds. Moreover, the post 1960s Armenian-American literature portrayed the hybridity of Armenian-American culture: from the earlier times to the contemporary decades, the English language predominantly transumed the position of Armenian language, signaling the Armenian assimilation into the American culture toward the 60s. Discovering, uncovering and unveiling the dusty closets of family history rendered self-knowledge and self acceptance possible, accompanied by mental negotiations of the ethnic boundaries between American-ness (*odars*) and Armenian-ness (*hays*).

From the outset, this thesis has aimed to illustrate the identity quests of the Armenian-American protagonists, whose mental and/or physical journeys to the “Old World” are restorative and reconstructive processes, healing and removing the previous tensions of displacement, or being “of two-worlds”. The first step taken in this direction was to go into the depths of the Armenian history, which has been indispensable from the Armenian-American literature/writing. Secondly, defining the socio-cultural aspects of the Armenian-American life based upon the theories about identity, ethnicity and diaspora was aimed to expose the diasporan consciousness and sensibility of the Armenian-Americans to provide the reader with a better understanding of the generational differences among the Armenian-American characters of the books. Thirdly, laying out the features of the common themes and issues of early Armenian-American literature rendered a comparison between early and contemporary writings of Armenian-American literature possible. These initial stages of my thesis provided the historical, theoretical and literary backgrounds, against which the theme of search for roots was analyzed in three contemporary Armenian-American books.

The chapter “Historical Background” was intended to represent the Armenians as worthy historical agents against the prejudiced constructions of Armenian-ness. It

was also targeted to show an alternate view of history from the Armenian perspective because the Armenians have been deprived of their authorship and discourse power as a consequence of their long-term minority status in different nations. A section under the “Historical Background”, “An Overview of Armenian History before the Ottoman Rule”, depicted the core aspects of the Armenian identity: where they come from, how they lived, how they shaped their national identity and retained their cultural heritage for centuries. Armenia in the antiquity, Armenian national symbols and their mythological beliefs about their ancestry provided an overview of the Armenian nation building process. Distinct cultural elements, such as being one of the first states to adopt Christianity as a state religion, Armenian language and its unique alphabet, the *nakharar* system, and the *vardapets*, were also explained under this section. In this overview, the short term independent Armenian kingdoms/dynasties and their conflicts with the stronger Empires were also given place. A last important aspect of this section was the religious differences between the Armenians and the neighboring/governing nations, which, undoubtedly, caused disagreements and conflicts in the long run.

The following subtitle “Armenians in the Ottoman Empire” portrayed the intricate relationships between the Ottomans and the Armenians. The rationale for studying Ottoman-Armenians as a section under this chapter was mainly due to the fact that most Armenian-Americans are the descendants of the Ottoman-Armenians, and most of the prehistoric Armenian region was located in the Ottoman Empire. Here, it was also intended to elucidate the characteristics of the Ottoman-Armenian life before their immigration to the United States, and crystallize the “Old World” concept in Armenian-American literary writings. This general survey about the Ottoman-Armenians provided the reader with the dynamics of Ottoman-Armenian relations: the *millet* and the *devshirme* systems demonstrated the social and political standing of the Armenian subjects in the Empire. The wealthy *Amiras*, intellectual young Armenians and the poverty stricken *marabas* illustrated the position of the Armenians in the social hierarchy in different historical contexts. Conversion to Protestantism and Catholicism in the nineteenth century also showed the influence of Western nations on the Armenians as well as the novel constructions of Armenian religious identity. Conflicts stemming from the differences in religion constituted another aspect of this section:

Christianity seemed to have paved the way for the Ottoman-Armenian discrimination as well as the social, economic and political conflicts between the Muslim groups and the Armenian subjects.

