DIASPORA – ENFORCED IDENTITY: CONSTRUCTION OF THE VICTIM IDENTITY IN THE FILM “ARARAT”

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ABSTRACT

The present thesis analyzes the identity of the Armenian Diaspora of Northern America (particularly the one formed after the Armenian Genocide of 1915) on the example of the film Ararat. It seeks to uncover the overwhelming presence of trauma in the film, by analyzing it with special focus on the Armenian symbols.

As a result of the discourse analysis of the film it becomes obvious that all the symbols of Armenianness that have been employed in the film are subordinated to the traumatic memory of the Diaspora in question.

Present author sees this focus on Genocide as a destructive feature of the identity that needs to be re-framed. Cultivation of this trauma although currently brings cohesion to the Diaspora, in the long run might work against this unity (especially when Turkey shall recognize the Genocide, since in that case the common goal of the diasporans shall be reached).

Among the major findings one can state the implications of the research where author proposes that self-victimization of the Diaspora creates impediments for the normalization of the relations between Armenia and Turkey. It also continues to divide the Armenians into Western and Eastern ones with their own homelands, languages and traditions.

Thus, the highlighting of trauma as opposed to the positive features of an identity is seen as a negative element that requires the cooperation of the Armenia and Diaspora, where Armenia has to take a leading role in broadcasting its living culture to Diaspora, and not vice versa.
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Introduction

As one looks around, he or she can see the world becoming more and more diverse. Not only is the average person being exposed to different cultures, these different cultures become a part of everyday life. In many respects this is happening due to two trends - diasporization of the world and presence of media in the most distant parts of the globe. The times when one was unaware of the events taking place worldwide and lived in a secluded mono-cultural environment are gone.

In this era of global migrations and diasporization of the world it is essential to stop and think about the effects that the diasporic communities have on the individual, community coherence and nation states. But what is even more important in my view is to look inside these communities to understand the type of identity that they produce and transmit to the later generations. As they grow and develop, they create their own microcosm by taking up the elements of the culture of their homeland, mixing it with the features of the host country thus creating a cocktail of a unique diasporic identity. It is this new self-perception that in the long run determines the way these communities function in the host societies as well as the ways they relate to the real or imaginary homeland. With this in mind as well as a great interest for the identity construction, nationalism and social memory I approach this topic.

The purpose of the current analysis is to look at the artistic product of one of the oldest diasporas - the Armenian Diaspora in an attempt to extract the identity of the community it is portraying. In particular, this paper will focus on the analysis of the film Ararat that was directed by the Armenian – Canadian director Atom Egoyan. As the film is telling the story of the Armenian Genocide and its denial, the audience is exposed to the effects this collective trauma has
had on the three generations of the post-genocidal Diaspora, which were formed as a result of the Armenian Genocide\(^1\) in the Ottoman Turkey in 1915.

The original assumption is that the identity that is portrayed in this film is unique since it is a merger of the victim identity and Armenian one, where the elements of the Armenian identity are subordinated to the more rigid victimized self-perception. This analysis shall argue that such cultivation of the victimhood with the help of the cinema is unhealthy and destructive for the individual members of the Armenian communities. Such cultivation is also detrimental for the building of productive cooperation within the South Caucasus region, since such victimized identity is being transmitted by the Diaspora to the Republic of Armenia.

It is essential to note that there are certain facts that are taken as given at the start of this research. First and foremost it is the fact of the historical existence of the Armenian Genocide in Ottoman Empire of 1915. The purpose of this paper is not to prove this statement, but rather to analyze the influence of Genocide on the identity of the Diaspora that was born as a result of it. Thus, despite the fact that there are still some countries, including Turkey, which have troubles recognizing the very fact of the existence of the Armenian Genocide, I believe it is pointless to deny that the historically documented massacres of such scale and rigor have all the elements needed for them to be classified as the first Genocide of the 20\(^{th}\) century.

Whenever I claim a certain feature of an identity as pertaining to the whole generation, I understand that such a claim requires particular degree of generalization and abstraction, which I accept as a necessary part of any qualitative research. Therefore, this analysis is built on the deductive premises, where I attempt to come to a general pattern from a particular case that Ararat film represents. I acknowledge that there are instances, which fall out of my generalization, and

\(^1\) Genocide in my understanding is what Encyclopedia Britannica describes as “the deliberate and systematic destruction of a group of people because of their ethnicity, nationality, religion, or race” (Genocide, accessed April 8\(^{th}\), 2023).
thus I do not attempt to claim for the overwhelming applicability of the conclusions that will be made. At the same time, I do believe that although such a study does not lead to a complete picture of the community it seeks to analyze, it is valuable in its attempt to provide the explanations for the trend and beliefs that are accepted by a major part of the community under investigation.

The choice of the film Ararat can be explained by the fact that it had a large audience within Armenia and in various diasporic communities as well as by the fact that this film has, what I call, a quasi-official status. When I say that it has this status, I am referring to two facts. First of all, it is the presence of the President of the Republic of Armenia at the premier of the film in Yerevan in 2002, which has given it a symbolic power of representing the official history and social memory of the Armenians. This first official character is then supported by the second trend of showing Ararat in many countries\(^2\) on the annual Commemoration day of the Armenian Genocide (April 24\(^{th}\)).

The methodological approach, which has been chosen for the current study, has the historical and analytical dimensions to it. A historical dimension is essential, because, as Karl Marx said, - people “make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past” [Marx, (in Tucker, 1978, p.595)]. That is why even when analyzing identities one can not separate them from the historical context, which shaped them.

The method of analysis, which will be used in this study, is discourse analysis, where I shall use the term “discourse” in the understanding of Norman Fairclough (1992), who refers to “a practice of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning” (Fairclough 1992, p. 64). Thus the role of language is of great importance since

\(^2\)2006.)
discourse and language contribute to the creation of ‘social identities’ (which will be discussed later). At the same time discourse “helps to construct social relationships between people” (Fairclough 1992, p. 64). And finally for Fairclough discourse “contributes to the construction of systems of knowledge and belief” (1992, p. 64). These functions of language, which he labels as ‘identity’, ‘relational’ and ‘ideational’, allow for the discursive analysis of such cultural products as film, which is the key target of present study.

Cinema, by largely drawing on the signs and dialogs is discursive at its very basis. As Foucault elaborated in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, discourses are made up of signs but they do not only designate the items, for they are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak’ (1972, p.49). Accepting the idea that discourse has the power to create the reality, just as cinema does with the help of discursive formations, also makes it justifiable to look into the discourse within the film as a defining element of the identity formation.

Structurally speaking, this analysis will be composed out of *four chapters*. *The first part* shall be solely devoted to the provision of the theoretical basis that is used in the course of the research. In this chapter I shall propose the key definitions that are employed throughout the current paper. Following definitions will be discussed: Diaspora, identity and nationalism. Some attention shall also be given to the notions of trauma and memory in the context of the nationalism, which I believe is necessary for the understanding of the events that are both discussed in the second chapter and portrayed in the film Ararat.

*The second chapter* will provide the historical overview of the North American Armenian post-genocidal diaspora. It is aimed at providing the basis for the understanding of the various trends and identities within the Diaspora itself. An overview of migration waves is essential for the

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2 For instance Ararat was shown on the 24th of April (2006) on the leading channel of Russia- ORT, that has millions of the audience in Russia and thanks to the satellite and cable transmissions - all over the world.
understanding of the diverse community life of the post-genocidal Diaspora. This chapter shall also discuss the various religious affiliations of the members of the community, which results in the proliferation of the particular religious organizations that often times conflict with one another. Last but not the least, in this section of the analysis I will also touch upon the ways that these historical factors (including waves of migration) affect the choices that the Diaspora members make in terms of their participation in community life and their availability for mobilization.

The third chapter is to be devoted solely to an artistic product of the North American victim diaspora member – the film Ararat. In this chapter I will analyze the dialogues searching for the presence and shaping of the Armenian symbols as well as their coexistence with the omnipresent notion of trauma. Anthony Smith’s work with his typology of nationalism myths will provide a great basis for such discussion. Such symbols as Mount Ararat, religion, language, golden age will be discussed with special focus on the victimized part of the Armenian ethnic group, which is believed to be represented by this film.

The fourth chapter will provide analytical implications as to the identity, which can be drawn from the film. Among the major claims of this chapter will be the following statements.

First implication deals with the relationship between the victimized identity and younger generation. The fact that the Armenian identity of the Diaspora is firmly fixed on the Genocide creates a distorted image of the Armenianness among the young Armenians of the diaspora who in many cases have no personal experience of modern Armenia. Therefore, this overwhelming presence of trauma and equalization of the victim with the Armenianness, in its turn, might push them away from this stagnating victimized ethnicity.

The second implication, which will be discussed, is connected to the very fact of the recognition of the Genocide. Looking at the Armenian symbols through the prism of victimhood
also implies opposition of the victimized Armenian identity to the criminal Turkish one. This creates impediments for the possible building of the cooperation within the South Caucasus region. The fact that in this film the crucial division is made into victims and villains without leaving any space for any even slightly positive Turkish character (unlike the memoirs of the victims themselves, who often testified about some occasional help that they received from Turkish neighbors during the times of the mass deportations and Genocide) may delay the recognition of Genocide by Turkey, since it portrays the whole nation as evil.

Third implication that needs to be discussed within this chapter is the necessity of the re-framing and modernizing of the Armenian identity in order to preserve the rich culture and traditions. Unless this redefining is done and some other positive elements are brought into the Diasporic Armenian identity, there is a threat of assimilation, especially when the common goal of the Genocide recognition is reached. This redefinition can include various elements, which shall be discussed in this chapter, the most important of which, however, is to bring the Armenians of Diaspora closer to Armenia of the 21st century, in order to create direct and non-victimized connection between the two equally important parts of the Armenian nation. This is the puzzle which both Armenia and the Diaspora have to work on together.

All these implications make the analysis valuable since they provide a new look at the interconnectedness of the group identity and the relationships between this community and other actors of the political arena. By presenting these implications I propose that it is possible to change the reality by changing the discourses that surround the conflict.

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3 See Miller and Touryan Miller (1999) - for example p.106
Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

1.1 Theoretical conceptualization of Diaspora

Although the word diaspora has Greek roots, literally meaning a scattering or sowing of seeds, majority of the researchers connects the definition itself with the Jewish Diaspora. Since the term was originally used specifically when discussing the Jewish Diaspora of the world which was often stigmatized and discriminated, the term historically had a more negative and victimized connotation that referred to the scattering from the original homeland. It was connected in the public opinion with the notions of necessarily forced exile and scattering of the Jewish people across the globe. However this solely Jewish connection as well as victimized nature has been mostly overcome as the diasporization of the world has taken on the extreme speed from Middle Ages onward.

