Roots & Routes

The Origin and Development of Diasporan Armenian Collective Memory

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Anthropology
ANT 490 – Independent Study
Advisor: Professor Jim Taggart
Senior Honors Thesis
Graduation Date: 13 May 2006
Submission Date: 24 April 2006
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Recently, during an exit interview conducted by Professor Misty Bastian, the chair of Franklin & Marshall’s Anthropology department, I was asked my opinions regarding my experience with Anthropology and its relationship to a liberal arts education. Entering the interview I had not speculated much about the questions that may be asked of me and, needless to say, had not given any thought to my responses.

Liberal arts education was once explained to me as something “based entirely on the cultivation of impractical forms of knowledge,”¹ insofar as it is not focused on the development of a specific skill (mechanics, engineering, etc.). This statement did not cross my mind again until this recent exit interview.

Although the words of my friend immediately came to mind, the thought that my four years spent in college had amounted to naught, or at least to nothing overtly “practical,” seemed wholly unbelievable. The idea that this interpretation was entirely dependent on one’s definition of “practical” crossed my mind briefly before I found myself confidently articulating a pithy response.

The word “practical,” though it has many definitions, refers very definitely to the capability of a certain thing to be used or put into effect. As John Henry Newman wrote, a truly great intellect “is one which takes a connected view of old and new, past and present, far and near, and which has an insight into the influence of all these one on another; without which there is no whole, and no center”² (Harris). Anthropology is, to me, the embodiment of a liberal arts education. I feel that John Newman’s vision of a “truly great intellect” is precisely the description of an effective anthropologist. Anthropology is inherently about learning how to understand, communicate with, and relate to people. All of life, unless one wants to live like Thoreau, is based on this fundamentally important skill—making it seem quite practical, indeed.

¹ Alison Finley
² Taken from The Idea of a University.
Communication can occur on a variety of different levels in a multitude of realms—oral tradition, literature, media, informal interaction—but every type of communication shares a common feature: they all tell a story. Stories are “neither the pure creations of autonomous individuals nor the unalloyed expressions of subjective views, but rather a result of ongoing dialogue and redaction within fields of intersubjectivity (Jackson 2002: 22). All of life is about telling stories and interpreting the stories we are told. Michael Jackson, in *The Politics of Storytelling* (2002), develops his arguments out of a confluence of two related theses, building one out of the other. His starting point, an elaboration on an argument made by Hannah Arendt, is an understanding of storytelling as a strategy for transforming private meanings into public ones.

This conveyance of meaning between private and public spheres can happen in a multitude of ways, most obviously in types of journalism or literature. Newspapers, magazines, websites and blogs, poetry, and novels are all forms of media that convey meaning through stories. On a more personal level, we are listening to stories everyday in our interaction with others. Whether or not the significance is explicit, and whether or not one is conscious of the meaning she conveys, every story is imbued with the thoughts, feelings, and moral visions of the subject.

Roland Barthes (in White 1987) has remarked that narrative is international and transcultural, much like life itself. Because people’s life experiences cannot speak for themselves, if they are to be transferred to a public sphere on any level, those experiences are often turned into stories. Indeed, it seems that the impulse to narrate when reporting events is so natural, so deeply embedded within culture, that it is almost unavoidable. There is much discussion in academia regarding the nature and validity of narrative; many scholars view narrative as problematic in its representation of history. As an enthusiastic folktale scholar, I find this point to be misdirected. “Storytelling does not necessarily help us understand the world conceptually or cognitively,” but it allows us to gain access to a type of history that we cannot learn or experience cognitively—a personal, subjective culturally imbued interpretation of past events.

Walter Benjamin (1996) once wrote: “Natural history does not extend to mankind, any more than does universal history; it knows only the individual.” A fragmentary piece written in 1918, consisting of only five sentences, it is hard to know exactly what meaning Benjamin intended to convey with the above. However, I interpret his words to be a testament to the deep connection between history and individuals—history only exists insofar as there are people to live it and speak of it.
Hayden White concludes that this desire to narrate is so prevalent, that its absence in a culture should be considered more problematic than its existence. White (1987: 1) comments that narrative should be viewed, not as a problem of itself, but as a solution “to a problem of general human concern, namely the problem of how to translate knowing into telling.” This process of converting human experience into recognizable forms and structures of meaning is both human and culturally specific. The meaning given to a story cannot be equated with a single life, since human life is not merely “an island in the stream,” a purely individual thing (Jackson 2002). Stories, “like memories and dreams, are nowhere articulated as purely personal revelations, but authored and authorized dialogically and collaboratively in the course of sharing one’s recollections with others (Jackson 2002: 22; Halbwachs 1992). In this way, the transference of narrative becomes a collective and culturally specific experience.

My fascination with the creation of stories, the moralization of events in the process and the transfer of meaning was catalyzed by my discovery of a folktale within the Armenian narrative tradition. During one of the first Anthropology classes I enrolled in at Franklin & Marshall, we studied various cultural representations of popular folktales, operating under the principle that myths and legends may be viewed as symbolic representations of aspects of the culture to which they belong.

The idea of exploring Armenian folktales occurred to me during the very first class meeting. Although I consider myself to be quite well-acquainted with my Armenian heritage, I found the possibility of learning about the more subtle representations of Armenian culture intriguing. At the time, my discovery of a dragon-slayer story (told to me by my Hayastansi cousin, Rousan) and my subsequent analysis of its cultural symbolism was thrilling; I came to understand that Armenians have complex ways of representing their cultural identity and history. What I did not realize at the time was that my personal understanding of my Armenian ethnicity was also based on a series of fragmented but ultimately connected stories. This project began as what I hoped would be a continuation of my folktale study. In a short time, this hope disintegrated, due to a lack of resources, and became a study of Armenian ethnicity. As I reluctantly put aside my interest in folktales and pursued other topics of study, I came to realize that stories were everywhere. Each question I asked was answered with a story, and I found myself relating quite easily to my informants through some storytelling of my own.

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3 ANT 245—The Folktale; taught by Professor Jim Taggart, Spring 2004.
4 Meaning one who was born in Armenia.
When I traveled to Armenia in December of 2005, I realized for the first time how deeply embedded these stories were in my life and mind. Suffering quite a bit of culture shock upon my arrival, I knew later that my confusion about Armenia was a product of a lifetime of commemorative stories, idealized representations of the past and a deeply intermingling history and memory.

Armenian-American ethnic consciousness is based on collective memory and the representation and transference of this memory through narrative. Yael Zerubavel (1995: xvi) writes about her fascination with our fundamental need to create meaningful narratives, ignore inconsistencies, silence some stories, and elaborate others; by our enormous capacity to forget and live on, and remember and live on, and take this dual process for granted; by our inexhaustible efforts to continuously reconstruct our memory of the past between words and silences, images and void.

I honestly could not agree more. This paper will focus on idealized narratives of Armenian-American collective memory of the Diaspora which constitutes an important part of Armenian-American ethnicity. I will also focus on the subjective side of this phenomenon.
INTRODUCTION

When I first endeavored to explore Armenian topics, the decision to travel to Armenia seemed rather natural. I felt that regardless of what the final outcome of my paper would be, the trip would provide me an opportunity to view Armenia in an anthropological manner. Shortly after I arrived, I learned that attempting to understand the ways in which Armenian ethnicity was experienced, understood, and conveyed was highly problematic. Hayastansis are not confronted with their Armenian-ness as a Diasporan Armenian would be, or, as many of my informants reported, as they were when they left Armenia to visit another country. They are surrounded by the land and the people, the food and the language; they are there, Armenian culture is everywhere, and there is no immediate need to construct representations of it in order to feel more connected.

While abroad, my field journal became filled with notes expressing my confusion and ambivalence about the feasibility of my academic goals. Furthermore, my experiences in Armenia—some of the people I met, the conversations I had, the sights and sounds and smells of the city—filled me with a sense of emptiness and loss that I would not make sense of until I was back home. It was only in the last days of my trip and upon my return that I acknowledged that my project was going to take a slightly different turn.

The choice to focus on Armenian-American narrative, collective memory and ethnic identity grew out of the remains of what I thought to be an uneventful and even a wasted trip. I was able to find meaning in my disappointment with the trip after I returned to the States. Rather than try to ignore or be ashamed by my impressions—insofar as they seemed a betrayal of the pristine image of the motherland—I examined them in an attempt to discover their nature and their origin. Eventually, I began to see that the development of ethnic consciousness in the Diaspora is dependent upon the historical imaginations of Armenian-Americans, the idealized images they construct of Armenia and the transfer of these images to others. In other words, Armenians in America connect to Armenian culture through
collective memory and commemorative narrative. In some sense, the ways in which Armenians identify themselves as such within the Diaspora are based on the relationship that they feel to the “homeland.” More explicitly, this vision of the “homeland” is the product of a constructed memory of a past vision of Armenia.

In this paper I will argue that in telling stories, people are able to assert a sense of belonging to an ethnic group despite the incontrovertible distance (both geographically and psychologically) between the Diaspora and the homeland. Furthermore, in constructing and perpetuating these commemorative narratives, Armenian-Americans can bring the “homeland” closer to them. In this sense, they are able to bridge the space between there and here. I both quote the word homeland and italicize “there” and “here” to emphasize the fact that the image of the homeland is largely distorted through this process. Within the Diaspora, Armenia is generally viewed as a sacred land—a holy, blessed Virgin mayr⁵ of which our ancestors, and our culture, was born. Armenian-American ethnic identity is based on an intangible ideal which is substantiated by the creation of romantic narratives.

This process of creating narratives has both a cognitive and an affective component. The cognitive component consists of the formation of historical narratives and the existence of collective struggles (e.g. us versus them). The affective component consists of the ways in which individuals personalize and understand these narratives. However, these components are not mutually exclusive. The affective component, for example, is characterized by a sense of sadness and loss⁶ that is experienced both on the personal and the collective level. The cognitive component is more public, as it is based on historical facts, and it is therefore more easily accessible. My method of using myself as an informant enables me to understand the affective dimension of ethnicity, which is much more personal and internal. My personal experiences, both growing up as an Armenian and my two visits to Armenia⁷ December of 2005, are important because they illuminate the disjuncture between diasporan imaginings and contemporary Armenian “reality.” By comparing my stories and feelings about my Armenian ethnicity to those of others I am able to gain access to the affective component of narrative construction that will facilitate a better understanding of the creation and function of these ideals.

⁵ Meaning “mother.”
⁶ This loss is experienced in a variety of different ways, however, it may be attached to the genocide of 1915 and its victims, the loss (because of death) of ancestors and the immigrant culture that was spawned by the genocide, the loss of land to Turkey (Mt. Ararat, for example, but specifically regions where one’s family was from that is no longer a part of Armenia), and so on.
⁷ First in August of 2001, then in December of 2005
Methodological Considerations

In my research, although my time constraints were strict, I used a variety of sources that provided me with a more rounded body of information with which to work: Armenian newspaper and magazine articles, novels, orally conveyed folktales, children’s story and picture books, popular myths, epic poems and legends, movies and academic texts. Between September of 2005 and February of 2006, I conducted interviews with Armenian-Americans from various generations of ethnics, ranging in age from fourteen to eighty-three. In mid-December of 2005, I traveled to Armenia where I conducted interviews with repatriates, Armenian-Americans who frequently traveled there on business or otherwise, and with native Armenians, all varying greatly in age.

Illuminating, on a limited scale, some of the ways in which Armenians construct these individual pictures of ethnicity, identity and personhood, I began to understand that these complex structures of awareness occur on a mostly subterranean level, subconsciously expressed or experienced amidst the familiar push and pull of daily life. My professors often refer to a metaphor of culture that describes it as the “water in which people swim;” much like a fish in a tank, one is often not aware of this ‘water’ until the tank is drained. With this metaphor in mind, I began to get a better sense of how Armenian ethnicity is experienced in Hayastan; I had a better understanding of the common discussion among my Hayastansi informants that they were not conscious of their feelings for Armenia until they left to visit other countries. This confrontation with the Other is what solidified Armenian ethnic identity and pride more concretely in their minds.

The more complex this picture of Armenian ethnic consciousness seemed to get, the more I began to think about where I fit into this puzzling picture of Armenian-ness. Having both an Armenian mother and father, I always subconsciously considered myself immune to, or somehow separate from, the detachment of the Diaspora. I was somehow more Armenian than others. My sense of heritage was too strong, my Armenian pride too solid to be diluted with any sense of otherness. Besides, I was 100% Armenian, which, as any math student knows, leaves no room for anything else.

Regardless of these feelings, however, I manifestly am an American as well; I am constantly connected and confronted with otherness every day. I am inherently other myself, simply in virtue of the fact that I was born and raised in the United

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8 Armenian word for “Armenia.”
States. Furthermore, I have read works by Armenian-American authors and met and spoken with Armenians in the Diaspora who feel no particularly strong connection to their heritage.

These inconsistencies became issues of great interest and importance to me and I sought to explore them in more depth. Firstly, the experience of Armenian ethnicity in the Diaspora is overtly different from the ethnic experience in Armenia. Secondly, based on information collected through interviews, it is clear that Armenian ethnic awareness within the Diaspora varies in strength among different individuals. Therefore, considering my own case, where this strength of ethnic awareness originated became a topic about which I was deeply curious.

In addition to the incredible diversity of sources and information I had accumulated, my advisor recommended that I attempt to document the themes or patterns appearing as I reviewed my material. I found that over one-hundred pages of transcriptions (and countless more hours of recordings I never bothered to transcribe) were far too much, given the time constraints, to peruse in search of general themes. In order to give myself a template against which I would be able to compare and contextualize my vast amounts of data, I wrote down everything I knew about being an Armenian-American. I produced over twenty pages of stories—an important addition to a burgeoning body of information that would help me address the critical questions that emerged throughout this process.

The analysis of these diverse sources has made it possible for me to reveal the broader themes in both Armenian-American ethnic identity as well as in my academic approach. My target areas of study, which I touched on above, will be geared to establishing an understanding of some of the ways in which Armenian ethnic identity is manifested and strongly maintained within the Diaspora and why this occurs. I will first look at the expression of ethnicity, transnationally, within the Diaspora. Next, I will explore the ways in which this connection with Armenian ethnicity is sustained and transferred to others through collective memory and narrative. Finally, I will add my voice and the voices of other Armenian-Americans, as examples of these narratives in an attempt to uncover the ways in which this puzzle may be pieced together.
Defining Ethnicity

The term *ethnicity* was first recorded by David Riesman in 1953 (Glazer and Moynihan 1975: 1). The first appearance of this word in a dictionary did not occur until eight years later in *Webster’s Third International* in 1961. The next entry of the word was not until 1973, when the *American Heritage Dictionary* defined ethnicity as: “1. The condition of belonging to a particular ethnic group; 2. Ethnic pride” (Glazer and Moynihan 1975: 1). The first definition is an objective condition, the second is decidedly *subjective*.

Ethnicity is an important and perplexing phenomenon in modern scholarship. As the American Heritage definition of ethnicity implies, it is potentially both an *objective* and *subjective* condition. Whether people are identifying themselves or others in the argot of ethnic comparison, there are several issues that continually arise. Primarily, there is the problem of language; it is clear that the words *ethnic*, *ethnic group*, and *ethnicity* will inevitably mean different things to different people, specifically bearing in mind cultural context (Hicks 1977: 1).

Anny Bakalian (1993: 39) reports that the word *ethnicity* “derives from the Greek *ethniko*, an adjective of *ethnos*, referring to people or nations.” However, despite this etymology, the concept of ethnicity is extraordinarily elusive and difficult to define in a precise way. Talcott Parsons (1975: 53) states that “it seems to be generally agreed that what we call ethnicity is a primary focus of group identity, that is, the organization of plural persons into distinctive groups and, second, of solidarity and the loyalties of individual members to such groups.” Although the interpretation of ethnicity has been based in various domains from a biological foundation to territoriality, the concept of distinctive groups and individual loyalty to these groups is the most relevant to my study.
Ethnic Groups

Much of the literature on ethnicity attaches the word *ethnic* to the existence of a *group*. In my research, I have not yet come across a word in the English language for the phrase “ethnic group,” or any single word that could acceptably refer to a group that is united around shared cultural traditions. George De Vos (1975) appeals briefly to the word *ethne*, a term suggested by French anthropologists for technical usage. Fredrik Barth (1969: 10) states that the term *ethnic group*

is generally understood in anthropological literature to designate a population which:

1. is largely biologically self-perpetuating
2. shares fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms
3. makes up a field of communication and interaction
4. has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as
   constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order

De Vos (1975: 9) elaborates on this definition by adding that “the group’s actual history often trails off into legend or mythology, which includes some concept of an unbroken biological-genetic generational continuity, sometimes regarded as giving special characteristics to the group.”

The ideas in the last sentence of this quote will be examined in much greater detail in the next section; however, currently it will be valuable to point out De Vos’ mention of legend and mythology. William Bascom (1965: 4), in an article about the forms of folklore, defines myths as “prose narratives which, in the society in which they are told, are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past. They are accepted on faith; they are taught to be believed; and they can be cited as authority in answer to ignorance, doubt, or disbelief.” Bascom states that myths are the embodiment of dogma which, in most cases, implies that the set of beliefs are not necessarily based in reality. As Armenian history trails off into various forms of narrative, its elements are memorialized giving Armenian-Americans an idyllic image of their ethnicity and making it easy to connect to collective identity.

Since, with minimal research, one will come to discover that there are no essential or ultimate characteristics common to all ethnic groups and, furthermore, my research with Armenian ethnicity has been limited (in time and projection), it is important to specify many of my statements in this paper will be generalizations based on both information I have collected and accessible information in the body of literature on the subject. In order to clarify my academic standpoint, I will use De
Vos’ (1975: 9) point that “the word ‘usually’ must be understood as preceding any generalization” I make in the remainder of this paper. I acknowledge that there will always be exceptions to generalizations, since this is the nature of the latter, however, I do not believe this renders my conclusions invalid.

I believe Fredrik Barth’s explanation of ethnic groups, especially with regard to boundary maintenance, is still the most widely accepted and popular definition in scholarship on the topic. In Ethnic Groups and Boundaries (1969), Barth attempts to understand and elucidate the problems of ethnic groups and their persistence. He acknowledges the fact that much of anthropology has dealt with the differences between cultures and the historical boundaries and connections between them; however, he goes on to criticize the discipline for its lack of attention paid to the actual constitution of ethnic groups and the nature of the boundaries between them (9). With an increasing number of ethnic populations living outside of the “homeland” and in ever expanding diasporas and transnational populations, the simplistic idea that ethnic boundaries and cultural diversity are maintained solely through geographical and social isolation should be dismissed.

Indeed, as Barth points out, one observation that clearly demonstrates the inadequacy of this viewpoint, specifically with regard to geography, is the fact that ethnic groups are very much like corporate entities and that boundaries persist regardless of the individual people of which they are comprised. “In other words,” as Barth (1969: 9-10) puts it:

- categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information, but do entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories.

Furthermore, Barth argues that, contrary to the social isolation viewpoint, ethnic distinctions to some extent depend on social interaction between groups to the degree that the contrast between ethnic groups is often times the foundation upon which social solidarity is built. In Barth’s view, although cultural features, individual characteristics and organizational forms may change, the distinction between “us” and “them,” insiders versus outsiders, is the essence of an ethnic group (see Avakian 1992; Bakalian 1993; Barth 1969). It is this boundary, and its maintenance, that defines the group.

As stated above, these ethnic boundaries have two distinct sides. “The differences,” as Anny Bakalian (1993: 40) states, “are both subjective and objective, real or perceived cultural markers. Boundaries are either self-imposed or imposed by others.” For example, there is a large difference in the constituents of Armenian
ethnic identity for an Armenian living in Fresno and one living in Azerbaijan. Armenian ethnic identity for an Armenian in California is a much more subjective and voluntary boundary, defined by insiders, while the Armenian in Azerbaijan has ethnicity imposed on them by others in an attempt to mark boundaries in a more restrictive way. As Bakalian (1993: 40) points out, "increasingly, scholars have come to recognize ethnicity as a variable that may be an essential resource, irrelevant or a crippling liability, depending on the context."

Cultural Assimilation and Symbolic Ethnicity

Armenians in America, for the most part, seem to have skillfully adapted to American culture without fully assimilating. Not only do many Armenian immigrants retain aspects of their culture, they also pass these traits on to their children.⁹ For immigrant groups in America, or their descendants, Bakalian (1993: 41; see also Isajiw 1974) "identity beyond the stage of cultural assimilation is based on double boundaries; from within, through socialization, from without through intergroup relations." Bakalian (1993: 41) expands on this theory by stating:

Complete assimilation takes place when insiders cease to socialize their young in the ethnic subculture and its identity, and when outsiders do not perceive any salient markers that distinguish them from others. However, once a collective consciousness is established and distinctive characteristics of an ethnic group recognized, the group “takes on a self-perpetuating quality and is passed on from on generation to the next” (Cashmore 1984: 87). This self-perpetuating quality that Cashmore speaks of is dependent upon the existence of a collective memory which forms the basis for a collective identity and ethnic group.

Although the metaphor has recently changed, it is obvious that the term “melting pot” had its origins in the phenomenon of cultural assimilation. There seems to be little doubt that this assimilation process has been essentially accomplished, at least with regard to immigrant ethnics from the early part of the twentieth century. That said, the currently popular metaphor is “salad bowl,” a phrase that evokes images of tomatoes, cucumbers, carrots, radishes, and perhaps even an exotic fiddlehead nestled harmoniously together within the big bowl that is the United States. The emergence of this new phrase suggests that widespread cultural assimilation is no longer the trend and that there are “residual” ethnic

⁹ See Appendix I.
groups, creating a solid assortment, rather than a soupy, melted down, indistinguishable mass.

In an article on ethnicity, Herbert Gans (1979) explains this phenomenon by arguing that ethnicity in contemporary America does not disappear in later generations, instead, it becomes “symbolic.” Bakalian’s idea about ethnicity as a “variable” speaks to issues such as assimilation versus adaptation, and seems to draw on Gans’ hypothesis that ethnic diasporan populations tend to find suitable ways to express their ethnic identity by picking and choosing which cultural traits to embrace and express within a host country. During this process, Armenian collective identity becomes tied to an idealized version of Armenian culture that may not have any mooring in reality, past or present.

Gans (1979: 202) argues that even when ethnic ties begin to wane, whether through inter-marriage or assimilation, third-generation ethnics “continue to perceive themselves as ethnics.” Gans’ hypothesis (202) is that “in this generation, people are less and less interested in their ethnic cultures and organizations—both sacred and secular—and are instead more concerned with maintaining their ethnic identity, with the feeling of being Jewish or Italian or Polish, and with finding ways of feeling and expressing that identity in suitable ways.” By identity, Gans refers to the social and psychological elements that constitute role behavior, and he states that as generations progress the ethnic role takes on different meanings. Gans (1979: 203) claims:

the ethnic role is today less of an ascriptive than a voluntary role that people assume alongside other roles. To be sure, ethnics are still identified as such by others, particularly on the basis of name, but the behavioral expectations that once went with identification by others have declined sharply, so that ethnics have some choice about when and how to play ethnic roles.

Because, as time passes, these ethnic cultures get further removed from the first generation of immigrants, there is an increasing degree of freedom with regard to role definition within ethnic identification.