Additionally, the section “Armenian Question: Conflicts of the Nineteenth Century and Deportations”, introduced how the emerging Armenian nationalism and the successive conflicts between the Ottoman-Armenians and their Muslim neighbors gave rise to more serious conflicts, which left their mark on the collective psyche of the first generation Armenian-Americans, who consciously or subconsciously transferred their unpleasant experiences to their offsprings. Within this section, the Armenian question was defined with respect to two opposing views: while one of the views saw the Armenian question as a matter of Armenian democratic rights, the other held out that the Armenian question was but a gateway for the partition of the Ottoman Empire by stronger European nations. A second important aspect of this chapter was to draw the features of the Armenian nationalism shaped by the Armenian-Muslim conflicts as well as by the influences of the French revolution. The outcomes of the rising Armenian nationalism were traced in the reform movements by the Ottoman State, the emergence of *fedaiyee* groups and the uprisings caused by the State’s failure to carry out its promises. Next, the events preceding the deportations – the foundation of radical Armenian parties and the failure of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) that dethroned the Sultan were explained to draw the political contours of the pre-1915 events. Also, to emphasize my impartial standing with respect to the 1915 events, it was forcefully stated that I sought no answers to the question of whether the Armenian deportation was genocide or it was just a matter of national security.

The next chapter, “Social and Cultural Aspects of the Armenian-Americans” sought to expose the socio-cultural aspects of the Armenian-American life in the United States. The subtitle, “Immigrations to the United States and the Armenian Experience”, drew the outlines of Armenian immigration to the New Continent as well as the aspects of their new life in a foreign land: the emigration from the “Old World” and the difficulties they went through on Ellis Island; the first settlements in major cities and their struggles of adaptation to the American culture; discrimination, assimilation and their achievements in the “New World”.

The next subtitle “Aspects of Identity, Ethnicity and Diaspora” was intended to draw the theoretical background of this thesis. In the subsection ‘identity’, Stuart Hall’s conception of identity construction as a constant production of the self, whose meaning is forever defined through a set of symbolic structures, cautioned against the destabilized, fluid nature of identity. Multiple aspects of our identities (race, nation, class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality) are central to the subject of construction, thereby invalidating any essentialized/stabilized notions of identity. Another insight to the processes of subjectivity construction come from Anthony Giddens, according to whom, “the self’s migrancy in negotiation” is a project, whose form changes circumstantially in time and space as our identities travel back and forth between past and present with no fixed essence. Michel Foucault afforded a critical perspective on the thematic of identity, claiming that subject comes into being as a result of historical processes as well as the discourses, emphasizing the historical construction of subjects through social production. Hence, it follows that articulation of identities varies with shifting discourse powers, that is, self-articulation is a discursive processes.

Arguments under the subsection ‘Ethnicity’ afforded differing conceptions of ethnic identity. It was argued that ethnicity drew the contours of the relationships between the mainstream outsiders and the ethnic insiders that are susceptible to change situationally. It was also explained that ethnicity, together with diasporan consciousness, provides a sense of belonging, which is achieved through bonds with the homeland. Ethnicity can be inherited, achieved or assigned by an entity inside or outside the ethnic circle, while ethnic consciousness may differ from one person to another. Ethnicities and nationalisms are intertwined: ethnicities have mental boundaries, nationalisms have physical boundaries, and both depend on the same national definitions and institutions. In this respect, the mechanization of print publications paved the way for national consciousness, encouraging the creation of national communities.

Analogously, it was also pointed out that such imaginary national/ethnic identities are weakening in a rapidly globalizing world, where border zones of cultures are destabilized and subjects resist falsely comforting identifications and reifications. As James Clifford notes, in this highly globalized world, we are facing new “borderland

culture areas, populated by strong, diasporic ethnicities assimilated to dominant nation-states” (110). In this sense, Herbert Gans’s theory of “symbolic ethnicity” was considered to be fruitful and enlightening for my purposes. Gans’s theory of symbolic ethnicity conceptualizes the ethnic performativity of transnational ethnic collectivities as symbolically achieved. In other words, they sustain their ethnic identity through a maintenance of symbolic affinity with their countries of origin. It was further stated that this symbolic affinity was achieved through such ethnic performances as the celebration of national/religious holidays, ethnic culinary practices and/or an interest in ethnic political issues both in the hostland and the homeland. Starting from these premises, it was concluded that performing ethnic identity for the third generation Armenian-Americans was a matter of leisure time passing and nostalgia. Gans’ theory was later incorporated into the sociological aspects of the Armenian-American life by Anny Bakalian, who mentioned the voluntary, situational and rational acceptance of symbolic Armenian ethnicity. Unlike the Armenian migrants, who “were” already Armenian, and who fought against assimilation into the mainstream WASP culture, the third and late generation Armenian-Americans have been assimilated into the American culture, and “felt” Armenian only.