Diasporas, in their present form, began to take shape due to the numerous wars and ethnic and religious conflicts during the Middle Ages. Thus, the three most ancient Diasporas: Jewish, Armenian and Greek have their roots in those times. These three ethnic groups have traditionally had strong religious identification and a strong spiritual connection with their ethnic land, symbol of their homeland, or country of origin: Zion, Ararat and Hellas respectively.

John Armstrong, while providing his typology of diasporas, gives the following characterization of Diaspora. For him, the term applies to “any ethnic collectivity which lacks territorial base within a given polity i.e. is relatively small minority throughout all portions of the polity” (1976, p.393). As Armstrong explicitly states, the term includes the dispersed pastoral nomads and the Roma. Since I find this latter inclusion quite arguable, whenever I discuss certain characteristics of the Armenian Diaspora I use this term to denote a community, which can be characterized predominantly by the following characteristic features of Safran:
1. they or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original “center” to two or more “peripheral”, or foreign regions;

2. they retain collective memory, vision or myth about their original homeland- its physical location, and achievements;

3. they believe that they are not and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it;

4. they regard their ancestral homeland as their true ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return – when conditions are appropriate;

5. they believe that they should collectively be committed to the maintenance and restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity;

6. they continue to relate, personally or vicariously to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship” (Safran, 1991, p.83-84).

With these six features in mind I would not categorize Roma or nomads as Diasporas, since they hardly meet the test and barely have half or the above mentioned attributes. At the same time I still do not find these six traits sufficient for a group to be classified as Diaspora. In addition to Safran’s description, I would also add the necessary institutionalization as a feature number seven since without the organizational structure be that church, political and community organizations, it would be impossible to claim that Diaspora is in fact a community, rather then a number of disorganized individuals.

Paul Gilroy also would rather agree with Safran and support my inclusion of the institutionalization into the definition of diaspora, since he himself explicitly states that: “Diaspora identifies a relational [N]etwork, characteristically produced by forced dispersal and reluctant scattering. It is not just a word of movement, though purposive, urgent movement is integral to it. Under this sign, push factors are a dominant influence. They make Diaspora more than a vogueish synonym for peregrination or nomadism” (Gilroy, 1994, p.292). Although I am inclined to accept this definition, I still find it problematic because of the notion of the push factors.
Although in most cases, as Gilroy states, there were the push factors that provoked the formation of Diasporas, currently many of the Diasporas, as for instance Turkish, or Chinese are formed due to economic reasons, rather than “pogroms, slavery and genocides” (Gilroy, 1994, p.292). More recent theorization of Diaspora also does not limit Diasporas to only forced relocation. As Jana Evans Braziel states Diaspora is a term “which literally (and on historical level, negatively) denotes communities of people dislocated from their native homelands through migration, immigration, or exile as a consequence of colonial expansion, but etymologically suggests the (more positive) fertility of dispersion, dissemination and the scattering of seeds” (Evans Braziel, 2003, p.4).

Thus, the definition of the Diaspora that I build on is a hybrid of those offered by such scholars as Paul Gilroy, John Armstrong, and William Safran and can be summarized as the following.

Diaspora is a group or groups of people who have been originally dispersed from their homeland by force or any other reasons, and who maintain their collective identity (language, religion, culture) with the help of the community organizations while being located in host countries and preserve the often mythical idea of the return to the place of the original dispersal as well as an idea of necessary support for the “homeland”.

There are various typologies of Diasporas. Most of the authors categorized diasporas according to either the economic weight of the community or the original motivations for the dispersal. If we come back to the “push factors” that facilitated the formation of the diasporic community, we can claim that they determine the different statuses that diasporic groups can have. These different reasons for diasporization allow Armstrong to divide Diasporas into Mobilized and Proletarian. As Armstrong’s classification states proletarian diasporas are “the disadvantaged
product of modernized polities” (Armstrong, 1976, p.393). In simple words this would relate to the economically driven immigrants of the present-day Western European and North American urban areas. Mobilized Diaspora for Armstrong is something that is more worthy of discussion since it is “an ethnic group which does not have a general status advantage, yet which enjoys many material and cultural advantages compared to other groups in the multiethnic polity” (Armstrong, 1976, p.393). In this regard, similar typology is relevant, that of Gabriel Sheffer who in his turn speaks about old (historically traditional) and New Diasporas. In Sheffer’s understanding even what Armstrong coined “Proletarian” and what in Sheffer’s typology is called “New” is already capable of “establishing itself, acquiring relatively new advantaged positions, and are mobilizing for the maintenance, protection and promotion of their interests (Sheffer, 1986, p.388).

Another very relevant typology is that of Robin Cohen (1997, p.178) who in his book *Global Diasporas* provides the following classification of the types of Diasporas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Diaspora</th>
<th>Examples by Cohen (1997, p.178)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victim/ refugee</td>
<td>Jews, Africans, Armenians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others: Irish, Palestinians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperial /colonial</td>
<td>Ancient Greek, British, Russian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others: Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor/service</td>
<td>Indentured Indians, Chinese and Japanese, Sikhs, Turks, Italians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade/business/professional</td>
<td>Venetians, Lebanese, Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others: Today’s Indians, Japanese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural /hybrid/postmodern</td>
<td>Caribbean people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others: Today’s Chinese, Indians</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This classification of Cohen is important in respect that one can see that he classifies Chinese and Japanese Diasporas into a number of categories. This makes it possible and justifiable to divide the Armenian Diaspora according to this typology as well as other typologies into several segments that might be called Diasporas. Just as Chinese Diaspora can be at the same time classified as trade/business, postmodern and labor/service, Armenian Diaspora can also be classified according to all these typologies into proletarian and mobilized, traditional and new etc. Thus, if I synthesize typologies above, the Armenian diasporic community that shall be discussed
in this research can be classified as Mobilized, historically traditional, victim/refugee community formed as a result of the Genocide.

1.2 Theoretical conceptualization of Identity

Identity is a very interesting concept since it can refer to so many areas of the scientific knowledge. One can talk about social identity, which in its turn can be divided into ethnic identity, cultural identity symbolic identity, sexual identity etc. In the course of this paper I specifically will focus mainly on the ethnic type of social collective identity.

Social identity theory claims that each individual not only has his or her individual identity but also develops the social one. Social identity thus can be defined as “that part of an individual’s self-concept, which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance, attached to that membership (Tajfel, 1978, p.63). This social identity comes together with the specific “group beliefs” which are certain convictions which members of the group possess and believe to be the defining factors of their groupness (Bar-Tal, 1998, p. 94).

However, what is important to note is that I agree with Foucault who did not believe in the identity as something fixed and immobile. I also think that ‘identity’ should be looked at as something that is discursively constructed. Identity is something that one exercises during the interaction with the other peoples. At the same time I do believe that ethnic identity being a social identity has certain attributes to it which are common for all the possessors of that identity, even if this self-perception is only exercised during communication with the other people.

In fact in terms of ethnic identity I would even claim that it changes depending on the nature of the “other”. Thus in case the “other” is the possessor of the same ethnic identity, the holder of a shared ethnic identity is likely to be more critical and one might say self-reflecting
about the shared identity. However if the ‘other’ does not share the same ethnic identity, there is a tendency that because of the fear of the threat that the ‘other’ might pose to the object’s identity, the latter one is more likely to be more visible, blatant and radical. This observation that follows from communicating with various members of Armenian diasporic community in Ukraine supports the more general idea of social nature of identity.

Having given the definition of the Diaspora with its characteristic features as given by Safran and comparing it with the notion of the social identity, one can clearly state that Diaspora community as a group can be defined as the possessor of the social identity which is accompanied by common group beliefs. However if it would be only the social identity in its general understanding, then the word Diaspora would lose its meaning since in my view the term Diaspora should also include the ethnic characteristics otherwise one could substitute it with a word ‘group’. But diasporic identity is not the same as just a group identity, since it has to include the ethnic component.

The key determinant of ethnic identity is the fact that “it is generally acquired at birth” (Horowitz, 1965, p.113). Although Horowitz does claim that this ethnic identity is more of a “putative ascription” than an absolute one, I tend to consider ethnic identity among the most stable and permanent ones. It is true that, as Horowitz points out, ethnic identity can be changed through intermarriage, linguistic or religious conversion, however, it takes time and often generations for that to be accomplished. Therefore, in the present analysis ethnic identity is very closely connected with the notion of ethnicity or ethnic group⁴. I say closely connected, but not totally defined by it, since in the Armenian context the ethnic identity and Armenian ethnicity as such is at the same

⁴ Ethnic group’s sociological definition has been given by Weber (1968, p.389). For him ethnic group includes “those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent
time often mixed with that of race in its biological features. It is because of that “confusion” in some sources that discuss the Armenian Genocide, the Armenian ethnic group is sometimes referred to as Armenian race.

Another distinctive feature of the Armenian ethnic identity that should be mentioned at the beginning is the overlapping of this identity with the religious identity due to the fact that Armenians have their own distinctive Apostolic Church, which employs its own calendar. This has had additional effect on the group solidification and relative rigidity of the group boundaries.

1.3 Theoretical conceptualization of Nationalism, Memory and Trauma

Nationalism is another important concept that will be employed in the course of this analysis- often with the adjectives “ethnic” or “diasporic”. What is nationalism? There are various schools of nationalism which have their own definitions of the term as well as their own explanation of the origin of nations as such. These are primordialism, perennialism, modernism and what some call ethno-symbolic alternative.

One of the major divisions among the nationalism scholars is located in their positions according to the issue of antiquity of nations. Primordialists believe in the importance of the primordial ties for the nationalism. They talk about family, tribe and ethnic groups as natural ones, membership in which is acquired at birth. As Clifford Geertz (1963) discusses in his work, these primordial attachments include not only the presumed blood ties but also the fact that being born into a family includes such cultural givens as speaking certain language, being of particular race, religion and having ties to a specific home- territory/region (Geertz, 1963). Although, perhaps I would agree that these givens play a big role as they constitute one’s being from early childhood, I
wouldn’t claim that these givens solely determine the national identity of modern person, since as it has been discussed identity is a construct that can be described by certain volatility and encompassing nature.

Second, closely connected to primordialists’ explanation of nationalism is the position of perrenialists. Perrenialists do agree with the primordialists that nations existed throughout the recorded history; however they do not accept the “natural” explanation of nationalism. Time-wise, perennialism is a later trend in nationalism theory than the primordialism, but an older one than modernism. On of the most distinguished perrenialists Hugh Seton-Watson, for instance, distinguished between the two historical versions of nationalism which were developing differently in old and new nations. For him the old nations in 1789 in Europe were Scots, English, French, Dutch, Portuguese, Danes, Swedes Hungarians, Poles and Russians. These nations are old for Seton-Watson because they had their national consciousness and national identity “before the formulation of the doctrine of the nationalism” whereas the rest of Europe had a spontaneous process of formation and at the same time formulation of the above mentioned characteristics [(Seton-Watson, 1977) in Hutchinson, 1994, p.134]. Old ones had the national continuity, which is supported by the fact that these nations have existed at the particular territory for centuries, whereas the new ones can be characterized as recurrent since they decline and reemerge in new form.