As Gans explains, this identity can be expressed through action, feeling, or any combination of these in nearly any situation. Armenian-Americans, for example, have the opportunity to attend church on a regular basis (a sacred ethnic expression), become members of fraternal organizations (Knights of Vartan and its women’s auxiliary, Daughters of Vartan), participate in a variety of youth events (ACYOA, Hye Mertsoom), attend Armenian camps and so on. These various formal and informal organizations create communities, composed largely of fellow ethnics, that allow Armenians to express their ethnic identity in interactive groups. Along the
same lines, there are several Armenian periodicals (weekly and monthly) that circulate throughout the United States. As Benedict Anderson discusses in *Imagined Communities* (1991), these publications enable people to feel connected to a larger group in the shared experience of the “news.” Gans (1979: 203) refers to this as the discovering of identity through affiliating with “an abstract collectivity that does not exist as an interacting group.”

Symbolic Armenians “conceive of their ethnic identity as a choice, expressed in terms of pride in one’s heritage and strong feelings toward people and things Armenian. They gauge an individual’s commitment to his/her Armenian background in terms of voluntary actions” (Bakalian 1994: 395). Regardless of the distances between America and Armenia, between immigrant populations and third-generation ethnics, and between Armenian communities all over the world, Armenians in the Diaspora find meaningful ways to experience and express this ethnic identity. The transmission of narratives, especially romanticized narratives, is one of the easiest forms of ethnic expression, particularly with regard to generations of ethnics that are further removed from the immigrant culture.

*The Experience of Armenian Ethnicity*

Arlene Voski Avakian, an Armenian-American feminist, activist, historian and sociologist (among many other categorizations), has been a major catalyst in my understanding of the persistence of Armenian ethnicity within the Diaspora. Born in 1939 to immigrant parents, she is a first-generation Armenian-American, and was very closely tied to Armenian culture. However, Avakian did not connect to this Armenianness and, rather, she experienced her ethnicity as troublesome and problematic. As a young child, she struggled to find her place in the “regular” (i.e. American) world and rejected many of the features of her Armenian life.

The deeply rooted religious connection to her Armenian heritage, for example, was incredibly difficult for Avakian to face as a young girl. She wonders (1992: 3): “Why couldn’t we go to the “regular” church around the corner? My cousin went there and she was as Armenian as we were. My mother told me it was not our church but where ‘they’ went. I recognized her use of they. It meant ‘wrong.’ But that church looked like heaven to me.” The ambivalence that Avakian felt regarding her ethnic identity soon became intense dislike and rejection. She took care to separate herself from her Armenianness in every way possible, marking every
instance where she experienced difference or separation between herself (or her family) and Others (non-Armenians) and desperately attempting to erase this gap.

In a particular passage about her struggle to create a more “American” looking Easter outfit, Avakian (1992: 6-7) conveys the extent to which her difference, and the difference of “her people,” pervaded her consciousness as a young girl:

A young man in his twenties approached me. He asked my name, and, when I replied with a name that had the characteristic “ian” at the end, he responded that I certainly didn’t look Armenian. He went on to explain that I was too tall, too narrow in the hips, too light, and I didn’t have a big enough nose or enough hair to look like a real Armenian. His comments were meant as a compliment, and I took them as such: they made my day. It was possible to come from these people and “pass.” And it was clear, too, that I was not the only Armenian who put a premium on looking American.

This passage is helpful in understanding the physical or aesthetic aspects of collective ethnic identity. Harold Isaacs, in an article on basic group identity (1975: 36), writes that “the body is the most palpable element of which identity—individual or group—is made.” An individual may take many actions to deny this identity, as he can change his name, ignore or conceal his origins, disregard or rewrite his history, adopt a different nationality, learn a new language, abandon his family’s religion…embrace new mores, ethics, philosophies, take on new styles of life. But there is not much he can do to change his body (Isaacs 1975: 36-37).

Avakian takes great care in separating herself from every manifestation of her Armenian-ness, including her essential biological characteristics. As luck would have it, according to her, her genetic inheritance was less like a “real Armenian” than most.

The first fifty or so pages of Avakian’s memoir deal explicitly with her experience, namely her intense feelings and rejection, of being an Armenian-American. While as a child much of her rebellion was centered around the concerns such as those cited above, as she matured her focus shifted to the subtler aspects of Armenian consciousness—racism, discrimination, patriarchy—and as her interest in the civil rights and women’s rights movements developed, her rejection of her ethnic identity deepened.

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10 In Avakian’s memoir, this characterization mainly refers to the Armenians she is directly exposed to (members of her family and her church). However, this generalization could probably be extended to Armenian immigrants as well as to populations of Armenian-Americans living in the early half of the 20th century.
The detailed and provocative descriptions of Avakian’s experiences with ethnic identity and consciousness provide her with a guide for understanding the many challenging and life-altering (non-Armenian) events that occur in her adult life, which she spends nearly the entire remainder of the book discussing. The birth of a son with mental handicaps, her struggle with repressing feelings and emotion, her activism, and her relationships with her husband, intellectualism and with the roles of women in general, were all great challenges in her life that created tension and a feeling of difference, rebellion and defiance. Avakian relates to this feeling and recognizes it as being identical to her experience with her Armenian ethnicity.

In the last thirty pages of her book, Avakian finally acknowledges a connection between her experiences in the non-Armenian life—that she took great pains to create—and her Armenian ethnic identity. In one of the final expressions (in the book) of her intense interest in African-Americans, Avakian enrolls in a course called “Revolutionary concepts in Afro-American music.” She describes her experience as follows (1992: 258):

> Despite the incontrovertible fact of my whiteness, part of me felt I belonged in the New Africa House taking courses in the Afro-American Studies department. My emotional response to the material was also confusing...The strength of African culture, its ability to survive the Middle Passage, and the trauma of slavery were not only amazing on an intellectual level; they also evoked in me a profound feeling of respect and even joy...I had never before thought of Africa as a place from which black Americans had come—never considered it to be the homeland of anyone but the “natives” I’d seen in National Geographics...

It is in this moment that Arlene Avakian understands the deep metaphysical connection between her two “separate” lives. “I was well aware,” she says (1992: 261), “that Armenian men were male chauvinist pigs, and it was impossible for me to live near my family because of the way women were treated, but there was something about our common pain that would always connect me in some profound way to Armenians, women and men.” Among her other complaints, as a feminist and an activist, Avakian found the patriarchy of the Armenian culture intolerable. However, as the last part of her sentence suggests, “neither the practice of ethnic culture nor participation in ethnic organizations was essential to being and feeling ethnic” (Gans 1979: 212). Avakian soon realizes that despite her ever-present rejection of her ethnicity, many of her interests and aspects of her personality were products of her Armenian ethnic identity.
During this period of enlightenment in her life, Avakian’s mother sends her a book written by an Armenian—*Passage to Ararat*, by Michael Arlen. As she read this autobiographical account of an Armenian man’s attempt at coming to terms with being Armenian she felt compelled, for the first time in her life, to explore this common history and shared experience between herself and other Armenians. “Such small beginnings,” Arlen (1975: 14) writes:

That evening, for the first time, I met Armenians on my own. Armenian women who laughed and asked too many questions. Thick-chested men who seemed to have their arms around each other. Too many cups of coffee and small, sweet cakes. I was there—wherever there was. It was an uncertain beachhead, for I kept fighting a desire to bolt. Never let them get too close! But I also knew that a corner of some missing piece had briefly become visible.

As I finally made my way toward the door, a voice called out, “You will come back!” I couldn’t tell whether it was a statement or a question.

“I will,” I said. The journey had begun.

Arlen’s words resonate with Avakian and she experiences an excitement about understanding the there that Arlen references. Although their experiences growing up as Armenians were very different—Avakian was raised in an intensely Armenian environment, while Arlen had virtually no sense of his ethnicity at all—^11—they shared the feeling that their ethnic identities were “missing pieces” in their lives.

Arlene Voski Avakian’s life experiences are drastically different from my own in a multitude of ways. Her relationship with her ethnic identity was also quite different from my own, from Michael Arlen’s (as she discovers), and, quite probably, from each of the other Armenian writers and scholars that I have come across in my research. Yet, despite our obvious differences, the commonality is clear: we all feel connected to our Armenian ethnicity in some meaningful way, whether it is explicit or not. Regardless of its role in our lives, this ethnic identity has a very definite place in our consciousness, creating a common association that binds us to one another.

In the remainder of this paper, I want to understand the ways in which these ethnic bonds function and are transferred among individuals and generations. My work with Armenian folktales and my connection to Avakian’s story, and her

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^11 Arlen’ father, also a writer, had been raised in London. When he reached adulthood, he emigrated to America and changed his name from Dikran Kouyoumjian, to Michael Arlen. Not only were his father’s writings devoid of any references to Armenian ancestry, young Michael grew up with no indication at all that his parents were even Armenian (except, as he has stated, for an occasional derogatory remark about Armenians from his father).
connection with her grandmother’s story,\textsuperscript{12} led me to explore the concept of narration and the role of narrative and memorialization in conveying meaning. When I think of the ambivalence that often times surrounds Armenian ethnic identity, I am reminded of Michael Jackson’s discussion of the relationship we form between the worlds that surrounds us and the ways in which this relationship is mediated by our storytelling. His explanation includes a connection between the widely variant examples of the binary distinction between the self and the unknown other. All of these examples share a common concern “with how the line between categorically opposed domains may be understood, managed and mediated through the performance of rituals and the telling of stories,” (Jackson 2002: 24). In the case of Armenians, this opposition may lie in many different domains—from being and feeling Armenian in America, to the distance between life in the Diaspora and life in the homeland—and while individual representation and mediation of these seemingly irreconcilable concerns vary between generations and personal circumstance, they are deeply felt and represented narratively.

\textsuperscript{12} See Appendix II
The title of this chapter is meant to evoke images of a world without boundaries, a world that almost seems to negate the subtitle that it precedes, making the juxtaposition seem odd. This new millennium, to be sure, has brought new configurations of world-wide markets and instant communication and information technologies that have made nationalism seem redundant. While this is certainly the case, however, I have shown in the previous chapter that ethnicity is still something that is deeply felt. This experience of ethnic belonging, according to some scholars (Barth 1969; Gans 1979), creates its own boundaries, regardless of physical or geographical location. But what is it exactly that marks these boundaries?

For a person with a diasporic identity, “questions of race, culture, identity, and representation,” are entangled with immigrant memories (your own or another’s) and shaped by things such as gender, class, education “and the unstable notion of home” (Dunlop 2005: 115). Like many other Middle Eastern peoples, poetry (among many other forms of narrative, of course) has long been used by Armenians as a form of public expression or a representation of ideals. The following poem, “The Walnut Tree” by Sylva Gaboudikian (1946), is probably the most accessible example of this.

There is a walnut tree
Growing in the vineyard
At the very edge of the world.

My people, you are like
That huge ancient tree--
With branches blessed by the graces

But sprawling
Over the small corner of land;
Roots and arms spread out
And spilling your fruit
To nourish foreign soils.
The notion of *home*, though the word is not used directly in the poem, is understood as being small, isolated at the “very edge of the world,” and somehow connected with a sense of loss but, also, a sense of longevity and productivity—the symbols of the walnut tree and its fruit, *nourishing* foreign soils evoking these positive feelings. The ambivalence of the poem, and the seemingly contradictory positive and negative elements, quite accurately represents the range of feelings among Armenians toward their Diaspora.

Gaboudikian’s conception of the walnut tree (as it represents the Armenian people) as existing at the “very edge of the world” is incredibly provocative in understanding diaspora. Meena Alexander, a multi-lingual, Indian born, diasporan poet uses this same expression in an article written on the existence of an Asian-American aesthetic. Rishma Dunlop (2005: 115) calls this “sensuous location...a transnational borderland shimmering with the rhythms and tongues of multiple languages.” In a sense, my identity as an anthropologist, ethnographer and Armenian-American explicates this location. The multiple languages of this identity—English, Armenian, and anthropological theory, colored also by the collective memory and romanticized narratives in the Diaspora—and, indeed, the study of diasporic identity as a whole, “opens up a multitude of paradoxes, shifting identities, and intellectual challenges” (Dunlop 2005: 115).

*Diaspora*

Conceptually, the term “diaspora,” as hinted at by Dunlop, stresses multiplicity; “‘diasporics’ are not ‘citizens of the world,’ but they prosper in the new cultural fusions that may emerge along the borders” (Levy et al 2005: xii), similar to the way Alexander imagines her diasporic identity. Armenians and Jews are traditionally considered the “classic diasporas” (Levy et al 2005: xii), and, like many other Diaspora communities that have emerged since, have persisted over long stretches of time. Perhaps it is the link to the “homeland” and the engagement with a common history and collective identity that keeps these diasporan communities from fading with time.

The definition of *diaspora* suggests an unsettled, unrooted, unsatisfying existence. The root of *diaspora*, a Greek term meaning “the scattering of seeds,” implies dispersion and gives more poignant meaning to some of the more

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contemporary definitions. As Larry Tye (2001: 1) sees it, the word *diaspora*, today, “describes a homogenous people uprooted...from their native land by unstoppable armies or irreversible social forces.” The words “uprooted” and “unstoppable” within Larry Tye’s definition both imply a lack of autonomy in the emigrants and bespeak a longing to return to the homeland. Armenians, living under the control of the Ottoman Empire, fled persecution and massacres, in large populations of forced emigrants, approximately between the years of 1880 and 1920. As a result of this, and other, more recent, factors, more than half of the world’s population of Armenians currently live in the diaspora.\(^\text{14}\)

The term diaspora has since been expanded to incorporate situations that do not include *forced* dispersal or displacement. James Clifford, who has written extensively on a variety of subjects in anthropology, has presented a definition of diaspora that takes this into account. He discusses the main characteristics of diasporas as incorporating “a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland...desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship” (Clifford 1994: 305). Although these two definitions differ, and are by no means exhaustive, they maintain one common characteristic. Tye’s definition implies what Clifford’s says outright: diaspora is often characterized by a desire to return home.

**Types of Diaspora**

In the Armenian Diaspora, however, despite love, pride and, at times, even nostalgia for *Hayastan*, the idea of longing to return “home” seems entirely outdated.\(^\text{15}\) Vijay Agnew (2005: 4) uses the South Asian diaspora as another example of this: the South Asian diaspora is “not characterized by...its desire for a permanent return to the homeland...rather...it is defined by its ability to recreate a culture in diverse locations.” This fairly new image of diaspora, one that excludes this characteristic

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\(^{14}\) Out of a world population of 8 million Armenians, only 3 million still live in Armenia. Approximately one million Armenians live in America (nearly half in California).

\(^{15}\) During the immediate post-WWII period there was a call to Armenians in the Diaspora to return to the homeland. As R. Hrair Dekmajian (1997: 416) put it: “to the diaspora, the call from the homeland was embodied in the magic word *Nergagt* (Repatriation)—which *spoke to the deepest yearnings of the Armenian people*” (italics mine). In response to this decision on the part of the councils of the Soviet Communist Party and Stalin himself, 150,000 Armenians from all over Europe, the Middle East and the United States immigrated to the Armenian Soviet Republic. I acknowledge this isolated wave of repatriation, however, I also wish to point out that this act, among other effects, caused an enormous socioeconomic burden for the Armenian government which was especially detrimental to a country that was already suffering serious economic deprivation. The repatriations of the late 1940s were a hardship for the indigenous Armenian population as well, which “had to share with the newcomers the country’s meager resources” (Dekmejian 1997: 417).
longing, presents a story that is much more compelling in describing and understanding the Armenian case.

Larry Tye (2001: 2) sets forth to tell a story about the Jews, who he argues are perhaps the oldest historically displaced people, living for the longest without a centralized homeland:

It tells of Jews who are forever rooted in Israel but no longer need to live there. It describes a heterogeneous people who thrive in secular societies as far-flung as the former Soviet Union and Argentina, but continue to embrace a core of beliefs and practices that define them as Jews. It presents a Judaism that, after centuries of dispersion, marks a race as well as a religion, a culture as well as an ethnicity. It shows that diaspora is no mere curiosity of history, but rather the reality of today and tomorrow.

The very last part of this quote is extremely relevant in considering the “mixed salad” analogy from the previous section. America, for example, has become a regular pot-luck picnic of ethnic groups, all maintaining, to a certain extent insofar as they are still distinguishable as such, some aspects of their cultural traits. Drawing on the ideas of Barth (1969), Agnew (2005: 4) states: “Diasporas can thus denote a transnational sense of self and community and create an understanding of ethnicity and ethnic bonds that transcends the borders and boundaries of nation states.” Thus, we can posit that (ethnic) identity is not territorially based and can transcend national boundaries.

Regardless of the poignancy of Agnew’s statement, especially in its implications of the lasting power of ethnic identity within diasporan communities, the issue of memories, nostalgia, and the tension of “here” versus “there,” must still be addressed. At the present time in academic discourse, the word diaspora is used in three distinct ways: as a social form, as a type of social consciousness, and as a mode of cultural production (Vertovec 1997, cited in Agnew 2005: 5). Although these categories are distinct, they are by no means mutually exclusive. In fact, there is a great deal of overlap and intersection that occurs in their explication.

Diaspora as a social form refers to the ways in which individuals living in separate parts of the world identify collectively, either with one another or with the countries or regions from which they or their ancestors originated. Scholars who define a diaspora by its social consciousness, refer to individuals who live in various societies and cultures and “who emphasize their sense of belonging or exclusion, their states of mind, and their sense of identity” (Agnew 2005: 5). As a mode of cultural production, diaspora refers to individuals who reproduce cultural phenomena through hybridization (Agnew 2005; Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2005).
I believe that the Armenian Diaspora exemplifies all of the above categorizations of diaspora. First of all, it is worth noting that there are sizable diasporan communities all over the world—including Australia.16 Secondly, although each of these communities undoubtedly exhibits some unique characteristics, resulting, in general, from three major points in Armenian history,17 they also have a great deal in common. These commonalities give diasporan Armenians a great deal of shared experience upon which to connect. For example, the primary cause of large-scale Armenian emigration usually involved, as Tye’s definition at the start of this section suggests, some form of coercion—“deportation, religious persecution, political oppression, forced relocation, or escape from physical annihilation” (Dekmejian 1997: 436). This shared history provides Armenians, regardless of their geographical location in the Diaspora, with a source of collective identification.

This sense of collective identification within Armenian communities can also be seen as representing a form of social consciousness. Insofar as Armenians feel this connection and seek to further establish and emphasize these ties, whether through participation in an Armenian church, community events or other such communal activities, the status of the Diaspora as a social form and as a social consciousness overlap. The participation of Diasporans in these communal Armenian events and other organizations while simultaneously being a part of the host society renders the Diaspora a mode of cultural production—an arena in which Armenians can create hybrid identities that will allow them to be a part of a host society while simultaneously maintaining aspects of their Armenian culture.

It is clear that these categories overlap and intersect one another in their correspondence to the Armenian Diaspora. Furthermore, I believe that the connecting tissue between each of the categories is the existence of a (sometimes romanticized) collective memory and the transference of this memory through narrative. In her seminal work on the subject, Yael Zerubavel (1995) explores the ways in which societies of immigrants engage in constructing a distinct national identity and culture and recreate their roots. “These collective memories of recovered roots became a driving force for change and a means of articulating new values and ideas” (Zerubavel 1995: 3). The words that Zerubavel chose in constructing this sentence embody the overlap of the three interpretations of diaspora and their intersection.

16 See Appendix III for maps of Diaspora communities (Bournoutian 2002).
17 The first major wave of emigration occurred between 1894 and 1896, during the massacres perpetrated by Sultan Abdul Hamid. The second, much smaller wave, occurred in 1909 after the deportations and massacres at Adana. Finally, the 1915 genocide, perpetrated by the Ittihadist leaders of the Ottoman Empire, caused massive emigration until as late as 1930.
Collective memory calls to mind the definition of diaspora as a social form—individuals from various places identifying collectively with one another—while the word roots implies an acknowledgement of a common origin and a feeling of belonging that may accompany diaspora as a social consciousness. The last half of Zerubavel’s sentence—a “driving force for change” and an articulation of “new values and ideas”—implies that the Diaspora community is actively reproducing and hybridizing their cultural identity. The existence and development of a collective memory has been the foundation of the Armenian Diaspora in its current form. The establishment of reconfigured transnational communities is burdened with the struggle to maintain a balance between here and there. As Vijay Agnew (2005: 19) states: “[Memories] give shape and texture to…identities that are fragmented by immigration, displacement, and diasporic living. [They] are the glue that holds the past and present together.”

The Armenian Diaspora

As I am sure is the case with many diasporas, there is, and continues to be, variance in the attitude toward and perception of Armenia “within the diaspora, including the ways in which homeland is conceived and individuals and communities act on those ideas” (Pattie 2005: 49). Especially since 1991, with the independence of Armenia, there is increasing idealization of the land and convergence on the idea of that state “as homeland for all Armenians” (49). The construction of identity within the Diaspora is often intermingled with changing visions and relations with the homeland over time. As Susan Pattie (2005: 49-50) writes:

images of the homeland as constructed in diaspora often are idealized, content-less, beautiful, and unproblematic (other than, crucially, their unavailability). One can project anything onto the landscape. On the other hand, the inhabitants, their different-ness, their surprising “other-ness,” are a shock.

A quite perfect example of this assessment is family friend and informant Karpis Moushigian. Living in Yerevan for six months recently, and having spent several summers in Yerevan over past years, Karpis has a somewhat more objective attitude about Armenia and the Diaspora. Still, the idealized visions are present in his writing about his experiences in Armenia. In an email about a day trip into the country, Karpis writes: “From the village one looks out over the deep gorge of the Debed River across to villages and fields of other villages floating as if on air and the well tended fields of Dsegh. Pastoral to the point of sacred music.” (7 December
In a reaction to the “destructiveness of Soviet communism” on the land and aesthetics of village life, Karpis wrote: “What a beautiful country this is! How could such offenses be committed? What kind of people were these that seemed to be immune to the beauty and grandeur around them, unaffected by a God-given aesthetic?”

This tendency to romanticize, as overt as it is in the above quotations, is balanced by Karpis’ perception of some of the inhabitants of Yerevan. “There’s a rich class here,” he says (17 December 2005), “that are brash and show-offish. The way they dress, the way they behave—like they own the world—they’re very aggressive. I find it, especially the men, very unpleasant. Very unpleasant. But—this is it. This is it.”

Three themes are apparent in Karpis’ statements: the first is the use of language in constructing his chosen images in e-mails from Yerevan to America. The words—pastoral, sacred music, beauty, grandeur, God-given aesthetic—all evoke an image of an idealized homeland, as Pattie wrote, “beautiful and unproblematic.” The “problems” that are referenced are central to the remaining two themes present in Karpis’ statements. The first appears in the quotation relating to Soviet structures in Armenian villages; it is a blatant distinction between “us” and “them.” “What kind of people were these?” Karpis asks. Inherent in the statement is a sense of loss and almost a victimization of the Armenian land at the hands of the “Other.” The latter, in this same vein, subtly implies that some Hayastansis themselves are the Other. Karpis’ feelings about the arrogant aggressiveness that pervades the behavior of members of the new elites class in Yerevan represent Pattie’s description of the shocking quality of inhabitants of the homeland.