The subsection ‘Diaspora’ was meant to show how the Armenian diasporan consciousness is inseparable from their identity construction processes. Commemoration of historical events, establishment of ethnic institutions in the hostland, retaining homelands in imagination and nostalgia were explained to be the general constituents of the diasporan consciousness. William Safran’s and Kachig Tololyan’s views were applied to demonstrate that the diasporan myth of going back to the homeland is but utopian, and that the Armenian transnational experience entails living with double-consciousness, which problematizes any essentialized, static notions of national cultures and identities. Robert Cohen’s definition of the Armenian diaspora as a victim diaspora because of the 1915 events paralleled Seviç Göral’s opinions in that the deportees were deeply traumatized, conveying their unfortunate experiences to their descendants. Nevertheless, their common view was juxtaposed against Kachig Tololyan’s explanation that some segments of the Armenian diaspora had no deportation experience at all. Furthermore, William Saroyan’s idea of “New



Armenia(s)”, and Jendians’ “immigrants adaptation theory” with its three stages were highlighted to explain the multi-generational differences in the Armenian-American diaspora. Susan Schwalgin’s opinions on the Armenian diaspora also illuminated another fact that the foundation of the Armenian Republic caused many contemporary Armenian diasporans to (re)construct the meaning of their Armenian-ness, especially during their travels to Armenia, where they struggle to reach “Armenian purity”.

The following chapter, “Themes and Issues in Armenian-American Literature”, as a whole provided an understanding of how the Armenian-American literature matured over time. The accumulated experience in early Armenian-American literary writing gave birth to the theme of search for roots. This chapter demonstrated a comparison between the contemporary theme of search for roots and early literary trends in early Armenian-American writing. Early Armenian literary works in America were printed in journals during the first half of twentieth century. This literary phase was marked by reproductions of the homeland culture with the dominance of Armenian language publications. Another aspect of the same phase was the recurrence of the theme of lamenting the lost past, in which it was tried to survive the Old World culture through focusing on the subject matters related to the lost home. Immigrant life as another prevailing theme portrayed the Armenians’ encounter with the American and questioned the absurdity of discrimination. Humanism/war is bad, another common theme in early Armenian-American literary production emphasized the brotherhood of all humans, and criticized wars heavily. Lastly, aspects of the theme of search for roots were explained with an emphasis on the identity quests undertaken to achieve Armenian identity.

Against the theoretical background of ‘identity’, I argued that the protagonists in the literary works of this study construct their identities through a constant rearticulation of their past with their subjectivities during their search for roots. The protagonists’ forays into the depths of Armenian history helped them come to terms with the past traumas that had long been suppressed by the first and the second generation Armenian-American family members. This meant that the unfinished business of the older family members was subconsciously/consciously transferred to the grandchildren, who sought ways to solve this unfinished task via searching for their roots. Therefore, Armenian

history was central to the protagonists' identity quests, helping them conjure up mental images of the "Old World": Seta's imagination of Harput and her grandmother's experiences; Arlen's delving into the history in myriad historical sources and documents that brought about an understanding of his father's past experiences; and Balakian's historical accounts from testimonies, historical sources, a *bricolage* of Nafina's personal documents, which again, connected him to the suppressed, hidden aspects of his family history.

It was further argued that the physical and/or mental journeys made to the "Old World" connected the protagonists to their origins, thereby enabling them to admit the traumas of their ethnic past and rearticulate them with their Armenian-ness and American-ness. Physical journeys to what was perceived as "Armenia" can be exemplified here: Arlen went to Armenia in *Passage to Ararat* and Balakian's traveled to Syria to see his grandmother's house in *Black Dog of Fate*. As for *Rise the Euphrates*, such a physical movement did not take place; however, this was compensated by Seta's quest to find Casard's lost name as a mental journey to the river Euphrates and Harput. In short, history frequently and intertextually interrupted the present in the plots of *Rise the Euphrates*, *Passage to Ararat* and *Black Dog of Fate*, thereby initiating search for roots to connect the past with the present as a way of constructing Armenian identity, and of mentally conceptualizing what is perceived as "Armenia".