Thus he states that the national consciousness is not something that existed forever, but something that was developed over history with different features for various countries thanks to the different combinations of “state power, religion, language, social discontents and economic memories of colonization and migration”.

18
pressures” (Seton-Watson, 1977) in Hutchinson, 1994, p.137). In this view, modern nation is perennial since it is both a continuity and recurrence (Leoussi, 2000, p. 243).

I find a lot of similarities between the perrenialists and the primordialists, whereas the two are quite different from the modernists who treat the nations and nationalisms as not only a relatively new phenomenon, but more than that they claim that nations are the inventions of modernity. Modernists draw a thick line between the traditional and modern societies. Gellner (1983), for instance, connects the rise in the nationalist sentiments with the industrial revolution and economic growth of the society whereas Anderson (1983) insists on the role of media and particularly printed press and education in the formation of a public that shares common topics and perceptions. Three conditions, according to Anderson, were met which made the formation of the nations possible. First - the decline of Latin as the true sacred language, and introduction of the “national” language into printed press, second - de-legitimization of the monarchs as the divine creatures and the third - idea that the origin of the world and men is identical (Anderson, 1983). For modernists it is nationalism (incited by various mechanisms) that produces the nation and not vice versa.

To sum up, primordialists believe that nations are natural divisions of humanity, while perrenialists “argue that nations have been around for a very long time, though they take different shapes at different points in history” (Nationalism, Retrieved April 23rd, 2006). Modernists, unlike the first two think of nations as totally modern inventions. They believe that nations have been constructed either thanks to the development of capitalism or the proliferation of the media, or due to the political developments, which were facilitated by the state institutions.

Why is it important to discuss these various approaches to the nationalism? I believe that in the situation of the Diaspora, when the diasporic people are not subjected to the influences of the
homeland’s educational system, or any other institutional influences that would promote nationalism, it becomes obvious that the nationalism under question has other roots which are predominantly connected to the more primordial notions being linked to such concepts as kinship, common lines of descent, and blood. It is not the physical fact of biological connectedness or reference to the same territoriability by itself that creates the feelings of commonality among the members, but the fact that people acknowledge these as the common points of reference. In other words, I would say that it is not the primordial ties that create commonality, but rather the belief in these ties that does it.

With the reference to the modernist approach (Gellner and Anderson) to the nationalism, I would say that it is only useful for the present research that it gives credit to the media as the agent that can influence the beliefs of the people. However, unlike some media determinists, I do not believe that nationalism can be built solely by media somewhere where there are no pre-existing ethnic, cultural, religious or other links that connect people.

Thus, the closest to my understanding of the role that ethnicity plays in the collective memory of the nation is the fourth explanation of nationalism - ethno-symbolic alternative which is explained in its fullest mode in the works of Anthony Smith. He is one of the few scholars who actually give credit to the ethnic basis of nations and Diasporic nationalisms. His theorizing is especially important since in the present paper the ethnic identity that is discussed is not the same as the national one.

When one talks about Diaspora, the regular definition of a nation does not reflect the diasporic experience. In this case it is useful to talk about the ethnic or ‘diasporic nationalism’. But before that, it would be useful to identify the ethnic community. For Smith, ethnic community is “human populations distinguished by both members and outsiders as possessing the attributes of:
1. identifying name or emblem;  
2. a myth of common ancestry;  
3. shared historical memories and traditions;  
4. one or more elements of common culture;  
5. a link with an historic territory or “homeland”  
6. a measure of solidarity, at least among the elites (Smith, 1999, p.13).

It is interesting that these characteristics are very similar to Safran’s features of Diaspora. According to the ethno-symbolism modern nations “were based on ethnic ties and sentiments and on popular ethnic traditions…” (Smith, 1999, p.13). If it is the case, then the following statement can be made. In diasporic situations, when the homeland (mother country) is far away, ethno-symbolic ties, being the oldest and most “natural” take the leading role in the unification of the diasporic communities. This is why one can infer that the ethnic identification and ethnic nationalism in Diasporas is more relevant then even within the borders of a nation-state, where other elements play a role, be that political, cultural or personal.

**Diasporic Nationalism** for Smith is very closely connected in the Jewish and Armenian case with the idea of chosenness, which is closely intervened with the notions of Trauma and Golden age, which became part of the collective memory within the Diaspora. However for these ‘Smithian myths’ to become operational there had to be certain conditions within Diaspora, which would facilitate the acquisition and functioning of these myths. As Smith rightly points out there are two conditions, which had to be met for both Jewish and Armenian Diasporic nationalisms\(^5\) to take the shape, which they did.

The first one is what he calls “negative” condition is “the experience of catastrophe and trauma, sudden or prolonged or both” (Smith, 1999, p.216). The second one –“positive” was the existence of “channels and vehicles of collective action” (Smith, 1999, p.216). At the same time I

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\(^5\) I discuss only these two since they closely resemble each other due to the historical processes of dispersion from homeland and diasporic existence.
also agree with Smith’s claim that Diasporic nationalism proved to be effective and “culturally fertile” only in the case of the communities which act in the triangular relationship of Diaspora-national center-host society. This is proven to be true for both Jewish and Armenian diasporic nationalisms despite the fact that there were times when the homeland had more of an imagined character.

Additional important characteristic of a nation or ethnic group, which is relevant for this analysis and for which Smith is also useful, is memory. He claims that memory is “an essential element in any kind of human identity” (Smith, 1999, p.208). He writes, “in case of collective cultural identity, such as ethnies [French word for ethnic communities] and nations, later generations carry shared memories of what they consider to be ‘their’ past, of the experiences of earlier generations of the same collectivity, and so of a distinctive ethno-history” (Smith, 1999, p.208). Smith is confident that the ethnicity can be defined by a firm believe in common origin and by a referral to the common homeland. That is why Diasporas, as ethnic communities also share and I would even go as far as to claim that they enforce the common notions of the golden age and trauma.

For this analysis the common trauma is indispensible, since it defines in many ways the identity of the Genocide victim Diaspora that is under the investigation. Traumas, as well as other historical transformations are very powerful in a way that they are capable of altering the identity of the whole country. Even more so, they are able to change and often do change the identity of the individual person.

Stuart Hall, having a cultural approach to the identity, in his article proposes at least two different ways of thinking about cultural identity of an ethnic group (Hall, 1990, p.223). The first

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6 In Armenian case trauma includes both dispossession of homeland and feeling of “betrayal by their Christian kinsmen, who failed to deliver them from Islam, the Ottoman Yoke and captivity of genocide” (Smith, 1999, p.218).
one defines the shared culture, history, “a sort of collective one- true self hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed selves, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” whereas the second one takes into consideration “critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute what we really are; or rather- since history has intervened- what we have become” (Hall, 1990, p.300-302). The first one (although in my view should not be called superficial) is of great importance for the present paper since it brings up the notion of the collective and social memory.

As Paul Connerton said in his book Social memory (1989) “our experience of present very largely depends upon our knowledge of the past” (p.2). This can also imply that the trauma of Genocide has intervened into what the people have become and since it was a massive trauma, it became a part of the common identity. Despite the fact that not all the Armenians were personally subjected to the Genocide, this trauma became a part of the Armenian identity in general, as it is discussed by Smith.

Genocide became part of what Climo calls vicarious memory, “a concept that refers to strong, personal identifications with historical collective memories that belong to people other than those who experienced them directly” (Climo, 1995, p.176). The reason for this incorporation of the Genocide into social or vicarious memory, in my opinion is both the huge numbers of people who were affected by it, as well as the dispossession of the homeland, which resulted in formation of a vast “homeless” Armenian Diaspora. Large numbers of people who suffered from the Genocide were the repository of the immediate memories that they were able to transmit, whereas the Diasporic experience made the need to remember even more vital for the survival of the group.

The latter can be explained by the fact that Genocide by threatening the continuity of the group triggers the protective mechanisms of preservation and collectiveness among the members
of the community. These mechanisms of preservation include the necessary transmission of the memories of individual members of the community to the following generations.

I agree with Maurice Halbwachs’s understanding of the memory as being socially constructed through people’s membership in the various groups-families, religious and other communities (Halbwachs, 1950). At the same time, as Connerton mentions, only memories and membership are not enough for the construction of the social memory, “it is necessary also that the older members of the group should not neglect to transmit these representations to the younger members of the group” (Connerton, 1989, p.38). Thus it is this act of the transfer which makes the “remembering in common possible” (Connerton, 1989, p.39).

Communication is a key mode of the transmission of social memory, which includes the commemorations, various rituals, narratives, celebrations and I would add artistic productions that are broadcasting the social memory on a larger scale to the whole group. The power of these transmissions lies in their emotional charge, since the traumatic memory like that of Holocaust or Genocide “evokes powerful feelings in individuals, which link them to the important group events they did not experience directly” (Climo, 1995, p.183). I agree with Climo who says that vicarious memory (for Climo it is the memory of Holocaust) is based on the emotions that link people to their heritage and culture. However, what remains unanswered is the effect that this emotional linkage has on the individuals and the community in the longer run. This is something I will discuss on the example of the Armenian Survivor Diaspora in the following chapter.
Chapter 2 – Historical overview of the post-genocidal North American Armenian Diaspora

2.1 Formation of the North-American Armenian Diaspora

Diasporization of the Armenian ethnic groups has deep roots and has been occurring throughout the long history of the Armenians. Hrair Dekmejian distinguishes two major reasons for the diasporic nature of the Armenian historic experiences. The first one is connected to forced migration. According to him, historically, the forces, which caused the migration, range from “economic crises and deprivation, to political instability, conquest, religious persecution, massacres, and deportation” (Dekmejian, 1997, p.413). A second catalyst of emigration, according to Dekmejian, is “the pursuit of foreign trade, educational opportunities and military careers as mercenaries” (Dekmejian, 1997, p.413).

The migration of the Armenians to the New World started in the late nineteenth century from the Ottoman Empire. Although numbers differ from one researcher to the other, on average the first wave which was set in motion by the pogroms in the Ottoman Empire of 1894-1896 resulted in 100 000 people’s arrival to the Americas in the following years (Mirak, 1997, p.390). Prior to this wave there were smaller scale migrations incited by the American protestant missionaries, which established Protestant churches and schools in the Christian millets of Ottoman Empire and encouraged young Armenian men to get education in the US in order to come back to their homes afterwards and promote the conversion of the Armenians to Congregationalist Protestantism (Mirak, 1997, p.390). However as Mirak claims a massive exodus did not happen until the pogroms in which 100 000 Armenians in Constantinople and Van were slaughtered,
causing the formation of the communities in exile in Russia, Western Europe and New World\(^7\) (Mirak, 1997, p.390).

Once the relocation of Armenians began, it was growing annually and by the outbreak of the World War 1, according to Mirak, around “67 000 of Armenians had migrated to the United States and Canada and another 45 000 had settled in South America (Mirak, 1997, p.391).