Karpis’ e-mails and statements to me during interviews led me to examine the constructions of identity in the Diaspora and the different ways in which these constructions may intertwine with changing or evolving visions and relations with the homeland. The varied conceptions and symbolizations of the homeland occur across time and circumstance (Armenia under the rule of various empires, post-geocide Armenia, the independence of the Republic of Armenia, etc.). In this light, the cogency of Susan Pattie’s article title, “New Homeland for an Old Diaspora,” becomes apparent.
New Homeland, Old Diaspora

There is certainly much discussion, especially among Armenians, about the concept of diaspora, the meaning of the word, and the ways in which it is experienced. Is the Armenian Diaspora positive or negative? There are, of course, arguments for both sides. John Armstrong (1982, cited in Pattie) has suggested “that the Armenian diaspora most closely resembles the ‘archetypal’ or, in Safran’s words, ‘ideal’ diaspora of the Jews (Pattie 2005: 53).” Presumably, this assessment is related to the number of parallels that can be drawn between the Armenian Diaspora and the definition of diaspora as given by scholars such as Safran (1991; Clifford 1994). On the other hand, some scholars take issue with the idea of homeland (especially with regard to definitions stressing an “eventual return”), and argue that, as evident in the case of third-generation Armenians, the concept of the homeland was created long after dispersion and, in some cases, without any physical contact with the land. Scholars who hold this belief, such as Robin Cohen, argue that there are positive virtues in diasporic living. As quoted in Pattie (2005: 53), he writes, “The tension between an ethnic, a national and a transnational identity is often a creative, enriching one (Cohen 1997: 24).”

Yet others, and a surprising number of Armenians (mainly immigrant or first-generation), regard the Armenian Diaspora as entirely negative in its very nature. This position holds that from its roots—its reason for being—to its routes—dispersion from the homeland—the Armenian Diaspora is a “victim diaspora.” Armenians are a people “who have survived and been displaced by catastrophe, the memories of which continue to bind them together on some level” (Pattie 2005: 53; Cohen 1997). This pervading sense of loss, some think, is evident in the stories and representation of Armenian ethnicity within the diaspora. Regardless, however, if one views the diaspora in a positive or a negative light, there are certain characteristics that are somewhat consistent throughout the contemporary Armenian diaspora.

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18 Take, for example, poets Meena Alexander, Sylva Gaboudikian, and Rishma Dunlop, quoted and cited at the beginning of this chapter.
Contemporary Armenian Diaspora

As noted by Pattie (2005), and as e-mail correspondence from Karpis Moushigian shows, the concept and perception of the Armenian diaspora has been entirely transformed over the years since its initial creation. Some characteristics, however, remain relatively unchanged. For example, when I first began thinking about this project, the connective tissue between diapora Armenians and their heritage that I constantly came across was within family ties and ties to the Armenian Apostolic Church. Pattie (2005: 54) supports this as she notes:

As in the past, the cement of diaspora communities, within and between them, is family. Networks of people related through descent or marriage remain of great importance, though the specific ways in which this is true have changed. The national church and the political parties and cultural organizations that have grown up over the last hundred years provide an infrastructure and public face linking communities on a more formal level. The Armenian Apostolic Church has provided a primary identity alongside kin and locale.

Many of these assertions are already evident in my writing thus far, however, Pattie provides an alternative vision of the Armenian diaspora—having worked within a greater number of communities. The concept of “home,” although for some Diasporans this concept is inextricably attached to Hayastan, is mobile, and often times more synonymous with family than physical location. “The experience of place, whether present or known through memory, is always about people and their relationships, as well as about the physical surroundings” (Pattie 2005: 55). Perhaps this in some ways explains the ambivalence expressed in Karpis’ statements about Armenia: the experience of Armenia as known through (diasporic) memory, was seemingly irreconcilable with some of the people and unfamiliar (i.e. not in keeping with the idealized vision) physical surroundings (e.g. cold Soviet architecture juxtaposed with serene, pastoral Armenian villages).

Visions of the Homeland

As it has probably become apparent, the idea of homeland for Armenians is a contested, liquid and evolving notion. Finding examples to fit nearly every position offered with regard to homeland relations, Pattie (2005: 53) has concluded that the vitality of the Armenian diaspora “must be due in great part to its complexity and flexibility.” There are three distinct but parallel versions of the Armenian homeland. The first is the Republic of Armenia as it exists today. Described by Susan Pattie (2005: 55) as “a small, relatively forsaken corner of the ancient homelands,”
Armenia has been independent since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Needless to say, for those who live there, this Armenia is “the homeland.” For me, when I experienced Yerevan on my own for the first time, it was a place full of many frightening contradictions. Confused at the blatant disjuncture between the Armenia that I imagined and the Armenia that I saw, I recorded in my field journal (13 December 2005): “Ahhmmahhn...It definitely all seems wrong somehow. Everything here is different. I feel like a complete outsider. I could never have prepared for this.” Although I had traveled to Armenia once before during the summer of 2001, the circumstances were incredibly different.

I would not have been afforded the opportunity to visit Armenia the first time were it not for the generosity, foresight and planning of my maternal grandfather, Haige Garabedian. Annually, on my christening day, I would receive an envelope from my grandfather. Accompanied by a check, each would contain a poignant letter explaining to me the importance of my Armenian culture and heritage. The purpose was, as my grandfather stated, to save for a pilgrimage that our family would take together (siblings, cousins, parents and all) in the summer of 2001; on this date Armenia would celebrate 1700 years of Christianity as a nation. In the Diaspora, the adoption of Christianity is a source of enormous pride and, in many cases, a license to boast (“We were the first!”). Hence, this seemed to be an incredibly meaningful milestone for a culture so deeply tied to its religious roots. On this trip, my family and I visited all the ancient sites—monasteries, fortresses, and, most memorably, Dilijian and Khor Virap, two places that are framed and immortalized in my home courtesy of my mother’s photography skills and taken during her first trip to Armenia in 1972.

Armenia, as it exists today, is hardly the “homeland” that I imagine when I look at these beautiful prints, nor the “homeland” most people refer to when they imagine the villages of their ancestors. This homeland is what we call Hayastan, the ancient kingdom and territories embedded within a 3,500 year-old history, land that my grandfather, Henry, when relating stories to me about my great-grandparents, speaks of as “eastern Anatolia.” These lands, stretching from Dikranagert (northeastern Turkey) to Karabagh (technically a part of Azerbaijan), have not been united under Armenian rule since the first century BC, but they encompass the ancestral homes of most Armenian dwelling in the diaspora. Every one of my great-grandparents were from areas of Armenia that are no longer a part of the present day Republic: Van, Kharpert, Parchens, and Sepastia—the places that I imagine when I think of my ancient homeland—are all now eastern Turkey.

19 See Appendix IV.
The third vision of the homeland is decidedly the most intimate. Increasingly as generations progress, within the diaspora, the homeland includes the town or village of ancestral origin. My first experience with this localized pride was at an Armenian studies program at University of Connecticut during the summer of 2003. One morning, during a history lesson, a good friend of mine, Karoun Charkourian, and our teacher, Professor of Armenian Studies at Clark University, Simon Payaslian, discovered somehow that both of their families were from the ancient town of Marash.\textsuperscript{20} For the remainder of the three-week program, the two of them would sporadically yell out "Marashtsis!!\textsuperscript{21} and I would feel incredibly left out. Recently, I was able to experience this for myself. On the return flight from Yerevan, I sat next to a very un-Armenian looking man who told me he was from San Diego, in Armenia making a film. Ten minutes into the conversation, he was telling me about a trip to Turkey during which he was able to see the village his great-grandparents were from: Kharpert. I was ecstatic to share this bond with someone who, for all I came to understand during the five hour flight, had absolutely nothing else in common with me. Regardless, as third-generation Kharpertsis, we had a multitude of things to discuss—and we became fast friends.

The image of the homeland is shaped by the personal memories and experiences of people at particular times. This highly subjective experience is externalized by the connection of common themes among individuals. In turn, there is a collective identity that, in meaningful ways, both transcends and creates boundaries in establishing a sense of belonging. The \textit{presentist} approach states that the past is a social construction shaped by the concerns of the present. Lewis Coser (1992:25) explains: "The beliefs, interests, and aspirations of the present shape the various views of the past as they are manifested respectively in every historical epoch.” By transferring symbolic and meaningful cultural narratives, Diasporan Armenians are able to create a vision of the Hayastan that will sustain itself, and also evolve, through time.

\textsuperscript{20} This area, currently a part of southeastern Turkey, is now known as Kahramanmarash.

\textsuperscript{21} Meaning, one who is from Marash.
JOURNEYS—PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE
Collective Memory and Narrative

What is not a journey? As soon as one attributes an extended figurative meaning to the word—and one has never been able to refrain from doing so—the journey coincides with life, no more, no less: is life anything more than the passage from birth to death? Movement in space is the first sign, the easiest sign, of change; life and change are synonymous. Narrative is also nourished by change; in this sense journey and narrative imply one another.

-Tzvetan Todorov (1995: 60)

This work grows out of the current academic interest in memory and history. A fascinatingly difficult topic to address, and even harder target to hit, the interaction between history, memory and narrative (as a way of expressing the two) is a complex, yet increasingly popular and important, scholarly domain. The creation of an “archive of the present...once the exclusive domain of leaders and scholars...is now conducted by individuals and families, communities and nations” (Zerubavel 1995: xvii). What Zerubavel calls an “archive of the present” I interpret as a reference to the collective remembrance, recollection and commemorative narration\(^\text{22}\) of past events. Zerubavel (1995: xvii) illuminates the interdisciplinary popularity of these major topics by reminding the reader that “while psychologists and literary scholars tend to focus on the nature and dynamics of individuals’ memory, anthropologists, folklorists, sociologists, social historians, and political scientists explore groups’ memory and their social construction, and examine the history and politics of commemoration.”

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\(^{22}\) By *commemorative narration* I am elaborating on Yael Zerubavel’s (and, ultimately, Maurice Halbwachs’) thoughts that collective memory is sustained and substantiated through various forms of commemoration, such as the transmission of popular folktales, the celebration of a holiday or festival, or the participation in a memorial service (Zerubavel 1995: 5; Halbwachs 1992: 25).
Memory and History

The concept of memory and its increased use within literature may be imagined as the “natural result of an increased scholarly interest in the ways that popular and folk cultures construct history and the past” (Klein 2000: 127). However, Klein (2000: 128) argues that for years, “specialists have dealt with such well-known phenomena as oral history, autobiography, and commemorative rituals without ever pasting them together into something called memory.” Memory is increasingly employed as a meta-history that subsumes other terms and ideas such as folk history, oral history and so on. Why is this so, and what is it that connects memory to history?

Klein (2000: 130) in a discussion centered around this question, states: “If history is objective in the coldest, hardest sense of the word, memory is subjective in the warmest, most inviting senses of that word.” In contrast to history, memory “vibrates with the fullness of Being” (130). Indeed, although history is most commonly perceived and defined as an objective aggregate of past events, every definition I have encountered has included some discussion of the subjective aspects, such as people or narration. Webster’s New World Dictionary (1995): “1: an account of what has happened, esp. in the life of a people.” Dictionary.com (10 April 2006): “3: a record or narrative description of past events. 4: the discipline that records and interprets past events involving human beings. 5. all that is remembered of the past.” Merriam-Webster OnLine (10 April 2006): “1. TALE, STORY.” The American Heritage Dictionary (2000): “1. a narrative of events; a story. 2a. a chronological record of events, as of the life or development of a people.” In only one of these definitions is “an aggregate of past events” at the top of the list; it appears as fourth and fifth in most others.

The division of history as objective and memory as subjective, as Klein sees it, is not entirely complete. It is clear from these definitions that there is an element of the subjective in history as well. G.W.F. Hegel, in Philosophy of History, states: “History combines in our language the objective as well as the subjective side...It means both res gestae (the things that happened) and historia rerum gestarum (the narration of things that happened)” (quoted in Klein 2000: 133). Hence, it seems that the connection between memory and history is the subjective elements present in both. Both memory and history are connected to people and are essentially social phenomena. Just as history is inherently connected with the past insofar as it includes human beings, memory is also inherently social in its relationship to the past.
Collective Memory

The notion of collective memory presumably grew out of Émile Durkheim’s work on social solidarity. Durkheim sought to understand how members of a social group are held together. In response to these questions, Durkheim developed concepts such as “organic solidarity” and conscience collective. His explanation of social solidarity though this idea of conscience collective has had a widespread influence throughout the social sciences.

Perhaps the most notable and innovative work that grew out of Durkheim’s theories came from French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. Halbwachs’ development of the concept of “collective memory,” first introduced in 1925 (after Durkheim had died), broke new ground in scholarly discourse and linguistic practice. Although the concept did evolve, and eventually naturalized the usage of the phrase within scholarship outside of the social sciences, it would be some time before this occurred. Patrick H. Hutton, in History as an Art of Memory (1993), traces the evolution of this memorial consciousness. Devoting entire chapters to theorists such as Wordsworth, Freud, Foucault, Airés, and Halbwachs, and looking at many different aspects of memory, Hutton concludes that memory consists of two moments: repetition and recollection. “Repetition involves the ‘presence of the past,’ while recollection involves present representations of the past” (Klein 2000: 132-3). Still, historians largely ignored the notion of collective memory until the 1960s when Philippe Ariés employed Halbwachs’ theory in a work on the convergence of history and memory.

The concept of collective memory provides a framework for reconciling the subjective aspects of history and the objective aspects of memory. Although most people understand memory to be a psychic event that is only associated with a specific person, “memory is not a property of individual minds, but a diverse and shifting collection of material artifacts and social practices” (Klein 2000: 130; Schudson 1992). Maurice Halbwachs (1992: 38) states:

One is rather astonished when reading psychological treatises that deal with memory to find that people are considered there as isolated beings. These make it appear that to understand our mental operations, we need to stick to individuals and first of all, to divide all the bonds which attach individuals to

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23 Most authors leave this phrase in French because of the difficulty in translating conscience. As Bohannan and Glazer (1988: 233) put it, the word means “consciousness, conscience, and whatever it is one is aware of. ‘Shared awareness’ or ‘common understanding’ is about the meaning of the phrase in English; it denotes a view of classifications of the world and society.”

24 A historical monograph called L’homme devant la mort.
the society of their fellows. Yet it is in society that people normally acquire
their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize and localize
their memories...Most of the time, when I remember, it is others who spur me
on; their memory comes to the aid of mine and mine relies on theirs.

Halbwachs is arguing that no recollection can be said to be preserved solely within
individual memory. Indeed, he states (1992: 169), “from the moment that a
recollection reproduces a collective perception, it can itself only be collective.”

Just as Durkheim sought to understand the phenomenon that held social
groups together, Halbwachs pushed forward and sought to understand what holds
recent memories together. The localization of memories, he concluded (1992: 52),
was based on the fact that they are

part of a totality of thoughts common to a group, the group of people with
whom we have a relation at this moment, or with whom we have had a
relation on the preceding day or days. To recall them it is hence sufficient that
we place ourselves in the perspective of this group, that we adopt its interests
and follow the slant of its reflections.

The implications of Halbwachs’ last sentence are bipartite with relation to memory:
not only is memory a social and collective phenomenon, insofar as individuals gather
their memories within society, but the act of recollection is also inherently tied to a
social group. Halbwachs’ notion that recollection depends on the individual’s ability
to connect with the perspectives and interests of a larger group creates a concept of
collective of identity. By connecting with the reflections and thoughts that are
common to a group one is able to perpetuate the existence of this group through
time.

Halbwachs identifies collective memory as a form of memory that is distinct
from both the historical and the autobiographical. Given this fact, the issue now
becomes the source of these memories and their position in the past. Needless to
say, the word “history” seems to imply that the events concerned would be based in
fact, therefore the term “historical memory” would be thought to refer to the
memory of past facts. However, historical memory is not so unproblematic. When it
comes to historical memory, Lewis A. Coser (1992: 25) tells us

the person does not remember events directly; it can only be simulated in
indirect ways through reading or listening or in commemoration and festive
occasions when people gather together to remember in common the deeds
and accomplishments of long-departed members of the group. In this case,
the past is stored and interpreted by social institutions.
Halbwachs’ thought was that present generations become self-conscious through “counterposing its present to its own constructed past” (Coser 1992: 24, italics mine). Halbwachs asks: “How can currents of collective thought whose impetus lies in the past be recreated, when we can grasp only the present.”

His answer is that through participation in commemorative meetings with group members of the current generation we can recreate through imaginatively reenacting a past that would otherwise slowly disappear in the haze of time (Coser 1992: 24).

By developing memories and reconstructing images of their past, a group is able to highlight its unique identity in relation to other groups. Moreover, the collective memory provides the group with an account of origin and development and thus, as Coser pointed out above, the imaginative reenactment provides the means for recognition through time.

*Diasporan Visions of Armenian Ethnicity and Hayastan*

Edna Lomsky-Feder and Tamar Rapoport recently did an intensive study of Jewish-Russian university students in Israel. Collecting stories from these students about their visits to their native home of Russia illuminated many of the ways in which visions of the homeland are conceptualized.

For many of the immigrants they interviewed who were unable to travel to their old homes, the visit to the homeland remained an unfulfilled dream and “people and places could be retained only as pictures in their minds. By cultivating memories and fantasies and fueling their longing, immigrants were engaged in reinterpreting and reconstructing a vision of the life and land they had left behind” (Lomsky-Feder et al. 2005: 296). In this case, for immigrant generations, the process of constructing images of the homeland is incredibly active. One may think that the temporal closeness between homeland and immigration for these people would reduce the occurrence of these constructed visions, however the immigrant’s relationship with both the old and new homes is constantly being reinterpreted, reconstituted and refined. Situated both here and there, “being neither a total stranger nor entirely local...the visitor, who is (in our terms) a ‘transient home-comer,’ is located in a hybrid position” (Lomsky-Feder et al. 2005: 297). This hybrid vantage point enables the immigrant to freely interpret her new surroundings, the memories of her old home, and perhaps even the relationship she perceives between them. In this process, the immigrant is able to determine where she will best “fit” into her new society. “Experiencing ambiguity, her/his hybrid state entails a
constant change and redefinition” (Ibid.). By reconciling aspects of the old home with aspects of the new, immigrants create a new, hybrid identity—they develop a cultural niche where their identities can co-exist.

Immigrants are not alone in their creation of these hybrid identities. In fact, the development of these identities is based largely in the cultivation of collective memory among a group. As discussed above, “every group develops a memory of its own past that highlights its unique identity vis-à-vis other groups” (Zerubavel 1995: 4). Although collective memory is carried by individuals, it is much more than autobiographical memory. As Halbwachs stated, memory is an inherently social thing. Collective memory, for its persistence through time, relies on the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another.

**Narrative: Construction and Significance**

Stories render meaning to experiences in our lives; the immigrant’s movement through time and space, the second-generation ethnic’s quest to gain a sense of cultural continuity, and the third-generation ethnic’s journey to the homeland all elicit stories that encompass “both a collection of events, characters, and experiences which the individual (consciously or unconsciously) chooses to represent, and the rhetorical resources which s/he utilizes in describing and valuing them” (Lomsky-Feder et al. 2005: 298). These narratives express the complex interrelations between the external (objective) and internal (subjective) worlds and they are critical links between the personal and cultural meanings that the immigrants navigate while constructing their memories and hybrid identities. As such, narrative is “a vital practice of identity construction” employed by the immigrant that “consequently animates and revitalizes memories and experiences” (Lomsky-Feder et al. 2005: 298, 299).

Indeed, many scholars on collective memory hold that collective memory is substantiated through commemoration. Although this commemoration can involve any number of things (described in footnote 22), each act of commemoration produces a commemorative narrative, “a story about a particular past that accounts for this ritualized remembrance and provides a moral message for the group members” (Zerubavel 1995: 6). In some instances, particularly as generations become further removed from the immigrants, the narratives *themselves* are the subject of commemoration. In creating these narratives, subjects draw upon collective memory and historical sources, though they clearly do so selectively and, perhaps more importantly, creatively. The creativity of the commemorative
narrative endows history and collective identity with a unique meaning. The point, as Hayden White (1987: 42-3) describes it, is that Narrativization produces a meaning quite different from that produced by chronicalization. And it does this by imposing a discursive form on the events that its own chronicle comprises by means that are poetic in nature; that is, the narrative code is drawn from the performative domain of poiesis rather than that of noesis. This is what Barthes meant when he said: "Narrative does not show, does not imitate...[Its] function is not to 'represent,' it is to constitute a spectacle" (my italics).

This quotation exemplifies the extent to which commemorative narrative is able to blur the line between the real and the imagined.

The commemorative narratives—myths, legends, folk epics, personal recollections, and various other forms of dialogue within interviews—that I have collected in my research each reconstruct a specific past event or period of time, making them fragmentary in nature. Although I have not made it the goal of this work to piece together the fragments and present the reader with a coherent picture of Diasporan Armenian commemorative narrative it is important to note that it is these commemorations together that constitute the meta-narrative (called "master-narrative" by Zerubavel) that serves as the structure for collective memory (Taggart 2006; White 1987; Zerubavel 1995). This notion is described by Zerubavel (1995: 6) as a "broader view of history, a basic 'story line' that is culturally constructed and provides the group members with a general notion of their shared past." Through a dialogue between past and present, the group is able to reconstruct its history from an ideological perspective.

There are various aspects of this meta-narrative that deserve attention. The first draws on a concept developed by Lévi-Strauss called "the pressure of history." Due to specific historical and current social factors, certain aspects of the past receive more attention in commemorative narration than others. This is blatant in the preoccupation among many generations of Diasporan Armenians with the Armenian genocide. Zerubavel (1995: 8) calls this phenomenon commemorative density, claiming that it "indicates the importance that the society attributes to different periods in its past: while some periods enjoy multiple commemorations, others attract little attention, or fall into oblivion." The Armenian genocide "enjoys" a commemoration annually on April 24. The adoption of Christianity by the Armenian nation in 301 AD was commemorated, as mentioned in the previous chapter, by a

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25 In reference to "hot" and "cold" versions of chronologies due to historical pressure.
26 As displayed in the unprompted discussion of this topic during interviews with 8 of 10 informants.
massive celebration in Armenia. Some periods in history remain unmarked, or, in
some instances, completely reinterpreted and retold—these represents periods of

Thus the construction of the master commemorative narrative exposes the
dynamics of remembering and forgetting that underlie the construction of any
commemorative narrative: by focusing attention on certain aspects of the
past, it necessarily covers up others that are deemed irrelevant or disruptive
to the flow of the narrative and ideological message (Zerubavel 1995: 8).

This amnesia, I suspect, becomes more pronounced, in specific and meaningful
ways, as generations progress.

Another major aspect of collective memory and the meta-narrative, and one
that remains relatively constant, is their function in distinguishing or demarcating a
group’s identity, especially vis-à-vis others. In this way, the narratives often contain
themes that illustrate the group’s roots in a distant past. These forms of narratives,
specifically myths, are often times particularly important in the formation of a
collective ethnic consciousness (especially from abroad) because they “provide
evidence” of a unique and distinct past and set of traditions. Similarly, Zerubavel
(1995: 7) notes that “modern nations attempted to recover or invent older traditions
to display their common roots in a distant past.”

Among immigrant Armenians, the memory and conception of the homeland is central
to the experience of ethnicity within a new cultural context—the formation, perhaps,
of a hybrid identity. As time progresses, this collective notion, as it was developed
by immigrant populations, is passed to other generations of Diasporan Armenians.
Among each population, the collective narratives are reinterpreted and recreated,
continually transformed, in response to the group’s changing needs.

It becomes clear to see how and why Diasporan Armenians idealize their
narratives and memories about the “past.” In many instances, this “past” has no
mooring in actual events or reality, and the people “remembering” and passing these
things on do not actually have any empirical connection to them, other than the
stories they were told.