The arguments developed within the context of 'ethnicity' were also traceable in the analysis of the literary works. All protagonists of the three books – Seta, Arlen and Balakian – constituted the examples for the third generation Armenian-Americans in this study. Their stories were all narrated from their own point of view. Their writing in English undoubtedly demonstrated the protagonists' assimilation into the mainstream culture as well as their alienation to the Armenian culture and language. It was argued that the scarce presence of Armenian language, which was spoken only in ethnic and family circles in the books, was an indicator of the dominance of American-ness over Armenian-ness. Therefore, language kept pace with the dominance of American identity over the Armenian-ness in the books, whose point of view belonged to the third generation Armenian-American protagonists.

Apart from language, Armenian cuisine and other Armenian cultural practices and symbols were argued to be determining the ethnic boundaries of Armenian-ness: Casard's home making and kitchen, Armenian Church in *Rise the Euphrates*; Armenian Genocide Monument in Armenia, Armenian Cathedral and the Armenian restaurants in New York in *Passage to Ararat*; Peter's home, his relatives' homes, the vicinities traveled in Syria and Lebanon in *Black Dog of Fate*. The protagonists' interactions with these ethnic spheres, practices and symbols revealed the extent to which they were estranged from the Armenian culture, which was a secret world waiting to be discovered by them. The phrase "Old World" already connoted the protagonists' American-ness because their current lives are in a "New World", where the problematic "Old" was an obstacle to live the present. Their discoveries/journeys took the route from the "New World" to an unknown "Old World", which, as I claim, were undertaken to "feel" more Armenian.

Two motifs, *odar* (outsider) and shame (*amot*) were claimed to be reflective of the Armenian diasporan double consciousness. The motif of *odar* running throughout *Rise the Euphrates* and *Black Dog of Fate* pointed to the eternal conflict between ethnic retention and assimilation. Seta's grandmother's rejection to Araxie's marriage with George, Balakian's mother's discontent with his American girlfriends, in other words, their fear of *odar* was shown to be a symptom of the first and the second generation Armenian-Americans, from which the third generation Armenian-Americans were exempted. For them, Armenian assimilation into the WASP culture was both desirable and inevitable. The motif of *amot* (shame), on the other hand, revealed another aspect of being Armenian in the United States. For older generations, the discussion or the commemoration of the 1915 events was shameful. Therefore, they chose suppression as a way to get rid of their traumatic memories. It was also argued that the historical burden of shame was understood differently by the third generation Armenian-American protagonists (Seta, Arlen and Balakian), for whom loyalty to their ethnic identity necessitated the removal of the burden of shame by struggling to "feel" more Armenian and to coming to terms with a long-denied trauma.

Third generation Armenian-Americans' ethnic orientation was explained with Herbert Gans's theory of "symbolic ethnicity". All the protagonists happily returned to

their American lives after their mental and/or physical journeys to their roots. The “New World”, despite its lack of verbal presence, prevailed as their permanent “home”, from where they, through particular performances of ethnicity, symbolically returned to their “homeland”: commemoration of the 1915 events, celebration of certain Armenian events, identifications with the Armenian political issues, and Armenian culinary practices. As I claim, the “Old World” is only a temporary destination to be returned from. Moreover, the protagonists’ presentation of the Armenian culture resembled to a tourist brochure prepared for introducing a foreign country. Their presentation addressed both to the authors’ inner monologues for finding out more about their ethnicity and to the English speaking readers unfamiliar with the Armenian culture. Such presentation also reflected the assumed symbolic Armenian-ness of the third generation, as a way of saying “I am proud of my heritage”.