Thus, major years of the first wave migration of Armenians to the United States are those between 1894 and 1924- the years when the “sporadic massacres and, ultimately the Genocide” had happened (Mirak, 1975, p.13). In the years between the end of the War and the imposition of the Quota system in the US (1924), some more 23,000 Armenians settled in the US and about 8,000 migrated to the South America. Most of these latter immigrants were women “who had been orphaned, or widowed by the genocide”. Many of these survivors were brought to the US thanks to the efforts of their relatives who searched for them in refugee camps and orphanages (Mirak, 1997, p.390).

Armenians tended to settle in the urban areas with the biggest settlements being formed in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Detroit, Chicago and Los Angeles (Dekmejian, 1997, p.434). Although records show that the original founding generation settled in the New World during 1894-1924, Mirak claims that the largest numbers migrated to the North America in 1970s, “when the US Immigration Act of 1965 ended the discriminatory quota system and when the successive crises in Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, and Iran undermined the once large, prosperous, and stable communities in those countries”\(^8\) (Mirak, 1997, p.391). Among these “new” immigrants many were the second generation of the Genocide survivors- people who were born and educated in

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\(^7\) It is important to note that in the due to the fact that American Armenian Diaspora is much more research than the Canadian, present paper, draws upon this available body of literature. Canadian Armenian Diaspora is much smaller in numbers and less research, however it shares most of the features of American Armenian community

\(^8\) This is the wave, which brought to Canada the parents of Atom Egoyan and himself- then a boy of…. 
Beirut, Tehran, Istanbul (and various republics of the Soviet Union) and who represented the “bastions of Armenian Identity in the diaspora” (Mirak, 1997, p.392). With this new wave of the 1970s the centre of Armenian diasporic community has moved to the South of the USA, particularly to California\(^9\).

The third wave of the Armenian immigrants mainly originated from the Soviet Union and the newly formed Armenian republic. Due to the economic instability of independent Armenia in 1990s, predominantly Armenian speaking immigrants moved to the eastern coast of the United States and to the urban areas of Canada\(^10\).

The implications of such diverse migration waves are very important since it is the timing of these waves as well as the origin of the newcomers that created tensions within the North American Diaspora. As many historians including Mirak claim the major challenge to the very existence of the North American Diaspora came from within it – “from discord between the older generation of Armenians and the newer immigrants from the Middle East” (Mirak, 1997, p.399). The ambitions of the educated and skilled newcomers from the Middle East were originally supported by the older generation of immigrants. Newcomers later took positions in the Armenian organisations. However the “Old World hierarchical methods”, which they used, were not welcomed by the older generation which by that time has adopted the more egalitarian (American style) organisational structure and management (Mirak, 1997, p.399). Newcomers, in their turn, accused the older generation of losing their ethnic identity. Specifically, this accusation was targeted at the second and third generation – children of the “old settlers”, many of whom no

\(^9\) According to Dekmejian, currently the American Armenian population is approaching 1 million with over half of the million living in California. This resulted in the election of George Deukmejian as a governor of California in 1982 (Dekmejian, 1997, p.435).

\(^10\) Current Canadian population of Armenians includes the descendants of the Genocide survivors as well as the new migrants from Armenian Republic. According to Dekmejian, around 43 thousands of Armenians are mainly centered in Montreal and Toronto (Dekmejian, 1997, p.434).
longer spoke Armenian or were not so keen on the issues of Armenian culture preservation. This attitude in its turn alienated the third and fourth generation of Armenian immigrants who felt excluded by the newcomers who are supposedly more “loyal to the historic culture” (Mirak, 1997, p.399).

These battles over identity are of great importance for this paper, because they can help to understand the multiple identities that are shared by many and at the same time create cleavages within the community. These migration waves have influenced the community ties and the nature of the North American Diaspora as well as determined the abundance of varying views and attitudes towards their Armenianness among the various generations of the victim descendants.

Historical changes have had major influence on North American Armenian Diaspora as it shaped the attitudes both internally between its members, and externally - between Diasporic communities and Soviet and later independent Armenia. Dekmejian describes the 1920-1939 as a crisis within the North American Armenian Diaspora, which is without a doubt connected to the sovietisation of Armenia (Dekmejian, 1997, p.415).

The fact that beginning from the 1920s there existed a “designated territorial entity” which carried a name Armenia was at the same time a source of hopes and grievances. The hopes of the Diaspora were connected to the fact that the so much dreamt of ‘homeland’ had started to materialise, grievances were also tied to the fact that it started materialise with only a small part of the territory which was considered to be Armenian. Moreover, the actual homeland of the post-Genocidal Diaspora (Eastern Anatolia) still remains a part of Turkey.

Sovietisation itself also provided stability and at the same time worsened the situation in Armenia proper. As Dekmejian points out, Soviet presence “was the promise of physical security
and cultural autonomy” that was accompanied by “repressive policies under Stalin” (Dekmejian, 1997, p.415).

This duality had its effect on the Diaspora as well, where, according to Dekmejian, “virtually every Armenian diaspora community was split along partisan cleavages, which affected families, cultural societies, educational institutions, and ultimately the Armenian Church” (1992, p.415). This split continued throughout the Cold War, when the Diaspora was divided between the nationalistic feelings towards the ‘homeland’ and the ideological anti-Communist sentiments, which were promoted and proliferated by their host countries. However this came to a logical decline as the prospects for the independence of the Armenia started to cross the minds of the intelligentsia inside and outside of Armenia.

Apart from this ideological split, there still exists a religious split within all the Diasporic communities and the North American Diaspora in particular. This religious split is also a result of the diasporic experience of the majority of the Armenians. Having established communities in the New World of course meant the establishment of the Armenian Apostolic Church at the places of new settlement. According to Dekmejian, the first Armenian Apostolic church was consecrated in Massachusetts in 1891.

A major split within the Apostolic church happened as a result of the sovietisation of Armenia, when the religious centre Echmiadzin, which was located in Soviet Armenia was weakened and the Cilician hierarchy in Antelias (Lebanon) rose in its power. As the result, tensions between the two churches – Echmiadzin and Antelias, continue up to now, dividing the Diasporic Armenian religious life according to, what originally were political premises (Dekmejian, 1992, p.415). Once again as in the times of the war between the Ottoman Empire and
Russia, Armenians are divided politically and religiously, and this division was reflecting and still reflects the international political realities of the historical period.

Moreover, even before the split of the apostolic church, Armenian Protestant church that was created as a result of the activities of the American missionaries in the Ottoman Empire was also relocated to the New World. The first Armenian Protestant church was opened in 1901 also in Massachusetts (Dekmejian, 1992, p.415).

All this religious variety accompanied by the institutional and cultural diversity continues to exist to these days. However, as the general secularization trend is becoming more obvious, these differences play less important role in the identity construction of the younger generation of Armenians in Diaspora at the same time still dividing the older one.

### 2.2 Institutional organisation of the North American Diaspora

Political life of the North American Armenian Diaspora was a battlefield for 3 major parties, which migrated together with the Armenian population from the lands of their homeland. These three most important and influential organisations - the ARF (Armenian Revolutionary Federation or Dashnaks), Social Democratic Hnchak Party and the Ramkavar Party have been the centres of the community life, as well as the causes of the major divisions within the Armenian American communities. This was especially evident during the Soviet presence in Armenia proper when the rivalry between the Dashnaks and non-Dashnaks led to the assassination of Armenian Archbishop Tourian\(^\text{11}\) on Christmas Sunday in 1933 in NY, for which nine Dashnak members

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\(^\text{11}\) Tourian was representative of the Echmiadzin hierarchy. For ARF “the head of the Armenian Apostolic church in Echmiadzin was merely a tool of the Marxist government” (Mirak, 1997, p.403)
were arrested and prosecuted (Phillips, 1989, p.128). Since Tourian was a strong supporter of Soviet Armenia, he opposed everything that had to do with the Dashnak\textsuperscript{12} party.

By contrast, the conservative Ramkavars were supportive of the Soviet rule and considered it a positive factor for the “ensuring eventual independence” (Mirak, 1997, p.403). In their view the presence of the Soviet military protected Armenians from the “numerically and military superior Turkish forces” (Mirak, 1997, p.403). This opposition of the Dashnak and non-Dashnak party supporters had its effects on the overall community and religious life where Dashnaks after the assassination of Tourian were largely excluded from the community to the point where they even created their own churches which were aligned to the Cilician hierarchy in Antelias, Lebanon (Phillips, 1989, p.128-130).

With the independence of Armenia, however, new issues started to divide the political community of the Diaspora. However for the first time, despite the fact that both Dashnaks and Ramkavars, which had existed in the Diaspora for over 70 years, were defeated by the Armenian National Movement, diasporan political leaders were given influential political positions within the first government (Mirak, 1997, p.403). Dashnaks, however remained in the opposition mainly on the issue of the Karabagh, to which they espoused full independence. What is important is that with the independence of Armenia, these political battles partly have been relocated on the political arena of the new republic, whereas the Diaspora has concentrated its activities in the form of the various NGO's, interest groups, funds, assemblies, and lobbies.

Among the most influential Armenian interest groups, both of which are based in Washington are: Armenian Assembly of America (AAA), which was formed in 1972 and

\textsuperscript{12} ARF was founded as a secret organization in 1890 during the decline of the Ottoman Turkey. Dashnaks espoused a nationalist and irredentist cause and often advocated the use of violence to achieve their goals. The destiny of the Armenians, according to the party ideology lay only in a free and independent Armenia
Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), which as some researchers claim has an affiliation with Dashnak party. The goals of the AAA are centred on the promotion of cultural cohesion and sense of community among the Armenian Americans. One of the organisations that were formed on the basis of AAA in 1993, Armenian American Action Committee (ARAMAC) is rather active in the dissemination of the information about the events around Nagornyy- Karabakh by the means of sending out ‘legislation action alerts’ to its members (Anderson Paul, 2000, p.30).

According to the AAA official mission statement, their goals can be summarised as the following: to represent the interests of the Armenian-American community to the US public-policy making community; to expand opportunities for the Armenian- Americans’ participation in democratic processes on all levels; to expand research and provide advocacy campaigning for the universal affirmation of the Armenian Genocide; to “support and deepen” US /Armenia and the US/ Karabakh relationships; to promote public and private initiatives in both Armenia and Karabakh etc (AAA, retrieved April 12th, 2006).

ANCA’s goals are quite similar to those of AAA, however with some differences which are the result of the nature of each of these organisations. According to its official web site, ANCA has the following goals: “foster public awareness in support of a free, united and independent Armenia; influence and guide US policy on matters of interest to the Armenian- American community; and represent the collective Armenian- American viewpoint on matters of public policy, while serving as liaison between the community and their elected officials” (ANCA, retrieved April 12th, 2006).