The various narratives I have chosen to focus on in the remainder of this
work will be analyzed on three levels. The first will explore the individual story and
ascertain and evaluate the content and central themes present. The second will look
at the narratives as a whole, focusing on the themes that occur in each. The third

27 The David of Sassoun epic, for example, as it "represents" the Sassoun rebellion of 1894
(see Chapter 6 and Appendix V).
will explore the narratives in light of the general context—both personal and historical.
As with many ancient peoples, the origins of the Armenian people contains some elements of myth which serve as a paradigm for developing and maintaining ethnic bonds. According to the earliest Armenian accounts, recorded sometime between the fifth and eighth centuries AD, the Armenian people are descendents of Noah. After Noah’s ark landed on Mt. Ararat, Noah’s family settled in Armenia. Generations later, Noah’s grandson Haik, the leader of the Armenian people, moved south to the land of Babylon. George Bournoutian (2002: 16) gives an account of the story:

Haik, a descendent of Japheth, unhappy with the tyranny and evil in Babylon, rebelled and decided to return to the land of the ark. The evil Bel, leader of the Babylonians, pursued Haik. In the ensuing war, good conquered evil when Haik killed Bel and created the Armenian nation. Haik became the first Armenian ruler and his sons continued to lead the Armenians until King Paruir, a descendent of Haik, formed the first kingdom of Armenia and had to face the mighty Assyrian foe.

This story blends historical facts with mythical elements to create a prominent place for the Armenians in the Biblical Christian tradition. In this tradition, Noah is seen as another Adam, chosen by God to repopulate the earth. In this sense, the Armenians were blessed and called to live in accordance with the laws of God, which of course meant a duty to fight the evil Babylonians and that good would triumph.

Historically, the absence of a dominant state in western Asia in the thirteenth century BC provided an opportunity for the Urartians to create a new federation. The formation of the Urartu kingdom corresponded with the resurgence of the Assyrian Kingdom in the ninth century BC. “In fact,” Bournoutian (2002: 10) says,

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28 See image 1.
29 The collapse of the Hittite Empire created the hole in leadership for the Urartians to fill. The Urartians, according to Bournoutian (2002: 10) were probably of Hurrian descent. The Urartu kingdom lasted approximately 300 years, existing sometime between 870-585 BC.
“much of the data on Urartu comes from this neighbor and adversary...For the next three centuries, Assyria and Urartu fought each other.”

These numerous clashes between Assyria and the pre-Armenian rulers, and the invasions into the region on the part of Assyria, were undoubtedly etched into the folklore of the people. Bournoutian (2002: 16) notes:

It is not surprising, therefore, that between AD 440 and 840 early Armenian historians, such as Moses of Khoren,30 who did not have our historical and archeological data, recorded the oral tradition by substituting Babylon for Assyria and the Haik dynasty for the Urartian rulers in Armenia. The aim was not accuracy but rather a sure place for the Armenians in the history of Christianity, a religion that the Armenians had by then embraced wholeheartedly.

The Armenian myth of origin—the story of the battle between Haik and Pel—serves as the foundation for Diasporan Armenian ethnic consciousness and, to Armenians, Haik is viewed as the founder of the nation and of the people. The culture and the heritage of the people are believed to be, in some measure, born of Haik and his story. Generations of Armenians have passed on, the borders of Armenian lands have changed dramatically, and newfound independence and the Republic of Armenia have been established, but the story of Haik and his journey to and battle in the Ararat valley continues to be present in the minds of Armenians today.

Similarly, and quite obviously, the constitutive elements of my cultural identity as an Armenian, of the origin of my heritage as an Armenian in America, are entirely developments of those who came before me, those who paved new roads for a cultural group beginning their lives in a new land. My great-grandparents, and their parents’ generation, were among the first to emigrate to America and start a new life as “Armenian-Americans.” They brought with them all the familiar Armenian cultural commodities from recipes for traditional foods and dishes to music, dance and religion. They lived in closely knit ghettos at first, where they could speak in their native tongue and share the experience of adapting to, and raising their children in, a new cultural environment.

As my great-grandparents grew up, their generation eventually began to move into other areas (although Watertown, MA, and Glendale, CA—the two major immigration points—are still referred to as “Little Armeenias”), form churches, and, when necessary, learn the English language. While adaptation was certainly important, assimilation was not necessarily a priority for everyone, and many aspects of the culture were sustained in the new environments.

30 Also known as Movses Khorenatsi (literally meaning “Moses of Khoren”), he was one of the earliest Armenian historians.
The Armenian immigrants of the late 19th and early 20th centuries brought with them everything that they knew about Armenian culture—the history of a nation, past and present. Once established within the Diaspora, they appealed to their memories of their departed home and, at times, even created new ones. Creating a collective identity from these memories, immigrant Armenians began to transfer these memories, this connection to their ethnicity, and this image of the homeland to others through commemorative narratives. It was the image of this Armenia that they instilled in their children as they grew up in America. To keep their children involved in a culture so rich in its history and traditions they imparted their vision of Armenia—a closely-knit, caring community, rich in religion and tradition, among other things. With, of course, some reinterpretations, this is the Armenia that I grew up knowing, an Armenia that was maintained through memories of nearly a century past, and a cultural identity that was created out of a slice of time.

Just as many Armenians view Haik as the founder of the Armenian nation, both geographically and biologically, I view my grandparents as the origin of my cultural and national identity as an American-Armenian. I draw a parallel, in my mind, between the mythological Haik and my grandfather, Haige, who shares his name; this parallel is symbolic, to me, of the truly monumental accomplishment of Armenians in establishing and maintaining a strong cultural consciousness in a country as enveloping as America. The transference of narratives such as this myth of origin, as well as the fragmentary ones that constitute individuals’ collective memory and contribute to their ethnic consciousness, are central to the existence of this phenomenon.
THE DRAGON SLAYER
The Role of Good vs. Evil in Establishing Ethnic Identity

From the time of the myth of Haik and Bel to the telling of the legend that follows, many things had occurred in the history of the Armenian people. As centuries wore on, the Armenians continued to be dominated and dispersed. New stories were eventually created that would enable members of the Diaspora to connect with Armenia’s past and, hence, connect with their heritage in meaningful way. The stories established a sense of unity among Armenians as they reminded them of the strength and resilience that had come to characterize the Armenian people throughout their history. These stories take a variety of forms and, while I did come across a scattered collection of short children’s books and, of course, the famous folk epic David of Sassoun, they seem to have generally been passed down orally through generations. My second cousin, Rousan, who was born in a district of Yerevan called Norashen, recounted one such story to me in 2003. Classified by Stith Thompson as tale type 300, this classic dragon slayer tale has many specific features that deserve careful examination and interpretation.

"THE DRAGON SLAYER," BY ROUSAN KHERANIAN

There is a village in Armenia that is located near a stream. The people of the village rely on the water from the stream for drinking and washing. There is a seven-headed dragon that lives by the stream, however, blocking the source of the water and will only release it provided the villagers frequently sacrifice a maiden from the village as payment. The village slowly begins losing all of the young maidens to the dragon and there become fewer and fewer for the young men to marry. Eventually, a brave young man from the village steps forward and attempts to kill the dragon by cutting off its heads; but each time he slices one off, another grows back in its place. Soon, the hero grows weary and elicits the help of the villagers. The blacksmith of the village approaches the young hero with some advice, telling him to try cutting

31 See Appendix V.
off all the heads at once. The hero takes his advice and defeats the dragon, returning control of the stream to the villagers and relieving the maidens of the threat of sacrifice. The village has a great feast in celebration of the victory over evil.

The interpretation of this story depends a great deal on my methodology. I relied on a variety of different sources for my examination, through which I established a diverse system of meaning that speaks to the many different symbols in the story. To begin with, I collected oral literary criticism from Rousan. Rousan thought that the dragon and its many heads represented the various powers that have risen against Armenia and attempted to destroy or dominate the people. One head may represent the Persian Empire or the Battle of Avarayr, one may represent the Romans, one the Byzantines, one the Arab invasions and conquests, one head for the centuries full of nomadic invaders of all types, one for the Mongols, one for the Ottoman Turks and so on.

Each time a head was cut off, another would grow in its place, representing another power against which the Armenians would have to stand. Using the techniques of folktale comparison it becomes clear that while there are many dragon slayer stories in which the dragon has multiple heads, this particular version is unusual in that there is constant regeneration. Based on Rousan’s interpretation, this comparison seems to reflect the constant trend of domination and represents multiple oppressors over a long period of time. Such a telling can be reconciled with the historical background of oppression of the Armenians.

Also, according to Rousan, the hero in the story represents the Armenian masses. For over two millennia the adaptability of the Armenian people and Armenia’s geographical location enabled the group to maintain a place within history.

By the end of the middle Ages, however, Armenia’s political structure had disappeared. The demographic changes which had begun in the eleventh century and which continued uninterrupted until the dawn of the nineteenth century, finally resulted in the Armenians being reduced to a minority in much of their own homeland (Bournoutian 2002: 113).

The determination of the hero, therefore, representing the Armenian people as a whole, is symbolic of their persistence, strength, and desire to survive as a nation—a promotion of ethnic unity through myth. This unifying method becomes even more important when one considers the eventual dispersion that would come with the creation of the Diaspora. Presumably, as Armenians were reduced to minorities and

32 This theme can also been seen in legends such as Perseus.
moved out into foreign populations, these types of symbols and stories grew in
popularity and significance as they became the focal points of the creation of a
collective memory and identity among Diasporan Armenians.

As mentioned above, the adoption of Christianity in Armenia and its
movement throughout the Armenian population came at a crucial period in Armenian
history. With continual warfare leaving the Persian and Byzantine empires weak, the
opportunity for Arab invasions arose and Islam became preponderant in Armenian
regions. The newly partitioned Armenia required a sense of collective identity that
would successfully stand up against the larger and more powerful cultures that, at
the time, had such an influence on Armenia’s destiny as a nation. “In Christianity
Armenian leaders found a religion both tolerated by their strongest ally and
possessing a messianic fervor strong enough to counter Zoroastrianism”
(Bournoutian 2002: 49). Thus, the conversion to Christianity can be seen as largely
a political device: the movement from polytheism to monotheism brings unity in
itself, however the fact that the conversion occurred under a major power (King
Drtad III) was also important because it consolidated power under one ruler. If
Drtad III was considered by the people to be a representative of God, he was
legitimized in the name of the Lord; the people’s loyalty was now to God and
opposition to the King was therefore viewed as opposition to God.

There is, however, an obvious difficulty raised by the notion of uprooting
popular, indigenous religion in exchange for a largely unfamiliar one. Zoroastrianism
persisted for some time after the traditional date of conversion; however, although
Christianity “resulted in the martyrdom of a number of Armenian church leaders, the
new Christian religion was forced upon everyone” (Bournoutian 2002: 49). Pagan
temples and monuments were destroyed, while crosses (khachkars) and churches
were raised over their ruins as symbols of the new faith, “forcing the populace to
abandon its cherished beliefs for new and strange ones. Needless to say, these
measures met resistance, and it became clear that new strategies and new forms of
communication would have to be found for Christianity to succeed” (Petrosyan
2001: 60).

Although the Armenian people were not left with much choice in the matter of
their religion, since they faced threats of severe punishment if they did not convert,
and, although the change may not have happened overnight, it is questionable how
the people understood the upheaval of their beliefs. What were these new forms of
religious communication that Petrosyan references? One popular suggestion is that
the faith was conveyed through the khachkars themselves—visual images that
served to illustrate Bible stories and other tales or legends of the people who had
come to the faith. Hamlet Petrosyan claims that these pictorial images “played the same role for illiterate people as books did for the literate” (Petrosyan 2001: 60). Oral tradition may have played similar a part to that of the *khachkars* in promoting an acceptance of Christianity. While the visual images were powerful, oral tradition is more intensely interactive and would have provided the people with simple narratives to which they could relate in order to understand the religious changes around them. When we begin to examine the historical descriptions of the conversion with regard to the symbols in Rousan’s story, it becomes obvious that these stories may certainly have been used as alternate forms of communication, promoting the sense of unity and understanding necessary for such a change to take place.

Whether or not it is, in fact, true that these stories were used or interpreted this way in the fourth and fifth centuries among Armenian people cannot be known beyond speculation. However, there is one aspect that both the story and the historical points that were raised above have in common: the battle between two opposing sides—which I interpret as *good* versus *evil*. In the legend, the young Armenian hero—good—battles the fierce, life-threatening dragon—evil. Following from this dichotomy, I extend the good and evil distinctions beyond the hero and the dragon to encompass many of the symbols that Rousan pointed out in her oral literary criticism: Armenia versus Ottoman Turkey, Christianity versus Zoroastrianism and so on. This distinction between “us” and “them,” “good” and “evil,” is a distinction that has carried on into the Diaspora and one that is used in establishing more concrete and visible forms of identity.

Furthermore, I want to note an interesting discovery made during the revision of one of original drafts of this paper. The roots of Zoroastrianism can be traced as far as the beginning of Armenian history. Although it is claimed to be the earliest monotheistic religion, I referred to Zoroastrian above as polytheistic because of its dualistic nature. The main tenets of Zoroastrianism rest on an opposition between seven good and constructive Gods and seven evil and destructive Gods. This persistent conflict between good and evil is the defining characteristic of the Zoroastrian religion that was practiced by the Armenian people in ancient times. It appears that this tendency to distinguish between “us” and “them” has been present in the collective consciousness of the Armenian people for centuries.

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33 Supposedly emanations from *one* Supreme Being—Ahura Mazda.
Zoroastrianism and Christianity—Dragons and Saints

Artifacts from as early as the fourth century BC (the Early Bronze Age culture, named Kura-Araxes for its proximity to the eponymous rivers) have been identified as indicative of a “Mother Goddess cult” (Petrosyan 2001:6). The people of these early societies built temples and monuments to honor the goddess, along with various other related gods. Often, petroglyphs were added to rock cliffs or stone monuments were raised along the banks of springs and lakes. “When the scientific world discovered them at the end of the 19th century, the local population called them vishap (dragon-stones)” (Petrosyan 2001:10). Parallels have been drawn between the presence of the dragon on the stones (and the location of the stones) and the mythological dragons said to guard the sources of the waters. These vishaps, as Zoroastrianism began to fade among the Armenians, were perhaps precursors to symbols of Christianity.

Khachkars, the fundamental symbol of Armenian Christianity, were often found in similar places as the vishaps—sacred areas such as mountain ledges, and near springs and lakes. The existence of khachkars in these locations is compatible with the fact that “devout Armenians...not content to create only new monuments to the Christian faith, engraved crosses on the vishaps” (Petrosyan 2001:63). As mentioned above, early in the 4th century, following his baptism into the Christian faith and the adoption of Christianity in Armenia, King Drtad ordered all the pagan monuments to be destroyed and replaced by crosses. The crosses were subsequently viewed as weapons used to combat the forces of evil, “as symbolized by serpents,” and the cross was sometimes constructed to stand “triumphantly upon the spiral decoration that resembled a coiled snake with a broken back—the conquered serpent-dragon of the underworld” (Petrosyan 2001:66).

Over a period of time, the khachkars even came to be viewed as “saints,” having special powers to fulfill wishes or stop a cataclysm. Hamlet Petrosyan claims that certain aspects of the elaborate composition of the khachkar, such as the triumphant balance of the cross “above a pagan ‘winged’ rosette in the lower ‘profane’ space...may be an affirmation of the victory of Christianity over paganism.” (Petrosyan 2001:64). Furthermore, “medieval sources note that an ‘all-conquering’ weapon had to be hardened in the ‘blood’ of dragons and reptiles” (Tadevosyan & Petrosyan 2001: 210).

Looked at from a present perspective, the story takes on other possible interpretations: the hero represents Christianity and the dragon represents Paganism, and the story itself, in retrospect, appears to be a nationalistic, pedagogical device meant to display the ultimate “goodness” and benefit of
Christianity for the Armenian people. Also, since khachkars were viewed as the “all-conquering” symbols of Christianity, Christianity itself can be interpreted as the “weapon” referred to above, and it seems to follow that the story could also be used to convey the thought that it would take the death of Paganism for Christianity to flourish. These historical interpretations exhibit some of the ways legends may be used as symbolic representations to create unity—in this case, perhaps it was needed to address the widespread confusion and dissent regarding the conversion to Christianity. More important, however, are the ways in which these legends are interpreted today: as the foundation of a collective ethnic identity within the Diaspora.
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, literature is unread, music is unheard, and prayers are no more answered. Go ahead, destroy Armenia. See if you can do it. Send them into the desert without bread or water. Burn their homes and churches. Then see if they will not laugh, sing, and pray again. For when two of them meet anywhere in the world, see if they will not create a New Armenia.

-William Saroyan, “The Armenian and the Armenian”

William Saroyan’s famous poem, “The Armenian and the Armenian,” was written as a response to the genocide committed against the Armenian people at the hands of the Ottoman Turkish government in 1915. This organized crime was the Ottoman government’s answer to “The Armenian Question.” In order to fully contextualize the genocide and the impending discussion of Diasporan Armenian narration and understanding of these events, I will give a brief historical overview of the Armenian presence in the Ottoman Empire.

Amiras and Sultans: Armenians in the Ottoman Empire

The emergence of three, powerful Muslim empires in the late Middle Ages placed the Armenians, a small Christian minority, in a hostile environment. During the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the Ottomans and the Safavids were engaged in constant battle, much of the conflict taking place in the Armenian homeland (Bournoutian 2002: 186). Eventually, the century of hostility was ended by the Treaty of Zuhab, which partitioned Armenia into two sections—the western falling into Ottoman hands. “Destruction of property, famine, disease, forced

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34 Between approximately 1460 and 1876.
35 The emergence of the Ottomans, the Safavids, and the Mughals was result of power struggles between the Mamluks in Egypt, the Ottoman Turks in western Anatolia, tribal confederations of northwestern Iran and the Timurids in northeastern Iran and Central Asia. (Bournoutian 2002: 185).
conversions and resettlement reduced the population and significantly diminished the region’s economic viability. Apart from a few princes in Siunik and Lori, the hereditary landowning Armenian nobility virtually disappeared,” and the Armenian church submitted to Muslim rule in order to ensure its survival (186).

By the late eighteenth century, the Ottomans had organized the various subjects in their empire in religious communities. Thus, the Greeks, Jews and Armenians were grouped together into distinct communities known as millets. Each millet fell under the supervision of its own religious leader. Until the sixteenth century, the Holy See of Etchmiadzin was in Iranian territory. The Iranian leaders were tolerant and generous toward the Armenian religious hierarchy, recognizing the Armenian bishops of Constantinople as the leader of the Armenians of that city. Subsequently, the Ottoman sultans feared that the (pro-Iranian) influence of this region would spread to other areas of Turkish Armenia. As a result, the sultans relocated Armenians to Constantinople and endowed the Armenian bishop with “special authority,” hoping to “assure Armenian loyalty as well as to weaken Ejmiatsin [sic]” (Bournoutian 2002: 187).

Without getting too much deeper into this period of Armenian history, I will simply note that these tensions between the Ottoman government and the Armenian people continued in various forms throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the seventeenth century, Bournoutian (2002: 192) writes, “the Ottoman Empire, which had begun its gradual decline following the death of Sultan Suleiman (1566), suffered a series of defeats by Austria, Poland, and Russia.” “The eighteenth century,” he continues (2002: 193), “witnessed a number of Russo-Turkish wars in which Peter the Great (1689-1725) and, especially, Catherine the Great (1762-1796) succeeded in expanding Russian influence into the Balkans and Transcaucasia.”

In approximately 1774, when the Russo-Turkish war ended in defeat for the Ottoman Turks, the immanent decay of the Ottoman Empire raised the “Eastern Question”—a term used to designate the various diplomatic and political problems that would face the European territories under Ottoman control should the Empire collapse. Beginning in approximately 1789, Ottoman leaders, having become aware of the external threats to their state, began to enact a series of reforms, hoping to re-solidify the power of their Empire. This tanzimat (“reform” or “reorganization”) period would last until 1876.

Within the Armenian communities, much was happening in the nineteenth century with regard to cultural revival. Eastern cultures, at the time, attracted quite a bit of attention from European historians, archaeologists and artists; Orientalism
became a vogue and travelers frequently visited the Middle East. Armenian intellectual classes grew, colleges were founded, and many famous Armenian writers emerged. The result of this activity was “the zartonk, a renaissance or cultural awakening, of the Armenians in Ottoman Turkey” (Bournoutian 2002: 198). The eventual publication of the first newspaper in Ottoman Turkey in 1812 (by Armenians), and the subsequent establishment of fourteen periodicals in Constantinople between 1840-1866, “played a major role in the political awakening of the Armenian masses in Anatolia” (199).

Despite this cultural revival, however, the Armenians had not sought autonomy from the Ottomans. Bournoutian (2002: 257) states that there were multiple reasons for the behavior of the loyal millet. Firstly, “more than a thousand years of invasions, Armenian emigrations, and the settlement of Turkish and Kurdish tribes in Anatolia, had resulted in the fact that Armenians had but a Christian plurality in some places and a majority in only a handful of districts in western Armenia. Thus…Armenians did not constitute a majority in their homeland.” Secondly, and more importantly, the population of Armenian leaders consisted of merchants who did not reside in historic Armenia and, therefore, had no contact with the dissatisfied peasants in the interior. Armenians here had no military leaders to rally the population.

Meanwhile, the reforms initiated by Selim III in Ottoman Turkey had not succeeded in resolving the socioeconomic and political troubles facing the Empire. The conditions in western Armenia worsened as the local Turkish (or Kurdish) leaders resented any interference by the capital and felt that the reforms threatened their control over their Muslim and Armenian peasants. Armenian village heads and provincial churchmen, encouraged by the reforms, would seek redress by writing petitions. The central government’s inevitable inaction, however, would embolden the local…pasha to retaliate against the Armenians by driving them away from their land…those who remained were reduced to…slavery (Bournoutian 2002: 259).

Although some nobles had managed to escape to mountainous regions of Armenia, namely Karabagh and Zeitun, and remain autonomous, the Turks would not forget them. The central government tried repeatedly to take Zeitun by force but continually failed. In 1862, the Turkish army attacked the region and was defeated by the Armenians, who inflicted heavy losses. To be sure, the Zeitun rebellion had left its mark. Following this defeat, uprisings occurred over the next two years in Van, Erzerum and Mush.

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36 Mamurian (1830-1901), Dzerents (1822-1888), and Diusap (c. 1841-1901), for example.
The Armenian Question

In 1878, the Armenian Question was placed on the international agenda. According to Bournoutian (2002: 260), prior to this time, the West was unaware of the conditions of Christians living under Turkish rule. Regardless of the decisions made during the Berlin Congress, the fate of the Armenian people, in the eyes of Sultan Abdul-Hamid II, was already sealed.

Russian troops sent to protect and implement reforms in Armenia were withdrawn, according to article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin, and were substituted with a “collective European responsibility—without direct supervision” (Bournoutian 2002: 263). Realizing that European powers would not intervene, the Sultan encouraged local officials to “use a free hand in western Armenia” (264). In addition, “Sultan Abdul-Hamid recruited some of the Kurds into irregular cavalry units (known as Hamidiye) to carry out pogroms against the Armenians similar to those against the Jews perpetrated by the Cossacks in Russia” (264). During this period, the Sultan used his position as caliph to unite all the Muslims in the Empire against Christians.

By 1881, a number of young Armenian leaders, realizing that European assurances essentially meant nothing, began to organize revolutionary, defense groups and political parties.37 Joined by the Young Ottomans, who would later establish themselves in Geneva as the “Young Turks,” the Armenian revolutionaries sought to overthrow the Sultan and achieve a constitutional government. Many planned raids on Turkey ended in failure for these revolutionaries. In 1894, for example, the Armenian mountaineers of Sassoun,

frustrated by unfair taxes and services required by Kurdish and Turkish khans and pashas, and encouraged by the Hnchaks, rose in armed rebellion. Although they managed to hold out for a month, promises of amnesty and submission of an official petition to the Sultan induced them to surrender. The agreement was merely a ruse, however, and some 3,000 Sasuntsis were killed38 (Bournoutian 2002: 266).