The ‘Diaspora’ subsection also accommodated cross-generational diasporic positionalities and affiliations to shed some light upon the heterogeneity of the Armenian-American experience in the United States. These cross-generational differences in perceptions of Armenian-ness revealed the shifting meanings of ethnic identity through generations. It was shown that for the first generation Armenian-Americans, namely Casard in *Rise the Euphrates* and Nafina in *Black Dog of Fate*, Armenian-ness was the preservation and continuation of the “Old World” ways and its culinary practices. Speaking in Armenian, cooking Armenian dishes, performing specific Armenian cultural practices in a new continent were the acts of ethnic assertion. “Home” for Nafina and Casard was a narrative of loss, reconstituted in nostalgic images of the homeland. Nostalgia helped them cope with the traumas of their past and the chaos of their exilic diasporan double-consciousness. From their positions of exile, it was argued that Nafina and Casard have been vigilant about the faithful reproduction of Armenian-ness in a new context.

It was argued that for the second-generation Armenian-Americans, Seta’s mother, Arlen’s Father and Balakian’s parents and aunts, suppression of the past’s traumas was central to being an Armenian in exile. Denial, suppression, escapism, and willful ignorance marked the contours of their transplanted identities. Arax in *Rise the Euphrates*, for instance, betrayed her community, marrying an *odar* as a way to ignore

the implanted trauma of her mother. She also rejected to conform with Armenian customs in the “New World” to forget the pangs of exile and displacement. Arlen’s detached father in *Passage to Ararat*, avoided anything related to his family background and Armenian-ness, underestimating anything related to the Armenian issues. Again, In *Black Dog of Fate*, Peter’s parents and aunts evade any discussion connected with the “Old World” matters. Peter’s father’s constant obsessions in hygiene, his mother’s unending obsession of perfection were interpreted as unconsciously elaborated strategies to cope with their denial and suppression. Peter’s aunts, Nona and Anna, constructed their subjectivities as completely devoid of the Armenian past. While Aunt Nona thought of the exilic Armenians in the United States as “owls flying in the dark”, Aunt Anna found peace and “home” in French Surrealism.

Lastly, Seta, Arlen and Peter, who are already assimilated into the mainstream American culture, represented the third-generation Armenian-Americans, who carved out the evolving borders of their Armenian-ness and personhood through symbolic returns to the “homeland. For them, to achieve a symbolic connection between the “Old World” and the “New World” was more important than slavishly follow the Armenian traditions in the United States. By way of their dialogues and interactions with their respective family members, their forays into the Armenian history, their literal/metaphorical journey to their roots, to the “Old Country”, these third generation Armenian-Americans learnt to “feel” Armenian rather than to “become” Armenian. In other words, Seta, Arlen and Peter’s cultural alignments between the “Old World” and the “New World” do not entail the recuperation of a literal home, which is generally described as the defining *telos* of the diasporic sensibility. Rather, after reconciling with their ethnic past and journeying to their ancestral roots, they negotiate their ethnic identity (their Armenian-ness) with their American-ness, resulting in the restoration of ethnic dignity and pride. Through their ethnic performativity (culinary practices, interest in Armenian political issues, commemoration of 1915 events, taking part in Armenian cultural practices) Seta, Arlen and Balakian construct spaces wherein they “feel” Armenian and continue to being American at the same time. As I claim, the “Old World” for these protagonists is but a temporary destination, whereas the “New World” has always been the protagonists’ permanent space of their cultural practices. Therefore,

it can be concluded that “New World” is Saroyan’s “New Armenia”, where symbolic cultural practices are executed to express ethnic pride only.

In conclusion, the three books analyzed in this study are characterized by the theme of search for roots, which shaped the protagonists’ identity quests from their mainstream American identity to their ethnic Armenian identity. Historicity of the theme aided the protagonists in their identity constructions via a re-articulation of the Armenian history. English as the linguistic medium of narration and the presentation of ethnic culture in the books reflected the welcomed assimilation of the third generation Armenian-American protagonists. Finally, despite the overriding American characteristics in their identities, the protagonists’ journey to their roots was virtually a means for proclaiming their ethnic pride, signaling their symbolic ethnicity. Thus, the protagonists negotiated their hyphenated identities and assumed symbolic Armenian-ness as a result of their identity quests only for declaring their ethnic pride. In the presence of the Armenian-American protagonists analyzed under the theme of search for roots, this study proves that the contemporary Armenian-American literature appears more American in its maturity, when (what is perceived as) Armenia and her cultural elements only function as a temporary destination to be discovered and to be returned from: an aspect that prioritizes the “New World” as the real home.