Among the activities of ANCA the key place is given to “strengthening Armenia as a secure, prosperous and democratic state; supporting Nagorno-Karabagh's right to self-determination and independence within secure borders; increasing U.S. aid levels to Armenia
to promote economic and democratic development; securing direct U.S. aid to Nagorno-Karabagh; ensuring the appropriate commemoration of the Armenian Genocide” (ANCA, retrieved April 12th, 2006).

Despite the similarity in goals, Rachel Anderson Paul distinguishes major differences between the two organisations. She writes:

AAA is an ethnic American group that is supported by Americans of Armenian descent. In contrast, ANCA is the American affiliation of an international diasporic organisation that is tied to a long-standing political party and movement. While AAA is primarily concerned with issue important to Armenian-Americans, ANCA is part of a larger organisation that unites the diaspora around the world. Further, this international organisation is not just interested in mobilising members of diaspora: it wishes to influence the political system of the Republic of Armenia (Anderson Paul, 2000, p.31).

One can see from the above mentioned mission statements that Genocide recognition topic as well as the issues concerning Nagornyy Karabagh is present on the agendas of both organisations. In fact, it is true that the topic of the Genocide recognition is indispensable part of each and every Armenian organisation of North America, which can be effectively traced on their web sites.

Furthermore, apart from the churches, political organisations and interest groups, North American Diaspora is rich in media outlets, research institutes, and Sunday schools. Among the most famous Armenian research institutes one can name located at Cambridge, Massachusetts, Zoryan Institute for Contemporary Armenian Research is solely devoted to Genocide, Diaspora and Armenia as its three “broad subject areas”(Zoryan, Retrieved April 12th, 2006). There is also at least one, if not more University program in Armenian studies which is located at the core of Armenian America- California at California State University, Fresno. Apart from the courses on Arts and History of Armenia it also publishes its own newspaper, coordinates various guest lectures and community gatherings.
What is interesting about the Armenian newspapers of the USA is that they are often linked to one of the existing political parties. Dashnaks are the most effective in supporting media outlets, which cover extensively Genocide recognition efforts, events around Nagornyy Karabakh, as well as issues of the community life in the USA and Armenia. Additionally, as Rachel Anderson Paul notes when discussing the affiliation of ANCA and its targeting of the policies within Armenia, since ARF supports certain newspapers like The Armenians Weekly (publication by ARF central Committee, Eastern USA), it uses the newspaper to promote the legislation which it initiates. For instance the issue No 14, dated April 2006, included an editorial article on the latest ARF’s initiative – legislation proposal about provision of the dual citizenship for the members of Diaspora (Armenian Weekly, retrieved, April 12th, 2006). There are also various articles devoted to the news from the educational institutions of American, Canadian, Lebanese, French and many other Armenian diasporic communities.

As I was trying to show in this short overview, multiple political parties, churches, educational institutions, newspapers are actively used in the Armenian-American context for the creation of the community life. All of these organisations provide a rather solid background for the development of the Armenian self-perception for the many generations of Armenians of Diaspora.

At the same time one of the valuable characteristics of these organisations for present research is that all of them have been either formed, or have undergone transformation as a result of the Genocide, just as the community, which these organisations are meant to represent and serve. The fact that the community itself was originally created by Genocide survivors has had major effect on the organisations that were produced as a result. Interestingly enough, these organisations have been changing together with the historical developments within Diaspora and in Armenia. What remained unchanged is the issue of the Genocide recognition, which continues to be the
focus of many institutions, interest groups and of course individuals. However, I can not say that
the Genocide memory has remained unaltered because as generations pass, their perceptions
undergo transformations as well. Nevertheless, despite these changes, the overwhelming presence
of Genocide in the discourse is striking\textsuperscript{13}. In fact, as Anderson Paul suggests, it is possible that this

\textbf{2.3 The place of Genocide memory in the Identity of the North American Diaspora}

The identity of each individual has many dimensions, as I have already discussed in the
theoretical chapter of this thesis. However, what is extremely important for the ethnic identity
construction is the role of family as an original unit of socialisation and the role of the community
as a secondary one. In the Armenian context, the memories of the survivors have had an extremely
powerful, sometimes even negative\textsuperscript{14} effect on their grandchildren. This influence on the third
generation supports the idea of Hansen, who hypothesised that although in the second generation
ethnic identity tends to decline, in the third generation one can see the revival of ethnic identity
(Hansen, 1952).

Since currently there is already a fourth generation of the Armenians who were born in
Diaspora, their ethnic identity differs from that of their parents. In fact, although it is possible to
partially claim that due to assimilation, the symbolic identity of fourth generation has less

\textsuperscript{13} Taking into account the proximity of the Genocide Commemoration day (April 24\textsuperscript{th}) to the date of the writing of present analysis, the preliminary research was undertaken in December 2005 and January 2006, in order to avoid what might have been a misleading conclusion about the overwhelming presence of Genocide (which is normal for the April of each year)

\textsuperscript{14} Interviews with the members of Armenian terrorist group, responsible for killings of Turkish Diplomats, reviled great influence of the Grandparents’ memories on the terrorists (most of who were born in Diaspora and committed crimes in their early 20s). Narratives of horror transmitted to them by their grandparents made the terrorists consider their actions as moral duty of “fighting for justice”. (See Miller, 1991)
Armenian characteristics to it, at the same time as many researches (Miller, Bakalian, Abrahamian) show, this identity is being preserved with more or less constant focus on the Genocide.

The traumatic genocidal collective memory for Armenians has been a part of the ethnic identification for over 90 years. However, unlike for the diasporan communities (whose identities have been largely transformed into symbolic ones) it has never been the determining factor of identity in Armenia proper. Since the voluntary nature of the ethnic identity in the American context, especially for the current 4th generation, goes hand in hand with its symbolic nature, as it has been proposed by Gans, it is necessary to slightly touch upon this issue before submerging into the Armenian context.

Having proposed the notion of symbolic ethnicity, Herbert J. Gans claims that for many immigrants and subsequent generations in particular, such symbolic ethnicity may cover various ethnic identifications. He asserts that although some people use it “as a way to express their individuality or a special communal allegiance that does not conflict with other identities”, for many people such symbolic ethnicity is a bit more than just a label that they can use when they are asked during the interview. For the majority however, according to Gans, symbolic ethnicity is something in between (Gans, 1994, p. 579)

Ronald Suny when discussing Armenian Diaspora although does not use the term of symbolic ethnicity, proposes three modes of adaptation which are related to the above mentioned perceptions of identity. Some Armenians, according to Suny go to the extreme of totally rejecting everything that is connected to the host culture (Suny, 1993, p.216). They fully submerge themselves into the Armenian community as if it was the only natural way to protect their Armenianness “as either something natural and unchosen or as an obligation not to be questioned” (Suny, 1993, p.216).
This way of living was probably particularly true for some members of the first wave of the post-genocidal migration, since these people did believe into the eventual return to what was left of their larger homeland – Soviet Armenia. However, as Suny points out, the ideological differences and uncertainties “have kept many of these nationally conscious Armenians in exile” (Suny, 1993, p.216).

The other possible extreme choice that is described by Suny is the total rejection by the Diaspora Armenians of everything that is connected to their ethnicity. It is particularly true for those North American Armenians who have already lost their ethnic culture, have no knowledge of the Armenian language. According to Suny, in the community of the North-American Armenians, where the intermarriage has reached up to 90 percent, the “association with Armenians or identification with Armenia has been on steady, accelerating decline” (Suny, 1993, p.216).

Majority of the Armenians in the Diaspora, according to Suny, didn’t make either of the two radical choices. They decided to take the third road - be involved into the Armenian community life as well as take active part in the political and cultural life of the host country (Suny, 1993, p.217). This proves the notion that for many of the middle-of-the-roaders, Armenian ethnicity had become another “voluntary form of association” (Schahgaldian, 1979, p.90).

Symbolic character of the Armenian identity among the Diaspora has also been demonstrated by Anny Bakalian, who having conducted the survey of 584 Armenian-Americans came to the conclusion that there are two types of identity among the Armenians in the USA. The first is “traditional Armenianness, which implies being Armenian by birth and is manifested predominantly by new immigrants whereas the second-“symbolic” can be found predominantly among the generations which were born in the US (Bakalian, 1992). Although Bakalian asserts a steady decline in the participation in the voluntary organisations among the Diaspora Armenians,
her findings sustain my original perception of the continued concentration and high relevance of the Genocide issue for most of the community members (1992). She argues that there has been a reconstruction of the Armenianness among the subsequent generations of the Diaspora Armenians where they have gone from “being” Armenian to “feeling” Armenian (Bakalian, 1992). I would argue that what we are witnessing is not so much of feeling Armenian with “a strong sense of we-ness or peoplehood” (Bakalian, 1992, p.6), but rather a substitution of the two notions – “victimhood” with the traumatic ties among the people whose ancestors suffered common trauma with a notion of “Armenianess”, out of which, as Bakalian concludes, not much\(^\text{15}\) is left (1992, p. 5-6).

Thus we can claim that it is the topic of Genocide, and I would add the issue of Nagornyy Karabakh, unlike the political and religious controversies fill the symbolic nature of the Armenianness for the members of the North American Armenian Diaspora or as Bakalian writes, involvement with these issues allows Armenian- Americans to “derive ego-satisfaction, enhance their self-worth, and feel empowered by group affiliation (1992, p. 164).

Focus on the Genocide as a point of reference however has its own subtopics. The Armenian political scientist Razmik Panossian with his analysis of post-genocidal identity is particularly useful in identification of the key themes, which constitute this identity. When he looks at the key ideas, which are prevalent during the Genocide Commemoration day of April 24\(^{\text{th}}\), he distinguishes 4 key “themes”. He summarises the first one as “we are a victim nation and all of our dead in the Genocide are martyrs” (Panossian, 2002, p.137). The second one reads “we are still suffering because injustice has not been recognised by the perpetrators and most of the world”

\(^{15}\) From Bakalian (1992, p.6): “the Armenian language is no longer used as a means of everyday communication. The secular culture, even cuisine, is relegated to special occasions and acquires symbolic connotations. Frequency of attendance of Armenian religious services is gradually reduced, as is participation in communal life and activities sponsored by Armenian voluntary associations”
The third theme is centred on the idea of lost land which is “awaiting the return of its “true inhabitants”, whereas the followers of the fourth one take the third idea even farther to claim for “revenge and retribution” (Panossian, 2002, p.137). Based on these conclusions of Panossian, one can actually look inside the post-genocidal identity, which is the strongest in Diaspora and divide it into components. This ability to take apart the bigger Genocide topic and divide it into subtopics shows the complexity of the multiple identities. Thus, whereas some people share all 4 beliefs, others might opt only for two depending on the family background and social environment of the individual.