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37 By 1885, the Armenakan, the first Armenian political party was formed. In Geneva, there was the creation of a highly organized revolutionary group known as the Social Democrat Hnchakian Party. Later, the Federation of Armenian Revolutionaries, also known as the Dashnaktsutuin, was formed. Eventually, the original Armenakans joined the Sahmanadir Ramgavar party.

38 It is worth noting here, that this historical fact was immortalized in the famous Armenian folk epic, “David of Sassoun.” I will discuss this in the next chapter. Needless to say, however, in the Armenian epic, the battle does not end quite like Bournoutian records it.
Europe protested this but did not take action, and killings continued. The sultan was worried that if the Armenians gained independence, the Turks would lose a large part of their “homeland.”

In October of 1895, Turkish and Kurdish forces, under order from Constantinople, began a systematic attack on the Armenian villages in six provinces. These large scale massacres, ordered by the sultan, resulted in the death of over 300,000 Armenians. In 1902, the Young Turks joined the Armenian Dashnak party, along with “Arabs, Albanians, Jews and Kurds in the first Congress of Ottoman Liberals” (Bournoutian 2002: 268). Armenian and Turkish revolutionaries continued to plan activities against the sultan; since the prior attempts on the part of the part of the Armenians had failed, the Young Turks organized a coup and, in 1908, marched on Constantinople and deposed Abdul-Hamid, establishing a constitutional government.

By 1912, however, the leadership of the Young Turks was changing and racism and militant nationalism was on the rise (Bournoutian 2002: 269). In 1913, a coup lead by ultra-nationalists gave dictatorial powers to a small group lead by the infamous Enver Pasha (Minister of War), Talaat Pasha (Minister of the Interior) and Jemal Pasha (Military-Governor of Constantinople). “Ignoring the provisions of the constitution, the new leadership ruthlessly suppressed all opposition.

On the eve of World War I, a secret alliance was formed between Turkey and Germany with the understanding that Germany would help Turkey realize their dream: Georgians, Russians, and especially Armenians, the primary obstacle in uniting the Turkish people, must be eliminated. “Moreover,” Bournoutian (2002: 271) writes, “the Turks felt that in order to create a Turkish bourgeoisie, the Armenian middle class had to be wiped out.” Turkey’s decision to enter the war on the German side and its immense fear and hatred of Russia, along with its paranoia of Armenia’s attachment to Russian policy were determining factors on the fate of the Armenian population (Boyadjian 1972: 12). The Ottoman Empire “had shrunk to a small portion of its former self; Turkey was a nation unnerved” (13). Threatened with extinction in the event of defeat in the war, the Armenian population was the perfect scapegoat for Turkey’s fears and frustrations. (Toynbee 1975: 79).

The government of Constantinople, described by Lord Bryce as “a gang of unscrupulous ruffians”—a powerful but unprincipled group—had been busy working out plans that would begin in April of 1915 (Toynbee 1975: 40). In February, Armenian soldiers were disarmed and relegated to work battalions and leaders of Armenian villages were imprisoned throughout Turkey and tortured.
By the end of April, the stage was set for the final solution to the Armenian Question: on the night of April 24, 1915, “over two hundred Armenian writers, poets, newspaper editors, teachers, lawyers, members of parliament, and other community leaders in Constantinople were taken out of their homes at night and later killed. “The effective liquidation of community leadership rendered the Armenian community unable to offer any resistance against what was ahead,” (Kaiser 2001: 10). Certainly, the Armenians had much to endure ahead.

Throughout the year, the Young Turks, displaying greater ingenuity than their predecessor, Abdul Hamid, decided against an outright massacre of the Armenian race; rather, they carried out a systematic and brutal deportation and torture of the Armenian people. Every Armenian, regardless of age or health, was to be marched into the barren, oasis of the desert—the region of Der-El-Zor—and left to die if they did not do so along the way (Kaiser 2001: 10).

When the caravans first started, the individuals bore some resemblance to human beings; in a few hours, however, the dust of the road plastered their faces and clothes, the mud caked their lower members, and the slowly advancing mobs, frequently bent with fatigue and crazed by the brutality of their “protectors,” resembled some new and strange animal species. Yet for the better part of six months…practically all the highways of Asia Minor were crowded with these unearthly bands of exiles. Moving on and on, they scarcely knew whither, except that every road lead to death (Morgenthau 1999: 12).

Deportees in transit were forced into concentration camps, so as not to clutter the town of Aleppo; those who were not stationed at camps battled for existence as they were marched farther into the desert.39 Ambassador Henry Morgenthau recalls (1999: 8), “Thousands of women and children as well as men died on these forced journeys, not only from hunger and exposure, but also from the inhuman cruelty of their guards.” Although none of my grandparents had yet been born during this period, each of them carry the knowledge of their parents’ stories. Though the stories are fragmentary and require quite a bit of imagining to create a coherent narrative, they have been related to me in bits and pieces throughout the years.

39 See Appendix VI.
Remembering the Genocide

Haige & Dora Garabedian

Dora: My mother never saw any part of the genocide, she was not a part of it at all. And my father didn't either because he was in this country all along.

Haige: She was there during the period of the genocide, but she was never victimized by it.

Dora: She came from a better family, she never saw any of that. But she was there.

Haige: But my mother was in eastern Turkey, in the eastern region which was dominated by the Turks. She was young at the time. She was born, according to her, in 1901. My parents were victimized, oh yeah, sure. They were deported from their land, so, like a lot of other Armenians, they went on that trek through the Mesopotamian desert area, walking...and she finally wound up...she wound up in an orphanage. She had five bothers and only one of them survived. But he wasn't with her. She was alone. Her parents were killed. They were all killed. They were all killed. She was rescued out of the orphanage by my father and they went to Marseilles, and embarked to America from Marseilles.

Elyssa: Had your father known your mother before?

Haige: Yeah they did, somewhat. As much as you can get familiar with someone...

Dora: Same village.

Haige: There really wasn't too much knowledge. Don't forget, my father came over here in 1911. By then, she was only ten years old, my mother was only 10 years old at the time. My father left because if he didn't he would have been conscripted into the Turkish army. You know, he became a gamavor (soldier), and fought against the Turks in Palestine, and after they wiped out the Turks in Palestine, they returned to Adana. They were deported. So, through relatives, he learned that my mother was in an orphanage, and this was one way of him rescuing her out of that condition and bringing her to America, with the intent, of course, of getting married eventually. So they came to Marseilles. He borrowed money in order to pay for the trip to America, he landed in Providence, RI. A couple of days later, he wrote for, or called for a priest to come to Providence to marry them.

Agnes Karanian

Grandpa Henry’s mother, Ardemis, her uncle, by marriage, he was a doctor. And they said, you know, “we need you.” And so, being a doctor he went with them and he just never returned. Ardemis’ younger brother, they don’t even know what happened to him. He was just a little kid, he was about three years old. Yeah...he just...they just took him. His family never saw him again. They were right in the midst of the genocide. Oh yeah. Well, you know, grandma [Ardemis] always said she was very fortunate because her grandmother, and her,

40 Unfortunately, there is not much information at all about my grandmothers’ family. What is known is that they lived in the Pera section of Constantinople, also known as the “garden section,” an incredibly high class district. One can only speculate as to why they were not victimized. There is simply not enough information to know for sure.
and her aunt—who spoke English, she spoke English—so she said, we had no problem. She said, even though she didn’t speak English, “we got on the boat,” and her aunt spoke English and it was nice.

In my mother’s case, she traveled alone. She and my brother Yeghishe [Ernest], were taken in by a Turkish family and she cooked for them. And, well my mother always said there were some Turks that were more compassionate than others, you know. So she said she was very fortunate that she and my brother…I guess they were there for about a year. And then, when there was passage for a boat, she said to my brother, “Yeghishe you go and don’t worry about me.” He said, “no, I’m not going without you,” and she said, “yes don’t worry about me, you get to America.” And then about a year later she came, by herself, not knowing a word of English. She was about 34—yeah about 34, 35—still she had lived a lifetime. She had six children by then and all of them had died, except Ernest, of starvation. And, um...well, of course her husband was stoned to death, I think I’ve told you that. Stoned to death, yes. She had him dressed in women’s clothing but...they found out. After 1915, he was trying to escape the deportation and, uh...right then and there, stoned him to death, stoned him to death. I mean, they were brutal with their, you know...they raped Armenian women...they took their...pregnant women they cut their bellies and they took their...ohh. I mean, you know, the things they did. You know...it was just unbelievable.

Journalist Edward Mortimer of the Times (qtd. in Walker 1990: 343) said, “it would be hard to imagine anything more ferocious or harmful than the genocide committed against the Armenians during the First World War.” After WWI, those who had planned and carried out the genocide fled, and the Ottoman council began an investigation into the war crimes; however, the investigation was carried out in such a dilatory manner as to make sure that little justice was done (Walker 1990: 343). “Only one man of even slight significance was convicted, sentenced and hanged (June 1919)” (Walker 1990:344). All other guilty parties had escaped or were in hiding, and no attempt was made to extradite them to Turkey. Western Armenians’ hope for any independent or autonomous existence on former Ottoman territory collapsed with the negotiations at a Nationalist peace conference at Lausanne in 1922. Not only were the Armenians not mentioned in the subsequent treaty, American representative Joseph Grew noted, “There is no subject upon which the Turks are more fixed in obstinacy” (Walker 1990: 346).

The conference at Lausanne was only the beginning of further grim events awaiting the Turkish Armenians. The final blow to the Armenians came “when the European powers, setting aside their rhetoric, abandoned the Armenians and
renegotiated the Treaty of Sévres.\textsuperscript{41} The Treaty of Lausanne (July 24, 1923) did not even mention the Armenian question” (Bournoutian 2002: 315). Not only did the Turkish government refuse to discuss the Armenians’ claims for compensation for their material losses during the deportations and massacres, but everything was done to pretend that such events had never really taken place; so, naturally, claims for compensation were superfluous (Walker 1990: 347). Turkey refused to acknowledge that the Armenians died as a result of their planning and deliberate attempt to destroy the race in its entirety and preferred not to discuss it at all. The subject was largely taboo, and allies of Turkey were expected to follow the Turkish viewpoint on the matter—“that the Armenians had been in revolt and got what they deserved; it had been an unfortunate chapter, which was now closed, and Armenians and their friends would be advised not to try to reopen it” (Walker 1990: 379). The conference at Lausanne was crucial in depriving the Armenian remnant of even the semblance of justice—Turkey paid no reparations and “was not blamed for any atrocities it had committed during the war” (Bournoutian 2002:315)—and the agony of the Armenians due to the Turkish government’s failure to take responsibility for their actions seemed destined to continue indefinitely.

The final death toll, although devastating, was not the only factor in the victimization of Armenians during the genocide. The Ottoman Armenians were also victims of a psychological genocide. Not only had Abdul Hamid and the Young Turks succeeded in decimating nearly the entire Armenian population, they had made it impossible for survivors to continue living life as they knew it prior to the genocide. A number of survivors said that they had become more preoccupied with the genocide as they became older (Miller 1993: 155). The Armenians held no claim to any of their pre-genocide possessions, their lives had been destroyed—many were forced to abandon their Armenian identity completely and adopt Turkish culture and religion in exchange for keeping their lives—and they received no compensations or even acknowledgement of their intense suffering.

It is indisputable that the Turkish government’s continued denial of the genocide has profoundly affected survivor response. As would be the case in any human-created tragedy, denial by the perpetrator retards the victims’ ability to focus on their own healing. “The sense of victimization, even martyrdom, that Armenians

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\textsuperscript{41} The Treaty of Sévres, signed in August of 1920 by the Turks, European Allies and the Armenians, included the acceptance of the boundaries, drawn up by Wilson, of the Armenian nation—which was to include provinces of Van, Bitlis, Erzerum, and an outlet to the Black Sea—and promised reparations and restoration of property to the survivors of the genocide (Bournoutian 2002). See, also, appendix VII.
experience is all the more intense because the crime of genocide against them has been audaciously denied by the Turkish government and 'scholarly' establishment” (Suny 1999: 23). The offense caused by the denial by the Turkish government of the Armenians’ suffering is not easily overstated, nor is the amount of collective (as well as individual) energy that Armenians spend combating this distortion of the truth. “Turkish denial is unfortunate because, to some extent, it has fixated Armenians on a single issue, which has in turn, retarded a fuller flowering of post-genocidal cultural expression” (Miller 1993: 161).

While I agree that Turkey’s denial of the genocide has had a profound affect on the sense of victimization that Armenian’s feel with regard to their past, I do not agree with the latter half of Miller’s point. Of course, Turkish denial is unfortunate, and I have also seen, personally, how many Armenians are indeed fixated on this single issue, which is also unfortunate. However, I do not believe that post-genocidal cultural expression in the Diaspora has been hindered in any way. In fact, I believe the exact opposite to be the case. The genocide continues to be present in the consciousness of Armenian-Americans insofar as it is one of many stories that make up the complex web of narratives that constitute an understanding and development of Armenian ethnicity. These stories are critical in perpetuating a unique cultural and ethnic identity in a heterogeneous environment separate from the homeland.
A CONTEXT FOR MEMORY AND NARRATIVE
Contemporary Armenia to a Third-Generation Diasporan

"Yerevan is nothing like I remember it."
-From an e-mail by the author to her advisors while abroad
14 December 2005

Being and Becoming

It has never been an easy thing to do to explain to someone that I am 100% Armenian. For one thing, as much as this may surprise you, the intelligent reader, a lot of people have no knowledge of Armenia’s geography, or even of its existence. (Once I even met a Turk who claimed not to know.\textsuperscript{42}) So I explain to them that Armenia is a tiny country nestled between Turkey and Iran, between Russia and Iraq, between the Black and Caspian Seas. I explain that this geography is important to Armenia’s history in many ways: Armenia is in the center of the route connecting Russia to Iran and Iraq, it is the landlocked country that connects the Black and Caspian Seas; trade routes passed through Armenia for centuries, hence, people from all corners of the middle east passed through the land, embedding aspects of their culture in that of the Armenians.

Situated along the route of the Great Silk Road, Armenia has fallen within the orbit of a number of empires. I tell them that Armenia suffered the twentieth century’s first genocide at the hands of the Ottoman Turks in 1915, and that this brought widespread destruction to the Armenians, as well as mass deportations, creating a Diaspora that stretched as far west as London and, eventually, America. After Armenia experienced the devastating earthquake in December of 1988, neighboring countries were in a position to extend their control over Armenia by blockading Armenia’s borders. Tiny Armenia was left even more vulnerable with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, endowing Armenia with an independent status.

\textsuperscript{42} I bitterly describe it as a "claim" since, firstly, it occurred at F&M, leading me to believe that this person was educated to some reasonable degree and, secondly, because as an Armenian I have been raised to be bitter about these sorts of things. This does not mean that I cannot think for myself, it is merely one of many examples (both impending as well as previously mentioned) of the pervasiveness of a collective Armenian consciousness.
With no capability to export goods, or control over what was imported, and with a large percentage of Armenians’ living outside of Armenia, Armenian’s sense of autonomy and the national unity of the people was strained yet again.

When I finish telling people this, or any part of this, they nod and mostly feign interest and understanding, but I don’t feel right. A part of me feels like I am telling someone else’s story. My parents and grandparents were all born in America. That makes me the third-generation in my family born here. Yet I feel a sense of my Armenian heritage wherever I am. This “Armenianness” follows me, informs my behavior and the decisions I make; my sense of family and the importance of various cultural traditions pervade my consciousness.

The food I eat and love is a product of many generations of recipes, passed on and on through the women in my family. The recipes are respected and treasured as sacred representations of each family’s heritage; although the foods are all the same in essence, each recipe is slightly different. My mother’s choreg (taken from her mother’s recipe) tastes nothing like our friend Adrienne’s—Adrienne uses too much butter, and too many sev gundigs (black seeds with a potent flavor). Each woman in the family takes a recipe, makes it her own, and passes it along to her daughters. My knowledge of this, even as a young girl, and my desire to learn and be involved in this tradition shaped me as I grew up, and continues to do so now.

My friends look forward to these seasonal treats and I bring them to school with excitement, answering the “you made these?” questions with a broad smile, my sense of Armenian pride shining. I know that these recipes are an important part of what keeps me connected to my great-grandparents and the “Old Country” that bore these traditions. In fact, I consider these recipes, and the practices surrounding food in general, to be some of the few pieces of knowledge I have about what Hayastan is actually like.

What keeps me tied to my Armenian heritage is not any one thing that I can point to. It’s everything that I have grown up with my entire life. My grandparents tell me stories about when I was a little girl. On Christmas day, opening a present from my mother, my paternal grandmother, Agnes, exclaimed, “Shad soolgheh!” (“It’s very expensive”). To which I replied, “No it wasn’t, gramma! My mother always looks for the sales!” And when she asked me, incredulously, “You understood that?” I would reply, matter-of-factly, “Of course I did! I’m an Armenian child.”

I understood Armenian when I was young, not because my parents spoke Armenian in the house all that much (excepting, of course, the Armenian songs and

43 This story, and dozens like it, were related to me countless times by my grandparents throughout my entire life.
alphabet, numbers and colors and that sort of thing), but because I was constantly surrounded by the language. When I learned how to read and spell at an early age, the adults knew they could not put anything past me by spelling, so they tried to get the better of me by speaking to one another in Armenian. I was determined not to be left out, so I began to understand Armenian and, therefore, the language was embedded in me from the beginning.

There are countless other stories that my each of my grandparents have relayed to me about my childhood awareness of my Armenian background as well as countless memories that I have of my own Armenianness. As I outlined above, my sense of Armenian identity was strengthened by things such as food, the language and, most importantly, my family. Before I was truly old enough to understand what the word ‘ethnicity’ meant, I was feeling it, living it and experiencing it. There was a seamless blend, when I was a child, of my Armenian heritage and my American lifestyle; so seamless, in fact, that I was never aware that they were separate entities.

My first memory of becoming conscious of the distinction occurred in elementary school (second or third grade, perhaps). My mother had packed me with some madzoon soup (a cold, yogurt-based soup with barley and spinach) for lunch. Madzoon soup was my absolute favorite Armenian food when I was younger (only my mother’s recipe, not my grandma’s). Well, that day when I took it out of my bag and began to eat (excited, of course), a boy from my class started to draw attention to my lunch. He pointed and laughed and asked me if I was eating paint, or something equally nonsensical. But I was tremendously hurt by his comment, and I stopped eating.

That was the first time I was forced to confront the “differentness” of my Armenian heritage. I remember going home and having to face my mother, when she opened a full thermos of soup, asking why I hadn’t eaten my lunch. People just didn’t eat things like that here, in America. Wouldn’t my life be so much easier, I thought as a child, if I had just grown up in Armenia? At least there I would be able to keep the things I loved and cherished so dearly while still feeling like an integral part of the whole.

I grew up attending St. George Armenian Apostolic church in Hartford, where I would spend the first half of the morning in Sunday School and the second half in the church for the end of the service. Nearly all of the two (or more) hour service is conducted in Armenian—songs, prayers, and chants—and these liturgical music and other traditions were well established in my mind at a very young age. After church, we would have “coffee hour” downstairs (which, when I was young, made the
seemingly endless church services worthwhile). Here, the members of our very small parish (40 at most, in regular attendance) would congregate to eat danish and drink coffee or juice and socialize. I called many of the older women “auntie,” regardless of their relation to my family and came to see church and coffee hour as my weekly connection to the Armenian world. Here I could hear (and speak) the language, surround myself with other Armenians and reconnect with that familiar, familial scene that I had known all my life.

Furthermore, affiliation with the church meant affiliation with all sorts of other Armenian events in the North-East: ACYOA (Armenian Church Youth Organization of America) events such as the annual Hye Mertsoom—where high-school aged Armenian-Americans would gather (in home-stays) to compete in sports tournaments by day and eat and dance to Armenian music by night—and St. Vartan Camp, a small diocesan camp that served as the perfect haven every summer to meet up with old friends, make new friends or, as grandmothers hoped, meet a future husband. It is clear to me now, as it was then, that the church played a huge role in my life and was one of the vital parts of my identification as an Armenian. It wasn’t until this December that I would wonder about the fact that hardly any immigrant Armenians ever attended St. George Armenian Church.

Decades of Soviet rule in Armenia has essentially erased religion in the minds of the people. Churches still stand, but people do not attend them. Whereas, in America, Armenians view the church as one of the most fundamental connections to the culture and heritage of the motherland, in Armenia, the church, and religious faith, is not a part of daily life. One informant told me that on Easter, in Armenia, all the stores and shops are open. She laughed at my shock, because, although she was born in Lebanon and was living in Yerevan, she was raised in Canada; as a diasporan Armenian, she anticipated my response. In the Armenian Apostolic Church in the Diaspora, Easter is the most sacred and important holiday on the religious calendar. The idea that it would not be recognized in the homeland was simultaneously surprising and enlightening, and the exploration of these feelings would lead me directly into the heart of this work.

I live in America and I do “American” things but I still call myself Armenian. Is this a paradox? Am I an Armenian or an American? Or, perhaps I am an Armenian-

44 “We still have churches, but we don’t have religion. We don’t have faith. Like, you ask Armenian, yeah, we’re Christians...but do they go to church? Do they know what are the Christian traditions? Do they? No! Here they celebrate more communist holidays than they do religious holidays. Come here in Easter, you will see...” Lara Aharonian, 19 Dec 2005.
American, or is it the other way around? America has often been referred to as a “melting pot,” a “mosaic,” and, most recently, a “mixed salad.” Regardless of terminology, America is undeniably a place full of a hugely diverse mixture of cultures. But is there such as thing as an American culture? In a country so full of “others,” how can one be sure that s/he truly is American? In a sense, this was the question that I initially endeavored to ask Armenians. With all the destruction and dispersion Armenia has seen in the last century—in some cases, assimilation into another culture or adoption of a new religion was necessary for survival—how have Armenians been able to not only call themselves “Armenian,” but, also, how have they been able to maintain a solid sense of what this “Armenianness” should entail?

When I traveled to Armenia in December I realized how silly this question was. People living in Armenia simply do not ask this question; they are there, they are living it. Being an Armenian is as natural a thing to them as being an American is for us. It is their culture! They don’t have to think about it. They don’t ask questions about how to hold onto it or even bother to try to. It would be as silly to them as it would be for Americans today to attempt to live by the traditions of the early 1900s—futile and completely pointless. We are not living in 1910, we are living today, and we welcome today with open arms and without much thought of being back to a time when people drove the Model T and lived without penicillin (and though we may wish we could trade G. W. Bush for W. Wilson, we could certainly do without waiting for the ice man to deliver).

In many ways, each of the items contained in this section has been essential in leading me to the discovery of my thesis. The stories I grew up hearing, my personal experience of my Armenian ethnicity, and my trip to Armenia—and consequent reevaluation of my academic goals—all illuminated for me the extent to which Diasporan Armenians create their own Armenia. A brief example of my experiences in Armenia (December 2005) will be useful for context and comparison.