I believe that this study will provide new routes for the evaluation of Armenian historiography, epistemology, literature and criticism. Moreover, I hope that this study will serve as a valuable source for researchers and academicians, studying history, ethnic literature, international-relations and politics, sociology, psychology, anthropology and other respective fields. I also wish that this thesis will enable its readers to make a revision of their partial opinions and bring about new understandings about the subjects analyzed in this study. From the very beginning, I have seen this research as an opportunity for digging into a compelling field, where the Armenian cultural life, which is in most ways the same as and related to my own country’s culture, is submerged in another country’s literature. While suggesting the utmost importance of analyzing and surmising about ethnicities without having conclusive judgments, I truly wish for each and every reader to consider this study as a guiding source for American, Armenian and ethnic studies.

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## **ORIGINAL TURKISH VERSIONS OF THE TRANSLATIONS**

(27) İnsanların en adili, en akıllı ve kudretlisi olan Melikşah, bütün insanlara karşı baba gibi idi. Bütün Doğu Roma ve Ermeniler kendi istekleri ile onun yönetimine girdiler.

(45) Osmanlı Devleti'ndeki ulusal ayaklanmaların uluslararası kamuoyuna duyurulmasında ve ayaklanmacılara yurtdışından destek sağlanmasında, Osmanlı topraklarında görev yapan Amerikalılar etkin rol üstlenmişlerdir . . . Amerikan misyonerleri ve ABD'nin İstanbul Elçiliği Başkâtibi Schuyler'in Bulgar isyanlarının dünyaya duyurulmasında nasıl etkili olduğu gözler önüne serilmektedir. Aynı şekilde Ermeni olayları sırasında da Amerikan misyonerlerinin bir bölümü, ABD ve İngiltere gazetelerine olay yerinden haber aktaran muhabirler gibi çalışmışlardır. Amerikan Misyonerlerinin gerek kurdukları okullarda verdikleri eğitim, gerek Bulgar ve Ermeni dillerinin yayın alanında kullanılmasına sağladıkları katkılar nedeniyle bu iki halkın milli uyanışlarına katkıda bulundukları söylenebilir.

(76-77) 1915 tehciri aslında çete olaylarına katılmayan pek çok Ermeni için suçsuz oldukları halde yaşamaya maruz bırakıldıkları, aynı gruptan diğer insanlarla ortak yaşadıkları, sadece savaş ortamının yarattığı öldürülme riskiyle ilgili tehlikeler yüzünden değil, göçten kaynaklı koşullar, açlık ve salgın hastalıklar yüzünden de tehdit oluşturan önemli bir travmatik olay olmuştur. Hayatta kalanlar yol boyunca travmatik olaylar yaşamışlar ya da bu türden olaylara tanıklık etmişlerdir. Genel olarak bakıldığında bile, Ermenilerin tehcir edilmesinin, bu olayı yaşayanların grup kimliklerini canlandıracak derecede önemli bir travma yaratacağını önceden tahmin etmek zor değildir.

(109) Sizler çocuklarınıza tüm acılarınızı geçirdiniz. Ben acılarımı çocuklarıma geçirmek istemiyorum. Çocuklarımin tarihimizin yaralarına ev sahipliği yapmasını istemiyorum.