Having analysed patterns of mobilisation of North American Armenian Diaspora, Rachel Anderson Paul also came to conclusions similar to Panossian’s as to the key premises of the victim identity. Though instead of dividing the victim identity into composing parts she put this identity into the general Armenian context, which reveals the other topics that have been chosen for the identity construction by Diaspora members. In her study she asserts that

...central to the successful mobilisation of this diaspora community is the amalgamation of an ethnic identity centered around the shared memory of an Ancient Armenian nation-state, the distinctive nature of its people, and the collective traumatic memory of the Armenian genocide (Anderson Paul, 2000, p.28).

These three pillars of the diasporic identity are essential for present research since one can see that all of them are connected to certain historic events (in case of the first and third) and a historic myth (in case of the second one). Thus, history provides all the three construction blocks for the building of the Armenian identity of Diaspora, leaving no place for contemporary influxes. I agree with Ronald Suny who states that “nations are articulated through the stories people tell about themselves” (2001, p.866), however what seems to be also true for the victim Diaspora is the fact that their ‘stories’ are all focused on the particular tragic historic event which marks the origin for the members of community. Levon Abrahamian supports my hypothesis when he says
that for many Armenians of the post-Genocidal Diaspora, the experience of survivors became “a specific differentiating characteristic” of the group (2006, p.328). Abrahamian brings in the examples of the interviews with the Genocide survivor- elderly Syrian Armenian woman, who explained the difference between her compatriots in Syria from the ones living in Armenia in the fact that the latter did not have the experience of “passage through the Deir el-Zor desert, which the former had experienced in 1915”(Abrahamian. 2006, p.328). In fact this memory of Genocide, which according to Abrahamian is also quite close to the “Myth of Beginning”, may cause dual reactions among the subsequent generations, which did not experience it personally. In the footnote to this claim he writes:

Some representatives of the third generation of the Armenian diaspora may lose all characteristics of Armenianness except the knowledge of the genocide their grandparents experienced in the Ottoman Empire. In some cases, on the contrary, this same knowledge is a reason for some people to shun their national identity- in order to avoid the label of victims of genocide (Abrahamian, 2006, p.328).

If the second option is possible, it is mainly articulated on the personal individual level, whereas, unfortunately, the Genocide memory has become a functional topic, used by the elites for the mobilisation of the community. The fact that this collective trauma remains the focal point of identification, in my opinion has both positive and negative sides. The positive aspect has to do with the function of the provision of cohesive group ideology, where as the negative side deals with the unhealthy victimisation and thus constant proliferation of hatred towards those responsible for the Genocide.
Chapter 3 – In search for Identity in film Ararat

3.1 Ararat review

Cinema is a very powerful tool since not only is it able to demonstrate the history, but also it has an incredible capacity to engage and make the viewer part of the historic events, which are being uncovered. This is largely achieved with the help of techniques of the film-making, such as famous 180 degrees rule where a camera should only show what a “naked eye” would see (Silverman, 1983, p.1999). Thus, as Kaja Silverman writes the camera is forced to “deny its own existence as much as possible, fostering the illusion that what is shown has an autonomous existence, independent of any technological interference” (Silverman, 1983, p.1999). It was this, what I call an eyewitness experience that was meant to be created for each viewer of Ararat and was effectively accomplished.

Cinema, just like a book or a television program is produced by artists and in most cases it is about the people and for people. Whatever is produced is usually created with an audience in mind. Movies can and often do contribute a lot to our understanding of the world. One can even say that films contribute to people’s understanding of the international relations and history. As Robert Gregg points out specifically with regard to the movies- they are especially important in their ability of “building bridges to increasingly remote but still important times and events, allowing the viewer to imagine what it was like to have been there”(Gregg, 1998, p. 5). What is even more important is the “debate catalytic feature of the cinema” (Gregg, 1998, p. 6). Having in mind Ararat, I can claim that it fulfills both these functions: it naturalistically reveals historic events, as well as generating wide discussions among the viewers.

Ararat came out in 2002 and was ambiguously accepted by the public. According to the director- Canadian Armenian born in Egypt, the film is about denial, rather than about the
Genocide. However it is the Turkish denial of the Armenian Genocide that is one of the central ideas of the film. Structurally, the film is made with the artistic method of a film within a film. Egoyan’s Ararat is about the making of the film about the Genocide by Edward Saroyan (played by Charles Aznavour (picture 1)). As the Genocide film is being made, many characters in the Ararat film are portrayed as living under the influence of events that happened long ago.

One of the most important characters for our research is the character of Raffi (played by David Alpay (picture 2)), the son of an Armenian terrorist/freedom fighter who was killed during an attempted assassination of a Turkish diplomat. Raffi, a 20 year old fourth generation Armenian, born in Canada is portrayed as a confused young man, who has a sexual affair with his stepsister Celia (played by Marie-Josee Croze (picture 3)) and who is trying to understand what forced his father to sacrifice his life and attempt to murder a Turkish diplomat.

As the movie of Saroyan is being made, Raffi decides that he must visit the historic homeland “to understand the legacy of his people”. Raffi’s mother- Ani (played by the wife of Atom Egoyan - Arsinee Khanjian (picture 4)) is invited to be a historical adviser for the Genocide film, since she is a university professor who researches on the life of the survivor of the Genocide-painter Arshile Gorky, who moved to New York and later committed suicide. The film unfolds as Raffi is stopped by the customs officer David (played by Christopher Plummer (picture 5)) when coming back from Turkey on the suspicion that the cans of the film which Raffi carries with him are used for the transportation of heroin. As Raffi tells his story, we are witnessing the Genocide film being shot.

Celia, Raffi’s stepsister and lover, is another confused and strong character in the Ararat movie. She blames Raffi’s mother for murdering her father (who apparently fell off a cliff or committed suicide) and will not let go of the idea. She attempts to destroy, what is presented as the
most important for Ani’s work, - the portrait of Arshile Gorky’s mother painted by him in his
studio in New York. After this scene, Celia’s character goes into shadow and is practically absent
from the film.

Customs officer David is also a character that is torn by denial of the fact that he is very
close to retirement and that his son is a homosexual. In fact the day when he stops Raffi happens to
be the last day of his work. Egoyan also includes the character of the David’s son Philip (a father of
a 5- year old son Tony), who came out and openly lives with his Half-Turkish partner – actor Ali
(who plays the villain in Genocide movie (picture 6)). Parallel to the interplay of all these
characters, the Genocide movie of Saroyan is being shot, thus creating two realities- one of present
day Canada and the other of 1915 Ottoman Empire, which are magically connected by the
memories, sufferings and denial.

Ararat is not the first film about the Genocide, but it is the first non-documentary popular
version. The previously shot films like The Armenian Genocide, Annihilation of the Armenian
Population of the Ottoman Empire 1915-1923 (1991), The Armenian Case (1975) and many others
were predominantly documentaries which had a much smaller, predominantly Armenian audience.

As Atom Egoyan states in his introduction to the script of Ararat, the fact that it is the first
large-scale film about the topic in some respect determined the nature of the film. He writes:

While my work may have been different if a more popular movie version of the Armenian
Genocide had already existed, this was not the case. Thus the screenplay had to tell the story of
what happened, why it happened, why it’s denied, why it continues to happen, and what happens
when you continue to deny (Ararat, 2002, p. ix)

Perhaps it was due to this desire to give place to the historical narrative, that it largely felt
like a history lesson on a chapter which has been read many times (especially true for Armenians
who already have the Genocide background). However since the greater purpose of the film about
the Genocide, just like the purpose of the many activities of Diaspora Armenians is to influence public opinion and pressure Turkey into Genocide recognition, this might have been justifiable.

The various reviews also support my impression of the film being somewhat disappointing as a work of art. Egoyan attempts to present everything that happened at all costs, but his emotional involvement with the topic in fact turned the film into a mixture of art, politics and personal sufferings, making it difficult to distinguish between the film of Egoyan and that of Saroyan. One typical comment about Ararat, which can be found in many articles devoted to the film, is that “It's all very informative but hardly inspiring” (Null, retrieved on April 18, 2006).

The reviews of Ararat in Armenia or among the various Armenian Diasporic communities were more favourable however. Most Armenians all over the world liked the film and found it valuable in its attempt to present the tragic history of the Armenian people. For instance, one of the online Armenian journalism portals had an article that covered the premier of Ararat in Yerevan, where according to the reporter the tickets were sold out long before and even the president of Armenia was present and liked it with the rest of the audience. In addition to the warm welcome, Egoyan was awarded with “the Movses Khorenatsi Medal of Honor for an important contribution to national culture and education” for Ararat (Abrahamyan, Accessed, May 19th, 2006). This, as I have already said in the introduction, gave the film the quasi-official status, which can be only explained by the desire of the Armenian authorities to improve the relationships with the Diaspora by showing the appreciation of the work that is done by its members.

At the same time, many Armenians did tell me that they expected something more from a film with such a name and that it did not provide any new elements to the picture of the Armenian genocide that each Armenian has due to the presence of Genocide in the collective memory of the Armenian ethnic group. Thus, if for younger viewer, interviewed for the above mentioned article
Ararat was an interesting “history lesson”, for some of the older and therefore more educated people in the audience, who have already had this “lesson” it was less attractive.

Egoyan himself also understands that Edward’s Genocide film might seem “raw and blunt in its depictions” which he explains by the fact that “they [Edward and his screenwriter Rouben] are the first people to cinematically present there unspeakable horrors (Ararat, 2002, p. ix). However what he does not see is the fact that there is no clear cut difference between his film and the one of Saroyan, since both of the directors are haunted by past trauma and thus unable to sacrifice the time devoted to presentation of the historic facts in order to leave more space for artistic freedom and creativity.

What is however essential is the fact that although artistically speaking Ararat is far from being a masterpiece, it provides quite valuable information about its authors, that can provide plenty of details that their victim identity is built on.

What makes it justifiable to look for an identity in the movie is the proposition that all films reflect the “knowledge and perspective, and the vision of those involved in their making” (Gregg, 1998, p. 7). It is possible to speak of Ararat as a film which reflects the views of the people who were making it as well as many people who it was made for. The importance of this is that had I only seen Ararat and not had the proper background to analyse it, it would have been impossible to draw identity solely from the film. Fiction films are not made for these purposes. To look for identity only based on the Ararat film, would be the same as to infer that a portrayal of a maniac in certain film implies that the director is a maniac and the audience also has the maniacal tendencies to it.

If it had not been for the context and the background of the film that is under discussion, it would make absolutely no sense to claim that what the viewer is seeing represents the identity of
many people in the post-genocidal Armenian community. It is also Ararat’s identifiable historic basis, which allows for the search for identity in it.

The fact that Ararat is based on the memories of the survivors, whose narratives are alive in the form of the documents and other various relics (that already have already became sacred for the Armenian community), turns this film into, literally, a storage room of the Armenian post-genocidal identities of various generations. Moreover as Jenny Philips claims, these artifacts (that Ararat is based on) have become shared symbols, “which formulate the basis of an inclusive Armenian identity” (Philips, 1989, p.3).