*Impressions of Yerevan—Excerpts from a Field Journal

**12 December 2005**

My second day in Yerevan and I can, quite regrettably, say that I have truly done nothing. It’s 10 pm and I’m sitting on the bed reading an article in AGBU magazine about Yerevan and practically starving (my living, breathing map of the city seems to
never want to eat). I think I have learned more from this magazine than I have from the city itself, to be honest. I know that this is just stubbornness, and the bitterness at not finding the Armenia that I wanted to find when I stepped off the plane, manifesting itself. The Armenia that I did find was something completely unrecognizable to me. To begin with, my beautiful Hayastansi cousin, Lilit, has recently had a nose job (since when did plastic surgery become popular, or affordable for that matter, in Armenia?) and dyed her hair blonde. Furthermore, she is much more interested in chatting online than she is in chatting with me. I cannot help but muse that if I wanted to play on AOL Instant Messenger, and get so lazy I could barely bring myself to eat, I would have stayed at home in the United States, where at least people wouldn’t stare at my UGG shoes as if they were dead animals I chose to wear on my feet (which, come to think of the accidental irony, they actually are).

Everything here is so mod it is almost unbelievable. I feel like a total outsider. With all the girls in black, knee-high boots and stiletto heels, fur jackets and hair extensions, it’s like ethnic New York City around here. At least if there were some color—in the clothes, the jackets, the sky or landscape—perhaps it would be less depressing, but everything is some dark shade and it’s hard to handle the dull bleakness of it all. It is difficult for me to separate my memories of Armenia (of the summer, more than four years ago, and of the stories of my childhood) from what I perceive as I look out on Yerevan tonight. Although it is impossible to say how much of my past experiences inform my present thought, I cannot help but blame the sunny skies of the summer for my unhappiness here, now. It seems worlds away from this Yerevan I see. When I look out the window at the grey metal roofs, the muddy, wet roads, and the dreary skies, I can’t help but admit that it is almost a relief to see the colorful glow of the flashing neon signs that splay out over the sidewalks and reflect in the puddles that form in the streets.

It is difficult for me to write about Armenia this way—as a sad and gloomy place—and even harder still to admit that I am comforted by the harsh and imposing lights (in addition to the sounds of car horns and voices into the night) and other characteristics of city life. It so deeply contradicts my vision of Armenia and my perception of the people and the land—a historical, pastoral and sacred country, with cities characterized by quiet darkened streets. Yesterday, the “wintry mix,” so to speak, was actually a grey (what else) mixture of morning fog and the smoke from the fires of burning trash and leaves and the wood fires warming the homes of those not yet connected to the ever-expanding natural gas network. This mixture makes the days aesthetically (and aromatically) unpleasant; gloom—in the form of smoke
and fog—actually sweeps over everything and the bright lights of the city are, as I said, increasingly, though strangely, a relief to me.

I defend this seeming betrayal of my motherland—these feelings of mine—by appealing to memories of conversations with my cousins and other Armenian citizens, as well as conversations with elders in the Diaspora, about life in Armenia during the years directly following independence. During these few years (between 1991-1995) times were almost inhumanly difficult—with blackouts occurring constantly, days with (if you were lucky) little more than one hour of electricity, living by candlelight, scarcely potable water, and so on. One must be open to see all the changes that have occurred and continue to occur in this country since that time; I believe it is easier for me to recognize these changes since I have not been here throughout (as it is easier for one who has been away for a time to notice how much another has grown, though that person does not perceive the growth so consciously about herself). Taking a bus out of the city to Lilit’s apartment I looked up at the towering apartment complexes that stacked the hills and realized that the oppressive winter darkness was cut by the lights that illuminated nearly all of the apartment windows. These subtle changes, to me, are true indicators that there is something happening in Armenia.

14 December 2005

Today, I experienced a nearly complete meltdown—hysterics and all of it—and I began to feel as though this trip was futile and that the Franklin & Marshall Committee on Grants had done themselves wrong by offering to pay for this foolhardy endeavor. I wrote my advisors an email (subject line: “ethnography, poo”) and expressed my deep reservations, frustrations and confusions about what I was seeing and experiencing. The response was exactly what I expected (and desperately needed). Something along the lines of: Get up, and get out there! Pull yourself out of the woes and throes of culture shock and self-pity. There is no time to succumb to this oh-so-familiar malady. This is your trip, so stop feeling sorry for yourself because you can’t get the information you think you want…and make use of what it is you have right in front of you.

Well, I tried, but what I had “right in front of me,” unfortunately, was disturbing me. The cause of the meltdown, as it happened, was something—well, a thing in two parts—that I saw on the street as I walked to meet an informant. Part one: a Porshe dealership on the corner of a relatively modest block, shocking of itself—the perfectly Windexed glass reflecting the flawlessly polished sheen of the
brand new Cayenes and Carreras—and the shiny perfection of the cars...even more shocking in contrast with the gaping hole in the city’s floor a mere 50 yards away (more on this project later).

Part two is where the breakdown begins. My feelings about the existence of the Porshe dealership were confusing enough as I pondered this unbelievable development in Yerevan. My mind barely had time to process my rapidly flowing thoughts—the absurdity of a Porshe dealership in a country with a poverty rate of 50%; the fact that my cousins had made a *gigantic* financial leap simply in getting *heat* in their apartment (in anticipation of my visit), etc.—when I turned the corner and was stopped dead in my path. Beyond the dealership sat an old woman, huddled under a small tarp and bundled with scraps of clothing, selling the most ridiculous amalgamation of items you have ever seen. It was a regular garage sale of junk ranging from small, plastic do-hickies (maybe toys of some sort) to knee socks and a basket of uninflated balloons that looked far from new.

How can a city as small as Yerevan simultaneously be home to those who drive Porches and those who barely make ends meet selling trinkets on the street for as little as 50 drams (less than 10 cents) a piece? As I stood there, angrily pondering this question, I noticed the people as they passed by—dressed to the hilt and much too busy looking fine to notice the woman (whose face, in their defense, actually blended into the dirty color of the sidewalk) sitting by her stand.

16 December 2005

I needed time to reflect before I wrote any more about my emotional crisis the other day. I figured objectivity can only come with distance, so I gave myself a night and a day to cool off. Admittedly, I was haunted and disgusted all of yesterday by the image of the pensioner woman in the midst of such flaunted affluence (“conspicuous consumption” as Professor Billig would say). It is hard for me to see any good in a Porshe dealership when I know that there are so many people in this country who struggle to gather enough money to buy their bread and cheese; it is even harder when I contemplate the fact that, for the most part, the tiny percentage of wealthy

45 The response, “What about New York City?” has been asked, and I have counted, a total of 7 times since I wrote this journal. Number aside, it was asked of every person to whom I recounted this shock. At this point, it should already be apparent that the reason for my failure to consider NYC when confronted by this in Yerevan lies in the nature of Armenia in my consciousness. Armenia is not Armenia, to me; Armenia is Hayastan. To me Hayastan is a sacred land of ancient history and tradition—and no place as sacred can be home to such appalling discrepancies in the life of the people.
people in Armenia who can afford to capitalize on such luxuries are only wealthy at
the expense of the rest of the population.

When Armenia was first released from the communistic hold of the Soviet
Union, the independent government had trouble adjusting to their newfound power.
They found that large sums of money could be gathered by plundering factories and
selling every piece of manufacturing equipment they could get their hands on to
neighboring countries. Result: lots and lots of money in their pockets and
completely empty factory buildings with no way (fiscally) of regaining what was lost.
They also discovered that the worse shape Armenia was in, the more foreign aid they
would receive. Result: the foreign aid did, indeed, come in—and they lined their
pockets once again.46 Without getting too deep into this familiar diatribe about the
incredible corruption of the Armenian government, I will simply say that it seems to
have given rise, among the general public, to a definite passivity, apathy and overall
disbelief that any positive change can occur in the country.

Furthermore, I can feel this gloominess in the city—a general theme of
cynicism and pessimism—that I know extends beyond the weather. Diasporan
Armenians who have spent considerable time visiting, working, or living in Armenia,
and with whom I have spoken so far on this trip, have largely shared this conception.
Overwhelmingly, these trends in the mentality of the people, I think, have their
origins in the pervading corruption of the government and the relentless hardships of
life after independence. One informant, Karpis, wrote in an email:

The government here has a serious problem of public morale, a pervasive
indifference and withdrawal into private life. The country, in spite of the
collapse of the economy and the rapacious plundering of assets after
independence, the war in Karbgh and the economic blockade by Turkey and
Azerbaijan, has made remarkable economic progress. The disparities of
wealth—vulgar, conspicuous wealth on one hand, and on the other hand the
everyday struggle to make ends meet for most people—is not exclusively an
Armenian problem. It is one throughout the former Eastern Bloc, where a raw
capitalism has supplanted a moribund so called planned economy.

Being raised in the Diaspora, Hayastan was always represented as a perfect,
unchanging ideal—our images were steadfast and solid, the country was the root of
our “Armenianness” and everything that we understood that to be. The promise of
the motherland—the homeland—kept our sense of Armenian identity strong. So,
naturally, my first reaction when I encountered the dramatic changes and contrasts
in the city was a negative one. Back in the neutral environment of the Bed and

46 This information is based on my collective consciousness. I have not done enough research
to know the extent to which these statements are accurate.
Breakfast, I took the time to reflect on what I had seen during the day. I focused on replacing my subjective image of Armenia as an ideal with an objective version of Armenia as a new and growing republic beginning to find its footing in the world (and one that is not unique in this, as Karpis pointed out).

One of the images that many people in the Diaspora hold, perhaps because of Armenia’s history of victimization, is that the country, all over, is in a constant state of depression; while life in many regions of Armenia is still incredibly difficult, things are changing. Positive change is everywhere, no matter what the scale; it is starting with Yerevan and is slowly beginning to reach out into the surrounding regions.

That said, it is an interesting phenomenon for me to hear people be speak pessimistically, and at times even nihilistically, about Armenia. Although it seems that when reminded of the changes that have taken place over the last seven or eight years, they rethink their attitudes and admit that, yes, there has been significant progress. It is as if the people here (and those in the Diaspora, I think, also, although to a different extent47) have put on blinders and refuse to see any good at all, each living in their own narrow world of negation. This is not to say that everything in and about Armenia is bright and promising—certainly not. But it does mean that in spite of daily difficulties and frustrations, Armenians, in the Diaspora, too, need to look beyond our individual noses and take in the broader view. Armenia is not an easy country to live in, especially when compared to Europe and America—countries with a history of affluence—places in which you can settle down and have everything in order. As long as you can work (or even just get on welfare, in some places) life is manageable. Unfortunately, this is not the country Armenia is now.

Meanwhile, statistically (and encouragingly), the gross national product in the first nine months of 2005 grew by over 12%, and a friend tells me that within a few years the per capita income will have reached that of 1989. In other words, a full "recovery" has been made (if you measure in those gross terms) from the beginnings of Armenia’s independence. The critical issue, however, remains the uneven distribution of wealth and the shameful gap between the wealthy and the remainder of the population.

47 In the Diaspora, the image of Armenia is not negative, but outdated. In many cases, Diasporans perceive Armenia as still suffering from the ravages of the earthquake of 1988, and essentially just as being a backwards, third-world country. As one informant, Lara Aharonian told me: “In the Diaspora they still think that in Armenia everything is backwards, they feel if you are coming here you still have to bring toilet paper with you… a lot of people think this way! It’s stuck, you know, their image of Armenia is the starving children, the orphans…I hate that mentality. I have friends who come and they bring huge bags of clothes and toys. Why? We’re past that, we’re past that stage of relief organizations. Armenia doesn’t need that…that’s my anger against diaspora.”
“INCH EhINK, INCH EGHANK...”

My grandmother used to say this phrase to me often when joking about the inconveniences that come with old age. In English, the phrase, which has always struck me as imbued with tones of longing for days past, roughly translates to: “What we were, and what we have become.” Being considerably younger, I never felt from this phrase what I could always tell my grandmother felt when she said it—always evoking a familiar look in her eyes, like moments of her past were playing in mind. Today, as I sit here on the plane reflecting on the past ten days, I have an inkling about my grandmother’s feelings: it is about loss.

It seems that in the past four or five years, Yerevan has been seeing changes occurring at an almost exponential rate. AGBU [Armenian General Benevolent Union] magazine did a nineteen page spread on Yerevan in the November 2005 issue—one that I spent much time getting acquainted with at the beginning of this trip. The headline on the cover of the magazine reads, “Yerevan: 2747 years old,” and the feature includes four major articles, beginning with one subtitled, “The challenge of growth in a city of ages.” This first article focuses on the major changes taking place in Armenia’s capital city over the past decade. A description of the changes that occurred can be understood through the microcosm of an old warehouse building (which housed the State Fund of Social Insurance), and the changes seen there in as little as five years. Five years ago, there, in Sahkharov Square in center city, the neediest city residents met and formed lines to receive welfare vouchers for flour. “Today,” as writer John Hughes so succinctly puts it, “in what was that very room where the bread of life was stored, the dirty and dark walls are replaced by storefront windows and chic displays inviting passersby into the track-light elegance of the GF Ferre boutique, where a simple blouse off the rack costs $251” (Hughes 2005: 4).

This example of overpowering materialism is only one of many less-than-subtle displays of wealth that Yerevan has seen in recent years. As I walked the streets I noticed stores such as Lacoste, boutiques selling designer brands such as Christian Dior, Louis Vuitton and Fendi, and a even (as I wrote last week) a Porche dealership. The more trendy and expensive stores and items I saw, the more I wondered about the market for such things; with the level of poverty being so high in so many parts of the country, I wondered who within Armenia’s population could.
afford to utilize these “capital” changes. At a café last week, Karpis explained to me, “There’s about 10% of the population here that are very, very wealthy. Very wealthy, and they have a lot of money to spend. And you could see more Porches, and Mercedes, and BMWs—you can see all that and more—and even some Hummers, here...But it’s a very uneven development.”

This sort of raw capitalism, that began in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, seems to have caused a very uneven development in Armenia: a small number of people became rich very fast, and the remainder of the population fell in the wake of development. And Yerevan is a prime example of this phenomenon. Not more than 20 paces from the Porsche dealership sat a woman, about whom I wrote at the start of this journal, one of the cities many pensioners, selling a random assortment of odds-and-ends. Outside of the trendy, yellow-walled, high-ceilinged, plasma-television-adorned Square One café sat an old man, worn with age. I took notice of the deep lines running through the skin on his face and the dirty, matted hat he wore. Patiently he sat, a few paces from the café, selling nuts and seeds—pistachios, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds—which he had partitioned into small sacks. More accurately, he sat eating the nuts that he was trying to sell, shelling them slowly and meticulously—one by one—with his teeth and fingers, braving the bitter cold city night and enduring the fumes of passing taxis and buses on the street, in hopes of a sympathetic buyer.

The Yerevan of today seems impossibly far from the Yerevan of 2001 (that I remember) which may or may not be a positive fact. The fact that remained the most bothersome to me was that Yerevan seemed a universe away from the rest of the Armenian republic, both as I have seen it, and as it has been described to me in stories of the “motherland.” Have these images of the motherland become images of the past? What is actually going on in Armenia? Is it a stable country where people can afford to get their noses “fixed” and own furs and a shiny new Beamer? Or is the image of “small Armenia”—where money and jobs are scarce, poverty is abundant, and “aid” is constantly necessary—still a reality?

Karbis, in an e-mail to Auntie Julie, wrote: “This ‘small Armenia,’ as we so often apologetically refer to it, is in reality not so small. Its small space is expanded by a thousand differing and beauteous sights. It is now our responsibility to tend to it, husband it, and give it the respect that it deserves.” At this time of great social

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48 My cousin, Lilit, one day when we were walking down the street, pinched the bridge of her nose and grimaced saying, “ooohhh, since the surgery my nose always hurts in the cold.” I was immediately worried. “The surgery?” I asked, assuming some horrible car accident (knowing the drivers in Yerevan) had left her bloodied and broken. “Yes,” she said, fingering the top of her nose “I had a little bump.” Then, smiling, she added, “So I got it fixed!”
dislocation, and the pain of “transformation” from a stable economy to a fairly raw market economy, when there are vast differences between the wealthy and the poor, it is difficult for my mind to comprehend some of the paradoxical images that confront me in Armenia. (One day, while sitting in a coffee shop, I noticed an advertisement for a New Year’s Eve celebration at the Golden Palace Hotel—an “International Fiesta” with artists from many different countries—for the “low price” of $150-$300 per person. More than half of the people I talked to in Yerevan could barely fathom a job where they would be paid even $100 dollars a month, and $150 is the monthly salary of a physician.) But positive change is clearly everywhere, as the dramatic differences in wealth would not be visible unless there was advancement to compare it to.

WHERE ARE WE?

Have Armenians in Yerevan begun to succumb to the familiar pull of the Western material vortex? Are they being blinded by the glitz and glamour of a few boutiques and jazz clubs in the center city? Have they begun to forget what Armenia’s history has been all about and ignore the persisting problems? Have they ever been conscious of it to begin with? In a city so full of distractions—giant television-screen billboards advertising all the latest trends in music, clothing and dining, and so on—have even those residents who are not part of the “wealthy” class become enchanted by the pearly paint jobs of the H3s, hot off the factory floor, and the store front displays of over-the-top fashion extravaganzas? If this is all the case, I must ask myself: is it really a bad thing?

As Karpis told me, “This is Armenia. This is what’s happening to this culture; it’s becoming a very European, very international culture.” He acknowledges that, right now, it is a very localized development, but also admits that “it’s beginning to move out into the countryside: people are more fashionably dressed, more European-ly dressed, and they want that life...they want that life.” So it seems that, more and more, Armenians are focusing their energy on moving up in the world—a goal that is entirely new to a country that spent three quarters of a century under communist rule.

Diasporan Armenians who have lived in Armenia for any period of time all seem to agree that, in the Diaspora, we need to move onto some new “issues.” The age-old woes about the massacres and the genocide need to be moved to the back burner. In the Diaspora, we must be conscious not to put our faces forward, and
represent our people and our country, to the world in a negative way. As Lara [a Lebanon born, Canadian-Armenian who is currently living in Yerevan] told me:

We need the Diaspora, it’s part of Armenia, but not like they are doing it now. We don’t need relief in Armenia, we need other things, people working on other issues; we have human rights issues, we have historical monument issues, we have infrastructure issues in Armenia. It’s a young republic! It’s being built! And if you’re really interested as an Armenian, come and build it with us. Don’t stay in the Diaspora and have your own theories about what Armenia should do. No! Come and live here, first of all, for a year and then tell us what Armenia needs.

In Armenia, people are moving on with their lives and living in the day-to-day of what Armenia has to offer. It is pointless to boycott Turkish-made goods because of “something that happened to our great-grandparents 100 years ago” since Turkish goods are “very good quality and available at low costs,” one informant told me. It is detrimental for a people to live in the past if their future requires so much attention in order to develop. And while it is certainly a localized growth, this is the case with any country—certain areas are more economically prosperous than others and certain areas display this more prominently. Similarly, it is also the case that the Armenians will try to move on from, rather than cling to, the events of the past in every way they can. In the Diaspora, on the other hand, we seem to be desperately clinging to these past events, as if they are all we have of Armenia—all we have to unite us as a people.
The name William Saroyan was not unfamiliar to me growing up. To be sure, I had heard his name spoken among many crowds of Armenians, read his quotes on posters in my grandfather’s basement, and seen his books on shelves in the houses of Armenian friends and relatives. One summer at the beach, I saw *The Human Comedy* on a shelf in my grandparent’s cottage. I realized I had heard his name over and over and never actually read any of his works in full. The fact is, it seemed to me, that it mattered less what he actually wrote than it mattered that he was a very famous, Armenian writer.

At one time, William Saroyan was America’s most famous ethnic writer. Anyone who knows William Saroyan’s works will also undoubtedly know something about Armenia (even if it is only the fact that Saroyan is a proud Armenian-American). In the dedication of *The Human Comedy* (1943: v), he writes to his mother, Takoohi Saroyan:

> Soon, I hope, someone wonderful will translate the story into Armenian, so that it will be in print you know well. In translation the story may read better than it does in English, and, as you have done before, maybe you will want to read some of it to me, even though I wrote the stuff in the first place. If so, I promise to listen, and to marvel at the beauty of our language, so little known by others and so much less appreciated by anyone than by you.

William Saroyan did not read or write Armenian at all, and so would have had to hope for a good translator in order for his story to be read to his mother. Nevertheless, his pride and love for Armenian heritage and language is clear in his dedication as well as in many of the works in his oeuvre.

Saroyan was born to Armenian immigrants in 1908 in Fresno, California (i.e. “Little Armenia”), lost his father at age three, lived in an orphanage and was eventually reunited with his mother in 1917. He wrote in an impressionistic and slightly romanticized style, celebrating the power of optimism even in the midst of
war and the Depression. Walter Shear (1986: 45), in an article about ethnic consciousness in Saroyan’s works, states:

Saroyan’s ethnic writing, which is in essence his emotional record what it means to be a member of the Armenian subculture, is scattered throughout the corpus of his work, appearing in almost every form his protean talent produced...While his later fictional works (especially his novels) tended to regard ethnic existence as a problem—sometimes as a state racked by irreconcilably conflicting values—his earlier works, while not always optimistic, tended to emphasize a seemingly immortal quality in his ethnic heritage and the capacity of recent immigrants for adjustments.

Many of these assessments written by Shear are reminiscent of the feelings that Arlene Avakian and Michael Arlen discuss in their writing on Armenian ethnicity. A first-generation Armenian-American, growing up nearly a generation after Saroyan, Avakian experiences feelings—the perception of “ethnic existence as a problem,” a state of conflicting values—that very neatly parallel Saroyan’s own description of his ethnic experience as it is expressed in many of the characters in his work.

Despite the conflicting values that tends to face ethnics, especially immigrants and their children, William Saroyan remained deeply tied to and affected by his Armenian background throughout his life. Although many of his largely autobiographical stories (e.g. *My Name is Aram*, 1940) dealt with the rootlessness of the immigrant, Saroyan also focused on the unspoken understanding of the old social world—the homeland. This notion of collective memory and identity pervades Saroyan’s writing as his characters navigate their new and unfamiliar societies, as he writes the immigrant ethnic experience in a way suggesting that it is the same among all Armenian groups, and, as he writes about the “developing gulf between the two generations” (Saroyan 1939: 69), he expresses consciousness of the development of symbolic ethnicity (Gans 1979).

*My Name is Aram* focuses on and analyzes the relationship between the ethnic Armenian community and mainstream American culture—something that nearly all ethnics in America are forced to confront. Shear (1986: 54) argues that Saroyan’s aim in *My Name is Aram* is “to show how his main character, possessed both of a heritage of values and an active imagination, senses himself moving psychologically between an old order and a new possibility.” Again, I feel that the ambivalence experienced by Saroyan’s main character, and the ambivalence discussed by Arlene Avakian and Michael Arlen in their writing, is a common feature of Armenian ethnic consciousness in the Diaspora.
I have tried to show, in the course of this paper, that there are numerous aspects of Armenian culture that connect Armenians in the Diaspora to their ethnicity and to one another. Separated from Armenia—the land and the culture—Diasporan Armenians have sought ways to express their identity, give themselves a distinct place within American society, and maintain a connection to their heritage. To convey their experiences, both to their own family members as well as to others, Armenian-Americans often revert to constructing narration rather than presenting a straightforward account of events. This "meta-code"—narrative—is a "human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted" and, more importantly, given meaning (White 1987: 1).

Armenians in the Diaspora have attempted to create a meta-narrative that highlights aspects of their common history, morals and values, and, most of all, their strength, persistence and continuity as a people. The establishment of such a narrative, as Zerubavel (1995: 214) states, "constitutes one of the most important mechanisms by which a nation constructs a collective identity for what Benedict Anderson calls an 'imagined community.'" Although history certainly serves as a source of legitimization, it is memory that shapes—remembers, restructures, reverses, rethinks—these representations of the past.