## **RESUME**

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## ÖZET

Tarih boyunca Ermeniler azınlık olmanın zorluklarının üstesinden gelmiştir ki bu Eski Dünyadan yeni kıtaya göçlerinden sonra da devam etmiştir. Amerikan toplum geneli tarafından Ermenilerin tektipleştirilmelerine ek olarak, başka bir güçlük de kültürlerini muhafaza edip asimilasyona karşı direnç göstermektir. 60'lı yıllardan sonra 1920'lerin eritme potası ideolojisi önemini yitirdi ve bu esnada olan değişim, azınlıkların temsil edilmesi adına bir etnik gurur ve yazarsal söylem gücü üzerine vurgu yaptı. Kimlik ve temsil meselelerinde olan bu türde bir kültürel ve politik değişim, Amerika'daki Ermeni diasporasının kendi farklı özelliklerini edebiyatta ifade edebilmeleri için bir sıçrama tahtası oldu. İlk Ermeni-Amerikan yayınları hasret, göçmenlerin uyum çabaları ve insancılık üzerine odaklandı. Ancak köken arayışı temasının kullanılması ile 1960'ların sonrasında Ermeni-Amerikan edebiyatı eski edebi ifadelerle karşı bir anti-tez haline geldi; bu olgu vazgeçilmez olan etnik gururla birlikte Ermeni ve Amerikalı her iki kimliğin de bütünleşmesi üzerine yansıyan kimlik politikalarına yeni bir yaklaşımla belirtildi. Bu temada, Ermeni kökenli Amerikalı başkarakterler, tireli kimliklerini müzakere ederek Ermeniliği elde etmeye çalışır. Bu temel olgudan yola çıkarak, Ermenilerin tarihleri Amerikalı Ermenilerin sosyokültürel özellikleri açıklanmış, etnik teoriler kullanılmıştır. *Rise the Euphrates* (1994), *Passage to Ararat* (1974), ve *Black Dog of Fate* (1999) eserlerinin incelemesi başkarakterlerin kimlik yolculuklarını göstermek için olan son aşamadır. Bu çalışmanın nihai hedefleri çağdaş Amerikan-Ermeni edebiyatı incelemesindeki boşlukları doldurmak, belirli yapısal ve biçimsel araçlar yoluyla yazarların nasıl tarihe dayanan özel bir Ermeni-Amerikan dünya bakış açısını ifade ettiğine ışık tutmak olmuştur. Başkarakterlerin özelliklerini dikkate alarak ve köken arayışı bağlamında; bu çalışma, Ermenistan ve kültürel öğeleri sadece keşfedilip dönülecek geçici bir varış yeri olarak işlev görürken, olgunluğa erişmiş Ermeni-Amerikan edebi yazınının ne kadar Ermeni veya Amerikalı olduğunu göstermeyi amaçlamıştır.

### ABSTRACT

Throughout history, the Armenians have survived the challenges of being a minority, which continued after their immigration from the Old World to the new continent. In addition to the stereotyping of the Armenians by the American mainstream culture, another challenge was retaining their culture and to resist assimilation. The 1920s ideology of melting-pot lost its prevalence following the 60s, when this shift emphasized ethnic pride and an authorial discourse power for representing the minorities. Such a cultural and political shift in issues of identity and representation became a springboard for the Armenian-Americans to express their peculiarities in literature. The early Armenian-American publications focused on nostalgia, adaptation struggles of the immigrants and humanism. However, post 1960s Armenian-American literature became an antithesis to the earlier ways of literary expressions via utilizing search for roots as a theme, which was marked by a new approach to identity politics, reflecting the amalgamation of both identities, Armenian and American, with an indispensable ethnic pride. In this theme, the protagonists, who are the Americans of Armenian decent, struggle to achieve Armenian-ness by negotiating their hyphenated identities. Proceeding from this principal question, Armenian history and Armenian-American socio-cultural aspects were explained, and theories on ethnicity were employed. Analyzing *Rise the Euphrates* (1994), *Passage to Ararat* (1974), and *Black Dog of Fate* (1999) was the last step to illustrate the protagonists' identity quests. The ultimate goals of this study are to fill in the gaps in the analysis of contemporary Armenian-American literature and to elucidate how the authors, by means of particular structural and stylistic devices, render a special Armenian-American worldview that is deeply rooted in history. In presence of the protagonists analyzed under the theme of search for roots, this study aimed to demonstrate how Armenian or how American is the Armenian-American literary writing in its maturity, when Armenia and her cultural elements only function as a temporary destination to be discovered and to be returned from.