As I have shown earlier there are various contested symbols of the Armenianness within Diaspora when it comes to religion, the notion of homeland or politics. These contested symbols break apart the community since not all the people can identify with them while the symbol of survivor, trauma and dislocation “provides Armenians with the sense of attachment to the collectivity” (Philips, 1989, p.3). It is this shared symbolism of the film’s foundation that gives me the right to describe the identity of the movie characters as real representations of the various identities of the members of the Armenian Diaspora.

Presented at the Cannes Festival in 2002, Ararat had been most likely created for a wider audience. However, the viewers of Ararat can be divided into two categories: Armenian and non-Armenians. For many from the first category the film felt like a repetition of their “pain and suffering” (re-victimisation) alongside restatement of the legitimacy of community’s claims for Turkey’s recognition of the guilt of committing the crime of Genocide. For some non-Armenians, it was a film that provided the first encounter with the topic, and gave all the background information needed to support the legitimacy of the claims of the Armenians. However, due to the naturalistic nature of the film as well as its goal-justified historicity, it is quite unlikely that the
members of the second category would ever want to watch it again, unlike the first category, which might get such a desire occasionally (especially in the framework of the Genocide Commemoration days).

As one watches “Ararat”, it becomes obvious that it has many of the Armenian symbols such as Ararat, Armenian glorious victory, Armenian language and Christianity. But all of these are looked at through the prism of the genocide: all these symbols are the victims of Genocide. Thus in the course of analysis, I shall discuss these symbols and their use, in order to demonstrate how they are employed in portrayal of the victimized nature of film makers and the community which they are portraying.

One essential point which has to be made before the analysis of the film itself, is connected to the fact that a film like Ararat can and should be analyzed from both the point of its content as well as the point of what is missing from its content. Thus in the course of the analysis I also include the scenes which were present in the original script, but did not make it into the film itself. I discuss the obvious blank spots and questionable omissions that seem strange and pose additional identity questions.

Another note, which should be taken, is the fact that in the final version of the film certain scenes have been repositioned. Despite that, since I am analyzing predominantly the text, I shall refer to the original scene numbering as in the script. Had I done otherwise, it would have been impossible to provide clear references due to the fact that some scenes blend into the others and for someone who is not a cinema specialist it would be problematic to correctly identify them.
3.2 Transformation of the Genocide trauma through the generations of Armenian Diaspora

Being in reality the director for both films, (Ararat and the Genocide film within the Ararat) Egoyan together with the cast portrays the victims of Genocide with all the audio-visual means available at their disposal. The scenes with thousands of people marching through the desert, the portrayals of individual tragedies, rapes, murders and tortures are rather naturalistic and self-evident. Victimization however is not limited only to the actual victims and survivors of the Genocide.

The viewer is witnessing the ways that each generation is coping with the trauma. Second generation (Edward Saroyan) is extremely emotional whenever he talks about his mother who was a survivor of Genocide. By making this film, he is putting his mother on the “pedestal of life”, just as Arshile Gorky (second generation) did with his mother by painting her portrait. Edward is also a ‘victim’ because Genocide has been present with him throughout his life. He says, “My mother was a genocide survivor. All my life I promised to make a film that would tell her story” (Ararat script, p.24). His emotional bond with his mother, who he mentions quite often, determined the scale with which he has taken on her trauma. There are various questions that Edward is struggling to answer. He is not in the position to forget or forgive, nor is he in the position to get into the arguments about the Genocide (as it was shown in the scene with Ali, who started to have regrets about being part of the film). The major question that Edward is trying to answer for himself and fails is voiced in the scene 42:

Edward: Do you know what still causes so much pain? It is not the people we lost, or the land. It’s to know that we could be so hated. Who were these people who could hate us so much? How can they still deny their hatred, and so hate us even more? (Ararat-script, p. 51)

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The crucial words here are “pain” and “hatred”. Genocide memories cause pain to Saroyan and by making the film he is attempting to share his pain with others. The word hatred is repeated through this one phrase four times in various forms probably in order to focus the attention of the viewer on the ways that history has been interpreted according to the narratives that the second generation of the post-genocidal Diaspora members heard from their parents. One can see from the film that Edward is making that his pain does not let him preserve the distance that some might expect to exist between the director and his creation. That is why, even Egoyan himself in the introduction to the script says that occasionally Edward’s film veers into “exaggerated and extreme view of history” (Ararat-script, 2002, p. ix), just as his overwhelming trauma paints the picture only into black and white colors, not allowing for any blending of shades.

Third generation Ani at first seems to be coping with the trauma quite well, however she is torn between the feelings of guilt for not supporting Raffi’s father when he attempted to assassinate the Turkish Diplomat, and for not transmitting to Raffi the full fledged hatreds towards the perpetrators. Raffi at some point does say that he was raised with the stories about the “evil Turks”. However as an educated woman, Ani also gave her son the understanding and the ability to question things and look for answers. Ani, like Edward, turned her trauma into her job. However, unlike Edward, she sublimated her pain by concentrating on the ‘positive’ products of Genocide—on the life and works of Arshile Gorky, Genocide witness and survivor. This sublimation (a quite common method of coping with trauma) was not chosen by all the third generation. For some like Ani’s husband and Raffi’s father, it was the militant actions of revenge, which were chosen as an answer to the persistence of trauma.

Fourth generation Raffi is still very young and confused. He resists the feelings of hatred and attempts to find the meaning of his life. The major question that he is trying to answer is what
forced his father to do what he did. He travels to the “homeland” to find the answer but he only partially finds it on set when Ali’s excellent acting and portrayal of Jevdet Bey, for a brief moment brings up the hate and desire for revenge. The following conversation with Ali reveals the inner controversies that Raffi struggles with:

**Scene 43**

*Raffi: That was a good scene*
*Ali: Thanks*
*Raffi: It must be really weird to get into that…head space.*
*Ali: Yea*
*Raffi: I mean I was raised with all these stories about evil Turks and everything, so I am a bit hardened to it all. But what you did today.. it made me feel all that anger again.*
*Ali: Hey.. thanks*
*Ali (continued): So... I guess you’re Armenian.*
*Raffi: Yes. That’s what I mean when I said I was raised to feel a lot of hatred to.. the person you’re playing*
*Ali: Right*
*Raffi: And you really pulled it off.*
*Ali: I guess it’d be hard to disappoint you*
*Raffi: What do you mean?*
*Ali: Well, you’ve been kind of prepared to hate my character. Like you said*
*Raffi: Sure, but I’m also kind of suspicious of stuff that’s supposed to make me feel anything. Do you know what I mean?*
*Ali: I think so*
*Raffi: So when I was watching you today, even though I know you were supposed to make me feel like hating you, I really resisted it. But then, by the end of the scene, I kind of felt like...*
*Ali lets out a short laugh*
*Ali: Killing me*
*Raffi is a little hurt and confused by Ali’s statement.*
*Raffi: Well yes (Ararat-script, p.52-53)*

This scene is an excellent material as the basis for discussion of the fourth generation identity. It is obvious that, as Raffi was growing up he was exposed to the narrative of the family and submerged into the persisting trauma. However, due to the fact that he is a representative of the fourth generation who was not in direct contact with the survivors, he is as he says “a bit hardened to it all”. As a young person, he attempts to find his own answers and resists what he is
taught. This is where the power of a film is essential, after seeing the tortures that were made by Ali’s character, his modern identity of a 20th-century Canadian steps aside leaving the stage for the victimized Armenian self-awareness. This constant struggle between the two determines his everyday life.

At the same time Raffi’s identity is a bit different from the other representatives of fourth generation of Armenians, born in post-Genocidal Diaspora, since he himself is a victim as well. His fatherless childhood fell victim to the Genocide memories, which he finds hard time to accept. Only at the end of the following scene he starts to understand his father:

Raffi: My Dad was killed trying to assassinate a Turkish diplomat. Almost fifteen years ago. I could never understand what would make him want to murder, what he had to imagine that Turkish Ambassador represented. Today, you gave me a sense of what was going on in his head. And I want to thank you. (Ararat-script, p.53)

However he did not get the complete understanding of what forced his father to do that even after he visited the ruins of Ani and saw the Ararat. This however shall be discussed in the following part of the paper.

### 3.3 “ARARAT victimized”: myth of origin, lost homeland

In Smithian terms Mountain Ararat can be classified as an emblem or symbol of Armenians. Perhaps, this was the motive why the name Ararat was chosen as a title for the movie. Though certain explanations can be given, it is quite difficult to base any of them solely on the film for Mount Ararat is not nearly the center of the plot.

The name Ararat as well as the image of the Mount Ararat is quite popular among the Armenians who use it for various purposes. Although the mountain is currently located at the Turkish territory, historically Armenians considered and still perceive it as the symbol of their nation. Taking into consideration the Christian myth of Ararat being the place where Noah’s Ark
finally rested, as well as the myth of the origins of Armenians who supposedly come from one of the Noah’s son’s Japheth, Ararat has an incredible symbolic value for Armenians. Perhaps it is this symbolic meaning of unity of all the Armenians in Ararat that was taken into consideration when choosing it as a film title. At the same time, if one would remember the symbolic value of Genocide as uniting point for Diaspora Armenians, the analogy plays out.

I presume that by choosing the title Ararat for the film about the Genocide, Atom Egoyan wanted to achieve two goals. Firstly, by appealing to the myth of Ararat as the origin of Armenian nation, Egoyan immediately received the attention and appraisal of the worldwide Armenian population. Secondly, the appearance of Ararat in the title can be considered as a reminder of the injustice and lost lands. By equalizing Ararat and Genocide, one can say that unconsciously, Egoyan extrapolates the Armenian myth of origin onto the Genocide, turning the latter into foundational point of reference for the Armenians (a supposition which is supported by certain dialogs within the film).

Historically the symbolism of Ararat can be divided into three comprising themes: origin of the nation, lost homeland and symbol of Christianity. Thus, Ararat for the characters of the film is closely connected with the feeling of home since it brings them memories of their relatives. Already in scene 6 Edward Saroyan, when talking with his production assistant Martin says:

> Mount Ararat. When I was a boy, my Mother used to tell me this was ours, Even though it was so far away to approach it, to make it belong to who I was…. To who I became. Will this film bring us closer? (Ararat- script, p.4)

In this short phrase one can see that for Edward, Ararat is closely connected with his mother- Genocide survivor. It is his mother that he remembers when he sees a painting of Ararat at the partially constructed set. At the same time, Ararat for Edward is the symbol of “collectivity”- symbol of common origin in Smithian terms. “It was ours”- his mother used to say. Meaning it was
Armenian. But since for Edward being Armenian includes being the Genocide survivor, (like his Mother) Ararat first and for most reminds him of her. This is also obvious when in the same scene he again links it to his mother and says:

This was the mountain my mother never saw again after her family was destroyed (Ararat-script, p.5).