The collective memory of the Armenian people in the Diaspora is full of paradoxes, confusions and contradictions. Of the two literary critics of Saroyan’s *My Name is Aram*, both stress the book’s “wavering between romantic allegiances and realistic constraints” (Shear 1986: 45). This interplay between ideals and reality did not disappear with Saroyan’s generation. In fact, it has been present in every interview I conducted during the course of this study. I have given some examples, both through my own experiences in Yerevan, and in quoting others, of the ways in which these contradictions pervade the Diasporan Armenian consciousness. The idealization, romanticization and memorialization of the homeland, and of the Armenian past and people in general, is the foundation of Armenian-American ethnic consciousness. In telling these idealized stories, to themselves and to the world, Diasporan Armenians are able to bridge the distance between *here* and *there*, and bring themselves closer to their Armenian heritage—a slice of time, or perhaps even imagination, that forms Armenian-American ethnic identity.
“The other day was one of those glorious days when the sky was crystal clear, the sunlight especially bright and Ararat loomed up in the near, very near, nearer than can be imagined, distance. One could see all the way to Iran. It was one of those days that you loved this country in spite of itself and yourself. Why in spite of? Because this is a country full of contradictions, like an country, but here its more intensely felt because it is personal. We Armenians are not merely residents of a country. We are part of a complicated history and a jillion complexes of dreams, idealizations, hopes, wishes, needs, expectations and on and on. So we experience this place with an intensity that is not normal in any other place. But on those days I was in love again and knew that this place must survive, prosper and become a country where people can live normal and decent lives, where a unique culture can develop among a talented people. This will be our revenge on history: to live well. To do that we need to be firm in our convictions and be determined to make it happen. To do less than that would be to hand victory over to our enemies.”

-Karpis Moushigian
## APPENDIX I

*Balakian's Statistical Information*

### TABLE 5.1
Frequency Distribution of Self-Described Identity by Generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N = 583</td>
<td>(219)</td>
<td>(272)</td>
<td>(36)</td>
<td>(40)</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenian</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenian-American</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>82.7</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diasporan-Armenian</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

### TABLE 5.11
Frequency Distribution of Respondents' Feelings toward Turkey's Denial of the Genocide by Religious Affiliation

(multiple response)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Apostolic Armenian</th>
<th>Protestant Armenian</th>
<th>Catholic Armenian</th>
<th>Other (Non-Arm.)</th>
<th>No Religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N = 565 (cases)</td>
<td>(366)</td>
<td>(54)</td>
<td>(22)</td>
<td>(89)</td>
<td>(34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need justice</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(346 responses)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>53.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(341 responses)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humiliation</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(53 responses)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indifference</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(26 responses)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forget past</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15 responses)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</table>
### TABLE 5.12
Frequency Distribution of Eating Armenian Food by Generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>N = 582</td>
<td>(218)</td>
<td>(270)</td>
<td>(36)</td>
<td>(41)</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few times per year</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few times per month</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week or more</td>
<td>75.7</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 5.13
Frequency Distribution of Knowledge of Cooking Armenian Dishes by Generation

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N = 581</td>
<td>(217)</td>
<td>(270)</td>
<td>(36)</td>
<td>(41)</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-5 Dishes</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-12 Dishes</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;13 Dishes</td>
<td>63.1</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 5.16
Frequency Distribution of Attitude Statement: “A Person Should Always Consider the Needs of His Family as a whole More important than his own” by Generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N = 584</td>
<td>(219)</td>
<td>(272)</td>
<td>(36)</td>
<td>(41)</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>84.0</td>
<td>78.7</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 5.17
Frequency Distribution of Attitude Statement: “A Person Should Always Help His Parents with the Support of His Younger Brothers and Sisters if Necessary” by Generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N = 584</td>
<td>(219)</td>
<td>(272)</td>
<td>(36)</td>
<td>(41)</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 5.18
Frequency Distribution of Respondents Feeling Closest to Five Relatives by Generation

<table>
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<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N = 541</td>
<td>(191)</td>
<td>(261)</td>
<td>(34)</td>
<td>(39)</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One or two</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than three</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 5.2
Frequency Distribution of Self-Described Identity by Ancestry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ancestry</th>
<th>Both Parents Armenian</th>
<th>One Parent Armenian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N = 583</td>
<td>(517)</td>
<td>(66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenian</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenian-American</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diasporan-Armenian</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 5.3
Frequency Distribution of Self-Described Identity by Religious Affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Apostolic Armenian</th>
<th>Protestant Armenian</th>
<th>Catholic Armenian</th>
<th>Other (Non-Arm.)</th>
<th>No Religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N = 575</td>
<td>(370)</td>
<td>(56)</td>
<td>(22)</td>
<td>(92)</td>
<td>(35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenian</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenian-American</td>
<td>65.1</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>59.1</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>65.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diasporan-Armenian</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 5.7
Frequencies of Responses (Ethnic Position) on Two Measures of Peoplehood by Generation (in percent)

<table>
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<tr>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N = 580-583</td>
<td>(218)</td>
<td>(272)</td>
<td>(36)</td>
<td>(41)</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeing on statement 1</td>
<td>97.7</td>
<td>96.3</td>
<td>94.3</td>
<td>95.1</td>
<td>87.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(no opinion)</td>
<td>(0.9)</td>
<td>(1.8)</td>
<td>(2.9)</td>
<td>(2.4)</td>
<td>(12.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagreeing on statement 2</td>
<td>87.2</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(no opinion)</td>
<td>(5.0)</td>
<td>(11.2)</td>
<td>(13.9)</td>
<td>(12.2)</td>
<td>(25.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statement 1: "When I notice an Armenian name on a shop or in the media (such as movie credits, press), I feel happy, proud."

Statement 2: "It is alright to change your name so that it will not be taken for an Armenian."
APPENDIX II

Avakian’s Story

As Avakian comes to understand that in her life—in her fight for women’s rights and civil rights, in her attitudes about oppression and suffering—she has always been “there,” she is driven to hear her grandmother’s story and the story of her family, her people and her past. This sense of connection to her Armenian heritage completes the puzzle of her consciousness. As she spends weeks transcribing the tapes of her grandmother’s story, she understands more and more the profound subconscious effect that the images of her Armenian past had on her life. In the last chapter of her book (1992: 281), she recalls:

[A]s I heard over and over again how the Turks had come for Ashot, how my grandmother had screamed again and again that they had no right to take him, that he was her son, I wept. For the first time I felt connected to her pain, to the pain of my mother, aunt, and uncle, and, by extension, the Armenian people. I also now understood why I had cried, often with wrenching sobs I could not control, when I read about the separation of black children and parents during slavery. The rage I’d felt against whites and Western civilization for what had been done to Africans and African Americans now included Turks. In both cases, my anger turned to fury because the horrors were not acknowledged. Africa remained the dark continent, and the Armenian genocide was still forgotten.

“I was amused at the irony of my grandmother making possible both my openness to the women’s movement and my dissatisfaction with it,” she continues (282): “Her story had lain dormant in my psyche for twenty years, but its influence had been profound. It had provided soil for the blossoming of the feelings behind my politics. I now realized that it would not, could not, be denied.”

49 Elmas Tutuian, Arlene’s grandmother, first told her the story when she was a fourteen year old girl but she had made incredible efforts to forget it. “Why would I want to know about people who were unknown to most of the world, who were hated so much when they were recognized that they were forced to leave their homes and to give up their religion, who were even killed,” she asks herself. “I was sorry that I had asked her to tell it to me. I didn’t want to know it. It was bad enough to be unknown, strange, and different from everyone else, but it was unbearable to be despised. I would forget it” (Avakian 1992: 32).
APPENDIX III

Diaspora Communities

Map 26: Armenians and Southeast Asia (19th Century)

Map 27: The Armenian Diaspora in the Arab World (19th Century)
Map 28: Armenian Centers in Russia in the Eighteenth Century
Map 30: The Armenian Diaspora in Eastern and Western Europe (19th Century).
APPENDIX IV

_Ancient Armenia_

Photos taken from Dusko M Du Swami

Aghtamar Lake

This lake is the subject of ancient Armenian legend; it is no longer within the borders of Armenia.

Armenian lake
Lake Van in winter
APPENDIX V
David of Sassoun

I.
Lion-Mher of fabled legend
For forty years at Sassoun reigned;
He reigned with might, and in his day
No flocks made flight o’er Sassoun’s steeps.
Far and away from Sassoun highlands
His mighty name was rumored wide;
His fame bespoke his glory, his fearsome deeds—
The single name, Lion-Mher.

II.
Thus, seated like a fearful lion
In the Sassoun fastnesses, he had reigned
As lord for forty years. For forty years
He had never raised a wail of woe;
But now, fallen upon declining days,
Into that fearless heart there crept a sting.
Thus the legend-laden eld to thinking fell;
"Alack, the autumn days of my life are come,
The black earth soon will claim me as its slave,
Like smoke pass the glories of Lion-Mher,
Pass even my name, terror and fear;
Alas! On my unowned and orphaned world
There rise a thousand upstart braves and fiends...
Upon my passing, alack, no heir remains
To buckle on my sword, protector be to Sassoun..."
Pondered thus the troubled giant grey-

III.
And on a day, his iron-grey eyebrows knitted,
Suddenly, as deep he pondered, from down the sky,
Fronting the giant hero, stood a firey angel,
His feet enwrapped in billowing clouds.
"Greetings! All-powerful giant of Sassoun,
Your voice has reached the throne of God;
Soon he shall grant to you a child.
But hearken well, O lord of the Mountains,
On that day when God grants you an heir,
On that selfsame day will you die and your wife."
"—His will be done," spake Lion-Mher, "we are ever
Of death and death of us; but if of this world
We gain an heir, with him deathless we remain."
Here the firey angel once more took aloft;
And onward from that happy day of joyous tidings,
When nine months did pass and nine hours more,
Lion-Mher a child did have; and David
He named his cub, and called to him his brother,
Big-Voiced Ohan--: bequeathed his lands and scion
To him. That day he died and his dame, too.

IV.
And in those times in Egypt there sat as king
Melik of Musr, mighty and unvanquished;
When he hears that Lion-Mher no more was,
Straight upon Sassoun he marched to fight. Ohan,
The Big-Voiced, set a-quake with fear, came before
The war-like hosts unhelmeted and bowed,
And seeking mercy, fell upon his knees.
"O Melik be you the master of our heads,"
He said, "while beneath your shadow we live;
Ever may we your servants be, our tribute pay,
Only lay not waste our tillage and our lands,
And with benignant eye hark you to us."
"Nay," roared Melik, "your people all must pass
Beneath my sword and homage pay, so that
Henceforward whatever I will to do, not one
Sassounite may raise a sword against me."
--Thus Ohan went and brought all Sassounites
Together and passed them all beneath the sword;
David alone, despite whatever moves
Were tried, came not near the foeman Melik's sword.
Vexed, the Sassounites came and tugged at him:
He bolted once, scattered the throng here and there,
The while his little finger grazed a rock
And drew from it a flight of firey bolts.
To the wise men gathered all about him,
Spoke the King: "I must kill this little fool!"
"O King," they said, "beneath your sword today
All Sassoun stands; sure you are the mighty one.
What is there a mere child should do against thee,
Though he were instead altogether fire?"
"You know best," said the Egyptian king, "but if,
On a day some harm should fall upon my head,
This day be witness,
From him it will come."

V.
When this event occurred our husky David
A mere child was, seven or eight years old,
I say a child, but one with so much strength,
Man to him or mosquito was the same.
But, alas! For the poor orphan on this earth,
Though he come forth from the loins of a lion.
Now Big-Voiced Ohan had a waspish wife;
Once or twice she held her tongue, but one day
Thus she began fighting with her helpmeet;
"A lonely soul I, heir to a thousand ills,
Why have you brought another's orphan here,
Weighed me down with a useless trencherman...
Would that I could cast sod upon his head!
No handmaid I, dancing attendance upon others!
Find a way to lose him, put him to a task,
Pack him off that he may labor for himself."
Saying thus, she 'gan to wail and weep,
To mourn her hapless days, to curse her fate,
That she luckless was to be on earth,
That nor master her did own, nor pitying spouse.
Ohan set out and brought back a pair
Of iron boots for the child’s feet,
Placed an iron staff upon his shoulders,
And made him the shepherd of Sassoun-town.

VI.
The mighty shepherd drove his flock of sheep
And mounted Sassoun’s peerless fastnesses

   “O endearing highlands,
   Highlands of Sassoun…”

When he called, of such force was his voice,
That canyons and highlands sounded with it,
Wild animals sprang from their lairs, scattered
From rock to rock, and became homeless.
David went after them all, those from the valleys,
And those from the hills—fox, hare, wolf, and deer
He caught—gathered and brought and mixed with his flock,
And at night drove them all on Sassoun-town.
The noise and the din, the sounds and the roars,
The charging of the numberless beasts let loose,
The townspeople suddenly saw and heard.

   “Oh! Help! Run…”
   Old and young,
   Panic-stricken,
   Away did run
   From their chores,

Some ran home, some to church, some to shops,
All bolted doors fast and closed shutters tight.
Boldly David strode and stood in the town square—
“Well! How early these people are gone to sleep.

   Ho there! Goat-owners, sheep-owners,
   Get up, swiftly unbar your doors;
   He who had one—I’ve brought him ten,
   He who had ten—I’ve brought him scores.
   Up, get up swiftly, come and take them,
   Take your sheep to the barns and your goats.”

When David saw that no one stirred, no one
A door unbarred, he placed his head upon
A stone, lengthened out himself upon the square,
And soundly slept until the break of dawn.
At dawn the burghers arose together
And went to Big-Voiced Ohan and said:

“Thou Big-Voiced Ohan, thou one taken by Death,
You it was who brought this fool, made him herdsman;
He parts nor sheep nor wolves nor foxes,
Thus with wild beasts has he filled out town.
If lovest thou God, put him to another task,
Else he’ll burst the galls of all these townsfolk.”

VII.
Ohan arose and went to see David.

“Uncle Ohan, take care, tread softly,
Else the goats will scamper off.” And hard by
An ash-colored hare, its ears fixed rigid,
Affrighted became and bolted away.
David was up in a trice and after it:
In the hills he trapped the hare and brought it back
And placed it once again among the goats.

“Oh, how hard it is, Uncle Ohan...
God has blessed those black-black goats, but these that be
Ash-colored goats, are ever escaping
And ever scattering into the hills.
So much did I scurry yesterday, suffer,
Until I gathered them and brought them back.”
Ohan saw that David’s boots were not what
They were, his goatherd’s staff worn to the butt,
So much in a single day had he run.

“David, my soul, I cannot leave thee thus,
The ash-colored goats are torturing you.
Tomorrow take the flocks to the pasture,”
Ohan said. And the next morning he went
And brought David still another pair of iron boots
For David’s feet, and brought an iron staff
A hundred pounds in weight, and made David
The pasture-keep of Sassoun-town.

VIII.
The mighty shepherd drove his herd of cattle
And mounted Sassoun’s peerless fastnesses.

“O endearing highlands,
Highlands of Sassoun,
How sweet the slopes rise
Against thy rock-ribbed sides...”

When David sang, os such force was his voice,
That canyons and highlands sounded with it,
Wild beasts from their lairs sprang forth and scattered
From rock to rock, and became homeless. David
Fell after them all, those from the valleys,
Those from the hills—wolf, leopard, lion, bear, tiger
He caught—gathered and brought and mixed with his herd,

50 Actually hares, not goats.
And at night drove them all on Sassoun-town.
The noise and the din, the sounds and the roars,
The charging of the numberless beasts let loose,
The townspeople suddenly saw and heard.

"Oh! Help! Run..."
Old and young,
Panic-stricken,
Away did run
From their chores,

Some ran home, some to church, some to shops,
All bolted doors fast and closed shutters tight.
Boldly David strode and stood in the town square—
"Well! How early these people are gone to sleep.

Ho there! oxen-owners, cow-owners,
Get up, swiftly unbar your doors;
He who had one—I've brought him ten,
He who had ten—I've brought him scores.
Up, get up swiftly, come and take them,
Take your oxen to the barns and your cows."

When David saw that no one stirred, no one
The doors unbarred, he placed his head upon
A stone, himself lengthened out upon the square,
And soundly slept until the break of dawn.
At dawn the burghers arose together
And went to Ohan, the Big-Voiced, and said:
"Big-Voiced brother Ohan, alas, death take you,
You it was who brought this fool, made him herdsman;
Our cows and our oxen, unshephered
Let them be, but rid us of this madcap lout.
He parts nor bear nor ram nor oxen;
Some day he'll bring great harm upon our town,
Make it a lair for bears, a forsaken land."

IX.
Soon David changed, a firebrand he became.
Put to it, and to his wit’s end driven,
Ohan fashioned and to David gave
Bow and arrow. "Go you forth, hunt among the hills."
From Ohan David took the bow and arrow,
Went forth beyond the bounds of Sassoun-town—
Huntsman he became. Into a barley field
He sallied forth, killing quail, shooting sparrows.
And at dusk, he took haven in a hut
Cared for by a poor and childless beldam,
Betimes to his father known. There alongside
The fire, like an immense dragon and long,
He would lengthen himself out and sleep.
On a day, when he was from the hunt returned,
The beldam raged at him. "Goodness, David!" she said,
"Death take you! Are you indeed your father’s son?
That field alone and I remain below
The skies and god. An old lady, I, weak
Of hand and foot—Why do you trample
My field under foot, and lay it waste,
Cut off my whole year's living? If you are
Huntsman, take up your bow and arrow—betake
You to the headlands of Zudsmaga, all
The way to Seghansar—your sire held there
Of an entire domain the tenancy;
Well-stocked are its highlands with a game preserve;
There be deer there, mountain-goat and wild sheep.
If you can, begone, go seek your game there."
“What is it, you hag, that makes you curse me?
Still a stripling I, now only have I heard.
Where be then the fastness of our game preserve?”
“To your uncle go, Ohan will tell it thee."

X.
Next day at sunrise David stood before
His uncle's threshold with bow in hand.
"Uncle Ohan, why have you not told me
My father owned a mountain game preserve?
There be mountain-goats there, rams and deer.
Up, uncle, bestir yourself and take me there."
“What!" cried Ohan, "These are not your words.
Whoso told them you, may his tongue be tied.
That mountain game preserve, my son, is lost
To us, as also the game that range...
No more are there mountain-goats, rams, deer.
In the days when your father was still quick,
(O what wondrous days, whence are ye fled?)
Oft I have eaten there the flesh of game...
Your father died, God forsook us, ruined
Our country, and the game from this mountain
He took, he plundered: the deer, the hind are gone...
Hence our fate's scroll has thus been written.
All is past, my son, go back to your work,
The king of Egypt else will hear your voice."
“What can the king of Egypt do to me?
What do I ask from the king of Egypt?
Let the king of Egypt stay in Egypt.
To my father's highlands what right has he?
Up uncle, take up your bow and arrow,
Your quiver buckle on, to the highlands
Let us go, to the mountain game-preserve!"
Ohan stood up, not knowing what to do.
They went, and what a game-preserve they saw...
The high walls demolished, thick forests felled,
The high turrets made level with the earth.

XI.
Night fell and there they remained fast. Big-Voiced
Ohan placed beneath his head the quiver
And the bow and peacefully snored. David
Was plunged into a sea of reckonings.
And soon he saw, in the distant darkness,
A strong and flaming fire burning bright.
Toward the fire David moved, and held by
Its spell, straightway was borne upward upon it;
Upward and upward he went, alighted on
A peak, ascended again, saw a great
Cleft marble stone, from its center belching forth
A pure flame, rising and falling, billow
Upon billow, on the self-same stone.
Now David came down from the place, came down
And called Big-Voiced Ohan. “Up, uncle, up,
And see that bright fire, burning brightly there.
How long will you sleep! A light has come down
From the steep hill, the steep hill of marble stone.
Arise uncle, from your sweet sleep. What light
Be that that issues forth from yon marble stone?”
Ohan stood up and made the sign of the cross
Against his face. “Alas, my son,” he said,
“How I idolize that light! That be the light
From our great peak Marouta. In the place
Of that light there once did stand our Sassoun’s
Patroness (what wondrous days!), Sassoun’s guardian,
The Blessed Madonna’s monastery
Of Charghophan. Always, when to the war he went,
It was there you father made his prayers.
Your father died, God became cross and was wroth,
The king of Egypt gathered up soldiers,
He marched upon our abbey on that hill,
He leveled it, but from the alter still
The sacred flames of our patroness rise.

XII.
When David heard this too, “Sweet uncle,” he said,
“Uncle sweet, orphan I be and liegeless
In this world. Lacking a father, be you
To me a father good. I’ll not again
From Marouta’s heights come down until
Once again into our abbey I descend.
From you I ask five hundred artisans,
Five thousand toilers, too, with them to work
So that this very week they come and build
Our former abbey as it erewhile stood.”
Now Ohan went forth and with him brought back
Five thousand toilers, five hundred artisans,
Who, mid sound and fury, builded again,
Much as before with glories overlaid,
Our Blessed Mary’s abbey, Marouta.
The scattered clergy once again came back,
And once again the sound of the canticle
And prayer re-echoed through the abbey’s walls.
When once again his father’s monastery
Full-peopled was and merry, David came down,
And only then came he, from Marouta’s heights.
XIII.
This news was taken to Egypt’s Melik.
“Well, don’t tell me! So David has rebuilt
His father’s abbey and become the ruler,
While I have yet the seven years’ tribute to
Collect!” Now Melik was exceeding wroth:
“Go,” he said, “Patin, Gouzpatin, Sitvin,
Charghatin, Sassoun’s earth and stones lay waste.
To me bring back my seven years’ tribute rich.
Bring forty virgin girls, nimbus-lit,
Forty short women to turn the millstones,
And forty tall to load the camel trains,
To be at my beck and call my household slaves.”
Gouzpatin marshaled up his soldiers true.
“Gladly, my Lord,” he said, “so be it.
I go to Sassoun even now to lay
It bare, to bring back groups of forty women,
Forty camel-loads of yellow gold,
And ruin the home of the Armenian race.”
Thus he spoke. Egyptian maids and women
Together danced and raised their voice in song:
“Our Gouzpatin has to Sassoun gone...
‘Groups of forty women I have brought,
Forty saddle-bags of gold,
Before my eyes in serried order
Have I brought milch-cows red...
In the springtime let us butter churn,’
O Gouzpatin, brave Gouzpatin,
Cast is David in the dust.”
Now Gouzpatin, swollen with pride, roaring said,
“I thank you sisters all, but patient be
Till I return—it’s then that thou shouldst dance.”

XIV.

Thus with a song,
With soldiers strong,
Haughty Gouzpatin entered Sassoun;
Straight when Ohan heard this he was tongue-tied:
With salt and beard,
With cried and tears,
He bowed his head
Before the spears,
For mercy prayed.

“Have whatever you wise, so be it; take
Rose-hued girls, of Sassoun-town the women-folk
The yellow gold that’s hard come by, take these,
Take these but mercy show our hapless race.
Do not cut us down nor do us in to death,
Above is God, below are you,” he said.
He brought row on row of rose-hued girls
And womenfolk of Sassoun-town. Upstood
Gouzpatin and gleaned; he lodged the likelier of them
Deep within the hayloft and locked the door...
Forty virgin girls beauteously nimbus-lit,
Forty short women to turn the millstones,
And forty tall, to load the camel-trains,
To be household slaves of Egypt’s Melik.
And from it’s hold mound on mound of yellow gold...
A pall of mourning hung on the Armenian race.

XV.
Where are you, O David, you guardian of
The Armenian race, O let the rock be rent,
Only come you out into the open!
Once David had repaired the abbey of
His sires, he dropped down from Marouta’s peak,
He found a tarnished, helveless blade and stepped
Into the grandam’s turnip field. The hag
Came forth with cried and curses. “Fool David,“
She said, “may you one day eat fire and pain
Instead of turnips. In this wide world
Do your eyes see only me and what are mine?
My field you’ve leveled to the ground, you have,
This only had remained my winter’s hoard,
This too have you cut off; how shall I live?
If you be brave, take your bow, begone,
Hold sway only over your father’s domains,
Eat only from the treasures of your father
Which you have so long unprotected left
That Egypt’s king has sent to pack them off."
“Why be you so angered with me, grandam?
I know not a thing of what you say.
What is it that Egypt’s king takes from us?“
“The Egyptian king, heavy-footed David,
Gouges your very eyes: already is
He here. On Sassoun-town have come Patin,
Gouzpatin, Sitvin, Charghatin; the whole
Of Sassoun-town they plunder even now...
Forty saddle-bags of gold for tribute,
Forty beauteous virgin girls, nimbus-lit,
Forty short women to turn the millstones,
And forty tall women to load the camel-trains,
All to be slaves to the Egyptian king.”
“O grandam why do you curse me? But show
And let me see—these demands, where are they made?”
“Death take you David! Where are they made!
Are you really the son of your father...
You who come here to munch on turnips?
In your very house Gouzpatin measures
Out your gold, while the pretty girls
Are together herded in your hayloft.”
David left off eating turnips. He went.
He spied Gouzpatin in his home, counting
The gold before him spilled, and Charghatin
And Sitvin holding back the barking dogs,
While at a distance, his neck to one side bent,
His arms folded across his breast, Ohan stood.
David saw, and his eyes were gorged with blood.
“Stop! Gouzpatin, stand apart. My father’s
Gold this be. I’m the one to count it out.”
Gouzpatin said: “Well, Big-Voiced Ohan,
This seven years’ tribute will you give or not?
If not, may my whiskers witness be, I’ll leave
And tell Musra-Melik, and he will come,
He will lay waste your Sassoun countryside,
Burn it down and plant a garden over it.”
“Begone, you unfeeling Egyptian dogs.
Have you yet to hear of Sassoun’s madcap braves?
Think you we are dead, or mere shadows all?
Think you to place our country under tribute!”
David’s wrath was great. At once he clapped
The weighing scales, which smashed Gouzpatin’s head,
Their fragments flew beyond the walls: till now,
To this very day, still are they in flight...
Now they rose up, let be the scattered gold,
Left far behind the Armenian world and fled...
Patin, Gouzpatin, Sitvin, Charghatin.

XVI.
“Well, well, uncle what shall I say to you?
We have here mound on mound of gold.
Of me a servant of the town you’ve made,
Abandoned me before an alien’s door.”
“You crazy fool,” his uncle said, “I’ve kept
For Melik all this gold that he might kindly
Look upon us. Now that you gave it not,
Who is there will front his wrath, fight with him,
When he comes forth with soliders and with fire
To lay ruin to Sassoun’s earth and stones?”
“Stay, uncle, let him come forth, I shall go,
I shall go forth and answer make to him.”
He smote the door against the dark hayloft,
Let out the pinioned girls and set them free.
“Go,” he said, “in freedom live, and fail not
To pray long days for David of Sassoun.”

XVII.
So, slaughtered in this way and bathed in blood,
Homeward bound they fled and reached their native land,
Patin, Gouzpatin,
Sitvin, Charghatin.
Egyptian women saw them in a distance,
Saw them in the distance and were right glad...
From the roof tops they clapped and cheered them home.

“They come, they come...they bear, they bear...
Our Gouzpatin has come from Sassoun-town,
Brought back groups of forty women, red milch-cows,
In the spring we'll butter make and chortaan."

But once they saw
At closer range
Gouzpatin bloodied,
They ceased giggling
And wagged aloud:
"Well Gouzpatin, you loud-mouthed runaway,
Down what dales and over what mountains have you fled,
Your thick head cleft in half? Did you not say,
'To Sassoun I go to fetch group of forty women,
To fetch forty saddle-bags of yellow gold,
To lay waste the country of the Armenian race?'
As a breathless, fleeing hound have you returned!"
Gouzpatin, now angered much, began to speak:
"Silence, you brats, you've seen only your breed
Of men and not the madcap Sassoun braves.
Sassoun's madcap bravoes are mountain-like.
Their arrows thick as stakes, and their country
Withal a stony fastness: canyon-walls,
Impenetrable, abound and deep hollows...
Even their blades of grass stand curved as swords...
They slaughtered three hundred men, Egypt's best."
Thus he spoke and, once he had, he tarried not,
But ran fast, head over heels, pell-mell,
Ran right up to the king. The king laughed from
His throne. "Live, O brave Gouzpatin.
The famed medallion of Ghouzghoun richly
You deserve, and from your neck shall it hang...
A guerdon for your great triumphal stroke.
But where are they? Bring Sassoun's girls and gold."
Thus Melik spoke; but Gouzpatin had bowed
His head clear to the very ground. He said:
"Long live, O great king! Barely did I flee,
Though mounted on my horse. How could I
Have borne Sassoun's yellow gold? A fool is
Born among the Armenian race who brooks nor
Lord nor fear nor mighty men. See how he's
Had at my bloodied head and smashed it through.
'I will not give,' he said, 'my father's gold.
Nor will I give the womenfolk of my
Armenian people. In Sassoun-country
There is no room for you. Your king,' he said,
'Let him come, let him come and fight with me.
If brave he be, let him come and take by force.'"
The Egyptian king, enraged, boiled over and over.
"Call," he said, "call all my soldiers together:
A thousand thousand males, new-born infants,
A thousand thousand males, beardless, without mustache,
A thousand thousand males, downy-lipped,
A thousand thousand males, fresh from the couch,
A thousand thousand males, black-moustachioed,
A thousand thousand males, grey-haired,
A thousand thousand males, to sound trumpets,
A thousand thousand males, to strike the war-drums,
Have them come forth, take up arms, get into mail,--
I go to wage war on David, desolate
Sassoun-town and plunder it to the ground.”

XVIII.
Thus he assembled an innumerable
Host, marched on the plains of Sassoun and encamped
In full solemnity, did the Egyptian king.
So great a population did they make,
That those who came to Batman’s banks bent down
And drank their fill till the river went dry,
And Sassoun’s townspeople were parched with thirst.
Big-Voiced Ohan was taken by surprise.
His fur-skin on his shoulders, he scaled the heights,
He scaled the heights, and, lo, what a sight he saw:
The white tents had so whitened all the plains
That one might say mid-winter night had come,
And with white snow had covered Sassoun-town.
His gall to water turned, his tongue stood tied,
And shooting ‘halloo’ he rushed back home.
“Halloo, run, it’s come...holla, soho, it’s come...”
“What uncle, what? What has come, who has come?”
“(Fell fire-and-pain has come to David’s nose.)
Egypt’s king has risen and come, come and pitched
His tented armies on our plain. The stars
May be numbered but not his numberless hosts.
Alas, for our lives, alas, for our world!
Come, let us take the gold, let us take the girls,
Let us fall on the ground before him, say prayers,
Perchance he may relent, forbear the sword.”
“Stay uncle, be not afraid; get you to
Your restful room and sleep on peacefully.
But now I’ll get up, gain the Sassoun plain
And make answer to the Egyptian king.”
Straight went David to his wonted grandam.
“Granny, my soul,” he said, “give me some scraps
Of iron, tarnished and old, and a grate, a spit,
Gather whatever you can and give it to me...
Also find me an ass on which I may sit...
Against the Egyptian hosts I go to war.”
“My goodness, David,” she said, “death take you!
Can you indeed be the son of that sire?
Your father had in war a firey steed,
Fully caparisoned, with a bellyband of gold:
A club of steel, a pearled saddle, helmet
Hardy, and a ready cross on his right arm,
Mailed vest, and a sword lightning-laden.
And now here have you come, O you warped fool,
Asking from me an ass and an old spit.”
“O granny, not yet have I heard such things.
Where is now the armor of my father?”
“Go now to your uncle, ask it of him,
Say, ‘Where are they? Find, bring them, give to me.’
If willingly he gives them not to you,
Gouge his eyes," she said, "and take them forcibly."

XIX.
And David went to see his uncle Ohan.
"O uncle," he called angered, "for battle
My father had a firey steed fully
Caparisoned, with a bellyband of gold;
A club of steel, a pearled saddle, helmet
Hardy, and a ready cross on his right arm,
Mailed vest, and a lightning-laden sword."
"Oh David, my soul," Ohan roared in fear,
"Since from the day of your father's death
I have not brought forth the steed from the barn,
Nor from the arms-chest the sword of lightning,
The mailed vest, the golden bellyband...
For goodness sake, let me be, plague me not,
If these you want scamper off and get them."

XX.
David clapped on his armor and his mail,
Buckled on, too, the belt of his lightning-sword
And, with the cross on his all-conquering arm,
Mounted his lion-hearted father's steed,
Mounted his father's steed and lashed it forth.
Weeping, Big-Voiced Ohan sang:
"Mercy, a thousand mercies
For the steed,
Alas, the firey steed,
Mercy, a thousand mercies
For the bellyband,
Alas, the golden bellyband,
Mercy that the rich array is lost,
Alas, the rich array is lost."
David flew into a rage,
Turned his horse and drove it back;
Poor Ohan paled, stood sore afraid,
And changed the burden of his song:
"Alas, my infant David's lost..."
This when David heard,
His temper cooled—
He dismounted and kissed Ohan's hand;
And Big-voiced Ohan, as a father should,
Blessed him and gave him paternal counsels,
And put him on the road to Sassoun plain.

XXI.
Now David of Sassoun an uncle hand—
Toros by name—a fearful, giant-like man.
When he, too, heard of the rumors of war,
With an elm-tree on his shoulder, he strode forth.
From afar he comes; roaring aloud he cries:
"Why are you come upon this field? Who are you, How many heads may there be among you? Have you no knowledge of David of Sassoun... But have you not heard he’s on his way here, And brings his winged horse to pace him round? Clear away, David will be coming here, Wherever he is—I’ve come to make a clearing.

As thus he spoke, he brought the elm-tree down From his shoulder and swept off some twenty Pitched tents of the army, the while David stood On a fearsome height and roared a dragon’s roar. “You who are asleep, wake up, You who are awake, get up and stand, You who are afoot, take up arms, You who are armed, saddle your horses, You who are saddled, mount your horses— That you may not later say that while asleep David stole stealthily upon you and left...”

Thus he roared, and goading his firey steed, Came down like a lightning-bolt as from a cloud, Spread terror among the Egyptian armies, On all sides brandishing his Lightning-Sword.

He smashed and slew and slaughtered till high noon, At high noon the blood rose in a floodtide; He rounded up and drove off together Thousands among those quick, among those dead.

Among the soldiers was an ancient man, A sage, and one well-traveled in this world; “Men,” he said, “make way for me, make way, I must go to David and with him speak.”

He went to David and stood before him; And this is how the elder spoke to him: “O brave one, may your fist ever stay strong, And in your hand always the stubby sword.

But listen to the words of an old man And see if there be any sense to them. Pray tell, what have these men done unto you That drives you on pell-mell to slaughter them?

Each one among them is a mother’s son, And each one a burning light in his home, Far behind some have left their forlorn wives, Wives whose eyes look on the road for their return.

Some have left a home with many children filled, Some have left behind parents old and poor, And some in tears, with veils across their faces, Are the young brides of only yesterday...
Under the sway of the sword and by might, their king has
Gathered them up and marched them here together.
We are the men to be pitied, with hastening days,
What harm have we brought to you, in what ways?

Your foe’s the warring king, the king himself,
If you must fight, go fight with him instead.
Pray leave off drawing your lightning-laden sword,
Spare these people-helpless, unprotected."

“You speak right well and true, O ancient man,”
Said David to the eld. “But where is the
Warring king? What can he now be doing?
Bring him forth that I may wreathe his days in black.”

“He has set out from the great-tent, the one
That has the smoke issuing forth from it’s center;
Yonder smoke is not smoke rising from the sky,
It is vapor from the king’s fuming mouth.”

Thus they spoke. Now David goaded on his
Horse and rode straight to where the great-tent stood.
He rode, and rode up to the entrance-door…
Thus he roared upon the Arabs standing there:

“Where is he?” he said. “Why has he become scarce?
Call him out, into the open call him out;
If he knows not death, I have brought him death,
If he knows not his nemesis, she am I.”

“Melik,” they said, “has gone to sleep. For days,
For seven days must he sleep. Three days only
Have yet passed, four more days there now
Remain ere he will have had his share of sleep.”

“What! Has he brought these poor and pitiful folk,
Dumped them on this field, spilled their blood in seas,
While he finds shelter under cover of
His great-tent, sleeps peacefully for seven days!

I can not abide whether he sleeps or no...
Quick! Get him up and out into the open;
In such wise I’ll put him to sleep before
His entrance-door, he’ll never again awake.”

The men arose, crestfallen, spat upon
The strong and burning fire; they rapped upon
The open heels of the Egyptian king
Who was wunk in a deep and peaceful sleep.

“How now! A body can no longer have
A peaceful sleep, the fleas are so noisome…”
So the great husky murmured to himself,
Turned around and once more fell asleep.
They went and with a great plow they returned;  
In the strong an burning fire they placed its share,  
And red-hot when it was, reddened and sparkling,  
Straightway they clapped it on his naked back,

“How now! A body can no longer have  
A peaceful sleep, mosquitoes are so unjust...”  
Slowly the great husky opened his eyes,  
He wanted so to fall asleep again,

But David he saw. Muttering to himself,  
He lifted his great head from where he slept.  
A great blast of air he blew on David  
Thinking in this way to set that giant to flight.

And when he saw that David stood stock-still,  
Surprise and dread struck through his very soul.  
His menacing, bloodshot eyes he cast sidelong  
Glowering at David’s unblinking eyes.

But just as soon as he had looked, he felt  
From him had ebbed the strength of half-score oxen.  
So on the place he slept he now sat up,  
And smiling, thus began to speak with him:

“Hello, well-met, David, you are still tired...  
Come, sit down a bit—let’s talk as is proper,  
Later we may still engage in combat,  
That is, if you seek another combat...”

The scheming tyrant, within his great tent  
Has caused forty spans of deep wells to be dug,  
Of which the black mouths had been covered over  
With screens and, over yet these, some bright throw-rugs.

His was ever the habit fawningly to lure  
Unto him all those he failed to vanquish;  
He coaxed them to sit within his great-tent,  
Directly over those black and deadly wells.

Dismounting from his horse, David came down,  
He went in, he sat, he fell into a well...  
Ha, ha, ha, ha, ho-ho, ho-ho, hee-hee,  
Laughed Egypt’s merciless king, the king of Egypt.

“There, now let him go and stay in that dark  
Well till he rots away and then some more.”  
Saying this, he brought an immense millstone,  
A millstone immense, and rolled it over the well.

XXII.  
On that selfsame night Big-Voiced Ohan slept.  
He dreamt that there appeared, up in the sky  
Over Egypt, a bright sun, bright with rays,
But over Sassoun’s fastness, a black cloud.

Ohan was terror-stricken. From his bed
He sprang. “O wife,” he said, “bring up a light.
Our artless David has bolted again,
And a black cloud hangs over Sassoun-town.”

"May the sod fall on your head!” said his wife.
"Who knows how or where David’s having fun...
Yet here you are asleep in your cozy home,
Seeing dreams and about others worrying.”

Ohan feel asleep. Again he started up:
"O wife, David is come to narrow straits.
So brightly glimmers Egypt’s brilliant star,
But sicklied over glows our star and yellow.”

What’s come over you, man, in the middle of
The night?” his wife shouted in a fury.
Ohan again crossed himself upon the face,
Turned around and slept, though with a troubled heart.

He saw another dream, more fearful than
Before: from heaven’s high arch there now sparkled,
Full-resplendently, Egypt’s star; Sassoun’s
Waning little star sank slowly toward the dark.

He woke up, afraid: “Wife may your house be wrecked!
How could I listen to your witless brains!
Alone unto himself our young and orphaned
David now is lost. Up! Bring me my arms.”

XXIII.
Ohan arose and went forth to the barn
And gave his white horse a pat on the back.
“Well, white horse,” he said, “how long will it be
Ere you betake me to where David fights?”

“By dawn you shall be there,” and saying this,
The white horse brought its belly to the ground.
Your back be broken! What’ll I do at dawn,
View his corpse or his funeral attend?”

He gave the red horse a pat on the back.
That horse, too, brought its belly to the ground.
“O red horse,” he said, “how long will it be
Ere you betake me to where David fights?”

‘In one hour you shall be there,” the red horse said,
“In one hour I’ll take you where David fights.”
“May you burst your gall! Pain and death take you!
Alas for all that barely you have eaten.”

And now to the black horse the turn came round;
The black horse, too, brought its belly to the ground.
“O my black little one, how long will it be,”
He said, “ere you take me where David fights?”

“If on my back you can stay fast,” the black
Horse said, “by the time your one foot’s in the
Stirrup and before the other one’s thrown over,
I will have brought you to where David fights.”

XXIV.
Swiftly the black horse dragged Big-Voiced Ohan:
He placed his left foot in the stirrup,
By the time he threw his right foot over,
The black horse had brought him to the highlands.

Now Ohan saw David’s steed, unmounted,
A-roaming in the highlands and neighing aloud:
Below, he saw the Egyptian encampment,
Undulating endlessly like the sea.

And that these might not burst with his straining
Ohan put on the skins of seven oxen.
And Ohan stood, like a cloud, atop the
Topmost peak in Sassoun’s highlands, and roared:

“O David, O David, where can you be!
But call to mind the cross on your arm, give
The name of our Blessed Madonna
And come you out into the broad daylight.”

His voice floated, reverberatingly,
And into David’s inner ear blared strong.
“Ho-ho! That is my uncle’s voice,” he said,
“From Sassoun’s fastness he calls for me.

O blessed Madonna of Marouta,
O intrepid cross of our litany,
I call on you—succor David now...”
He called, and from his place rose to his feet:

In such strength, in such wise he smote the millstone,
The stone was smashed into a thousand pieces,
The pieces upward flew to high heaven,
And still to this day they are in flight.

Melik, formidable, came out of his lair;
By fear his fiendish spirit was possessed.
“Brother David, do still come over here,
Let us sit at board together and parley...”

“Never again at board will I sit with you,
You base, you crooked, you poltroonly man;
Get up, quick, take up your arms, mount your horse,
Come out into the open and let us fight."

“Indeed let’s fight, let us fight,” Melik said,
“But mine is the right to strike the first blow.”
“Oh very well, it’s yours, strike,” David called;
He went and stood in the middle of the plain.

Musra-Melik arose, came to his feet,
He took up his lance and mounted his horse,
And dashed off all the way to Dirabekir,
And from that place yet again returned.

Three thousand boulders was Melik drawing
By the handle of his gigantic lance.
He charged and struck a blow—at once the dust
Arose and the world’s globe trembled strong.

‘There’s been an earthquake or the world’s destroyed,’
Said many people throughout the world;
‘No,’ others said, ‘bloodthirsty giants,
Men of might, are having at each other.’

"From but this single blow hath David died,"
Musra-Melik told his myriad soldiers,
But David from beneath a cloud called forth,
“Musra-Melik, yet am I among the quick!”

“Well, from short distance only did I charge,
But you’ll see now from where it is I come!”
Arose the mighty one, came to his feet,
And sprang on his mount for a second time.

Clear to Aleppo he rode the second time,
On his way back from there he left free the reins:
Rains came and hail, and a strong hurricane
With its tremendous force, shook the whole world.

He came, he struck, and from the clamor of
The blow, standersby were fully deafened.
“Lost is David to the House of David,”
Announced the haughty Egyptian monarch.

“Among the quick am I,” shouted David,
“Charge once again—but, no, t’is now my turn.”
“Well! From short distance only did I charge,”
Melik shouted, and sprang upon his mount.

The third time now that he mounted his horse,
Out and away he rode to Egypt’s own soil,
And from that distance, the lance in his hand,
Back he rode, charging full-tilt on David.

He charged on David and struck with all his strength,
Struck with a crushing and formidable blow:
The dust went up as high as Sassoun’s steeps,
So dense it was the sun’s face stood beclouded.

For three nights and for three days, the dust lay Like a cloud over all the countryside.
For three nights and for three days, the rumors Went forth that David of Sassoun had died.

When there had passed three days, like the dust That stood cloudlike, David too did stand;
Yea, as the peak, the peak of Mount Kur-Kur
Stood David, fog-shrouded, majestic.

“O Melik,” he roared, “whose turn is it now?”
The proud soul of Melik was terror-stricken:
Death’s tremors now possessed his very heart,
His haughty, puffed-up spirit was now let down.

Melik strode forth and dug himself a deep well,
He let himself down into the dark grot,
He covered its opening with forty skins,
And covered these again with forty millstones.

That lion-hearted son of the lion-hearted,
David, stood up from where he sat, grumbling,
Mounted his stormy steed, made it career,
As aloft he held his gleaming Lightning-Sword.

There now came forth, her hair loosed before her,
The mother of Melik, a mean old crone:
“O David, by my hair draw me beneath
Your heels, but deal thy very first blow on me.”

The second time he lifted high his sword,
There came running Musra-Melik’s sister:
“O David, if it be your wish,” she called,
“Strike your second blow on my fainting heart.”

Now the hour had come for the final blow;
And for the third time David raised his sword.
“This one blow alone I strike for God’s sake,“
He said, “I must strike...no one else remains.”

Saying thus, he mounted, careered his horse.
His firey steed took flight and sailed high,
In the heavens careered, defiantly—
Then downward came the lightning-laden sword.

Through forty hides of oxen did it pass,
Also through forty millstones did it pass,
Clear through the loathsome monster did it cleave,
Scattered its cloven halves for seven spans.

“I am among the quick! Strike once again...”
Melik roared from deep within the well.
David heard, and was much astonished
At the blow he’d stuck and his Lightning-Sword.

“Melik,” he said, “do move about a bit.”
And Melik made a stir within the well.
Right down the middle was he cut in two,
One section falling here, another there.

The Egyptian soldiers, when they viewed that sight,
Terror-stricken, their blood to water turned.
David called: “Be none of you in fear,
But listen yet to what I have to say.

You are but tillers of the soil, farmers,
Benighted and denied, hungry, naked,
With a thousand and one ills and pains,
With a thousand and one troubles to boot;

Why have you taken up the bow and arrow,
Spilled over onto far and alien plains?
Know you not that we too have homes and hearths,
We too have tender babes and the aged?...

Have you tired of the quiet and peaceful life,
The quiet and peaceful life of the husbandman?
Are you tired of the threshing-floor, the field,
Tillage and sowing, your harvests and greens?

Return you by the paths that brought you here,
Return to the native soil of Egypt;
But if once again by might and in arms
You should dare to march against these freeborn men,

Be the wells you dig forty measures deep,
Be they covered up with forty millstones,
Against you will rise, just as today,
David of Sassoun and his Lightning-Sword.

And at that time, only God will know
Who will between us shall the sorrier be...
We who rise to wage a battle great,
Or you, who’ve made of us your enemy.”
APPENDIX VI

Map of Genocide Cites

Map 32: The Genocide (1915-1922)
APPENDIX VII

Boundaries of Armenia

Map 39: The Armenian Republic after the Batum Treaty, June 1918

Map 40: The Armenian Republic, September 1920
Map 41: Wilson’s Armenia for the Treaty of Sèvres, 1920

Map 45: Present-Day Armenian Republic
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