In fact, this victimized link is a very essential element of the whole diasporic community, because what the subsequent generations know of “being Armenian” they largely get from their parents/grandparents (unless they had personal experience of traveling into the region), since they grew up in different countries with the dominant culture different from Armenian. That is why one can say that for many post-genocidal diasporans the two equalities stand mother = Ararat, (which is true for many Armenians, since Ararat is often considered to be the symbolic Mother of Armenians) and Genocide victim = Armenian. It is this second one that I find problematic. This second equation becomes more obvious if one continues through the movie and starts to analyze other scenes with Ararat.

Thus in scene 25: Edward is walking Ani though the studio set on the American mission in Van [besieged Armenian fort post]

Edward: Much of this is based on the descriptions that my mother told me. Ani stops dead in her tracks. On one of the painted backdrops, she sees an image of Mount Ararat. Edward (Cont’d): What is it? Ani: You wouldn’t be able to see Mount Ararat from Van Edward (slightly embarrassed): Well... yes. I felt it would be important Ani: But it is not true Edward: It is true in spirit..... (Ararat- script, p.29)

As the scene goes on Rouben joins them

Edward to Rouben: She has noticed, quite correctly that it would not be seen from Van Rouben: Well, we thought we could stretch things a bit. It’s such an identifiable symbol, and given the moment in history we’re trying to show... Ani: It is something you could justify
Rouben: Sure. Poetic license
Ani: Where do you get those?
Rouben: What?
Ani: Poetic Licenses?
Rouben: Wherever you can (Ararat- script, p.29)

This whole scene is very important for the understanding of the subordination of the Armenian symbols to the genocidal ones. The willingness to relocate Mount Ararat, a symbol of Armenians deeper into what is now Turkey, to sacrifice the truth in order to bring in “symbol of Armenianness” into the battle of Van, is quite explicit. In fact, by bringing Ararat into this scene, the author also clearly makes a reference to the global Armenian Diaspora, he intentionally or not, projects the victimization and at the same time in case of the battle of Van -heroism of self-defense on all Armenians globally. At the same time by bringing Ararat closer to Van the director actually fails to reconnect the two parts of the Armenian nation – Armenians in Armenia and Armenians in the Diaspora. Considering the fact that Ararat is located at the coat of Arms of the Republic of Armenia, the easiness with which the “poetic license” was used is impressive.

What is even more striking however is the fact that in the Genocide movie it was Ararat that was relocated to be closer to “Armenianness” (to be closer to the homelands of the Genocide victims) and not vice versa. Instead of bringing the Genocide victims closer to the symbol of Armenian Republic on the 21st century, the director relocated the symbol of origin to the actual “homeland” of survivors.

This leads to a striking omission of the film-a total absence of a single reference to the contemporary Republic of Armenia. When Raffi in search of his identity travels to modern Turkey to see the lands, the memory of which had forced his father to take part in the Armenian radical movement, he records a voice over to the images recorded on his handheld camera:

Scene 49
Raffi (voiceover):
I am here Mom. Ani. In a dream world, the three of us would be here together.
Dad, you and me. I remember all the stories I used to hear about this place, the
glorious capital of our kingdom. Ancient history. Like the story that Dad was a
freedom fighter, fighting for... return of this. I guess..

Raffi: What am I supposed to feel when I look at these ruins? Do I believe that they’re ravaged by
time, or do I believe that they’ve been willfully destroyed? Am I supposed to feel anger?
Can I ever feel the anger that Dad must have felt when...(Ararat-script, p.62)

Scene 50:
A deserted plain. A ruined church. Scorching heat
Raffi (his voice continuing on the tape): When I see these places, I realize how much we’ve lost.
Not just the land and the lives, but the loss of any way to remember it. There is nothing here
to prove that anything ever happened...(Ararat-script, p.63)

These scenes, shot in historical Armenian lands alongside with the Raffi’s multiple
questions reveal the trauma which is persistent among many in the Diaspora. At the same time the
fact that having traveled to Turkey, Raffi did not visit what actually remained of the homeland,
something that is not only a deserted plain, ruined churches and stones, is stunning. This omission
of any references to contemporary Armenia reveals the deep division among the Armenians as to
their understanding of their homeland. It creates a feeling that Genocide actually accomplished its
goal and exterminated all the Armenians except for the ones that are currently in the Diaspora.
This fatalistic idea that forces one to believe that the Genocide actually succeeded to do what was
set to be its goal, is terrifying especially when it is seen in conjunction with the rhetoric of many
Armenian American scholars. For instance the survivor accounts chapter that is presented in the
book of Donald Miller and Lourna Touryan Miller starts with a shocking phrase: “The genocide of
1915 destroyed a culture that had evolved for three thousand years” (Miller and Touryan Miller,
1999, p.55). The usage of the phrase “DESTROYED a culture” is so victimizing and objectifying
the survivors, who actually have not been destroyed, that it becomes obvious that Ararat with its
references to everything “ruined and destroyed” is in fact the consequence of such beliefs. This line of thought then justifies the relocation of Ararat closer to the homeland of these Armenians since it provides them with the mission of both preservation of their Armenianness and the preservation of the memory about those killed.

At the same time, this scene has a historic reference to the Armenian kingdom of Ani, which gives the sense of historic longevity to those who are given this mission. The same is accomplished in scene 40, when Raffi is telling to the customs officer about the historical “golden age”- glorious victory of Armenians.

Toronto Airport, Customs Station-night
Raffi: They were heroes. What happened in Van in April 1915 was an amazing act of self defense... like the Jews in Warsaw ghetto. We hadn’t done anything like that since we held back the Persians
David: When did you held back the Persians?
Raffi: 451
David: Fifteen hundred years before.
Raffi (slight smile): Like I said we go back

In fact this phrase “we go back” is almost the only historic reference to the long lasting history of Armenians in this movie. In the other scenes, it is the 1915, which determines the “origin”, like in scene 60 when Rouben and Ani discuss Celia’s attempt to destroy the painting of Gorky.

Scene 60:

... Ani: My point is that your are not sickened because people should not do those things. Because they do. They do them all the time. What you’re sickened by is that it was that particular painting. You are sickened because that painting is a repository of our history. It is a sacred code that explains who we are, and how and why we got here (Ararat- script, p.73)

It is this last phrase that strikes one the most, since for Ani - memory of Genocide explains who she is. It is from the Genocide that she counts the history of her people. Of course one can say

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16 At the same time, in case the authors refer particularly to the culture of the Western Armenians, the ones who lived in Anatolia, then may be it is even worth because by doing that they divide the already divided nation on the basis of
that she particularly speaks about the victims, however being a third generation descendant, who in other scenes argues for the right positioning of Ararat, it is more likely that her statement refers to Armenians as a collective ethnic group. If that is the case, then- her son Raffi, looks deeper and seems to have another understanding of Armenianness, then just the Genocide. This however can hardly be substantiated at this point.

Scenes 49 and 50 also reveal the trauma of lost homeland, which is prevalent among the Diaspora. Moreover, for Raffi this trauma has personal dimension to it as well. The place that he visits is both the lost home, since his father sacrificed his family life for it, and at the same time -the symbolic historic homeland of his people.

3.4 Religion, Christianity and Ararat

Apart from the myth of origin, Ararat is also strongly associated with the idea of chosenness of Armenians and the place of Christianity in their identity. The theme of Ararat, Christianity and Noah’s Ark was initially included into the movie. There were two scenes 63 and 64 which originally incorporated Noah’s Ark, but according to Egoyan’s Introduction to the script at the first cut of the film they “seemed to be unnecessary convolution” (Ararat-script, 2002, p.x). The symbol of Ararat was part of the David-Philip-Ali story, where it was used in a somewhat humorous context of explaining to Philip’s son Tony the fact that Noah didn’t take only the female-male couples, but also single animals and possibly “gay animals”. However the two scenes did not become part of the film, possibly due to the sensitivity of both topics – religion and sexual orientation. Originally the role of these scenes was to create a link between all the humankind, since Ararat is somehow a symbol for the rebirth of humanity, independent of the ethnic origin or religion.

regional differences and habits.
Religion has always been a very important element of the Armenian identity. As it has been presented in the historic chapter of this thesis, there are various dilemmas within the religious life of the Armenians in the Diaspora. The controversies between the two Armenian Apostolic churches as well as the existence of the Armenian Protestants and Catholics create divisions within communities. In the film, one can see the images of the priests of the Armenian Apostolic church, however the attention is driven to the American protestant missionary Clarence Ussher, who was providing the assistance to the wounded inside his missionary. The fact that no active role has been given to any clergy from the Armenian Apostolic church might resemble the opposition between the American Protestants and the traditional Armenian church which existed at the beginning of the 20 century, when the American missionaries were actively working to convert the Armenians into Protestantism. Also, since the plot is largely based on the actual diary of Clarence Ussher, authors didn’t feel so free to exercise the poetic license in this case.

3.5 Terrorist vs. Freedom Fighter discourse

Another controversial element in the film is the way characters evaluate the dead father of Raffi. Throughout the film we can hear him being described as both terrorist- mainly by non-Armenians (Celia, customs officer) and as a freedom fighter (Raffi and Ani).

As in scene 22 Raffi and Celia are talking:

Raffi: *He wasn’t a terrorist.*
Celia: *I didn’t say he was*
Raffi: *You said he was a terrorist.*
Celia: *Did I?*
Raffi: *Yeah.*
Celia: *Well I suppose you could see it that way. I mean he was about to assassinate a diplomat...*  
Raffi: *He was a freedom fighter. There is a difference.* (Ararat- script. P.23)
This division is not so clear-cut. In reality there are various segments of the Diaspora, which do not hold a unanimous opinion about the members of ASALA. As Donald Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller present in their interviews with the family members of the arrested ASALA activists, the relatives, together with the most radical segment of the victim diaspora do consider them to be freedom fighters. Millers write:

“It was evident in the interview that Levon’s [terrorist’s/ freedom-fighter’s] grandfather reciprocated his grandson’s commitment to the Armenian cause. Levon said that the days after he was arrested, his own immediate family was in shambles. [just like Ani was when her husband was killed] His grandfather however went to the church and circulated from person to person shaking their hands as if to accept congratulations for his grandson’s heroic act. Levon reflected, “I got the impression from my grandfather, Now I can die’” (Miller, 1991, p.20)

Two elements are essential with regard to this statement. First one is that being a third generation representative of post-genocidal Diaspora, and being exposed directly to the traumatic memories of his grandfather Levon inherited the hatreds without questioning anything, unlike Raffi.

Secondly, the place where the grandfather received the support for his grandson’s “heroic act”- namely the church, gave Levon a sense of being a martyr, who suffered for the right cause. The presence of church here brings us back to the role of religion and institutional framework in the proliferation of the victim identity. It seems as if despite its divisions, the church, was still an important element in the identity construction at the late 1970s - early 1980s.

In general terms, I see this debate over the usage of the word in reference to the people who killed or attempted to assassinate Turkish Diplomats in the eighties as an attempt to portray as many existing opinions to the issue as possible. However the fact that it is largely the non-Armenians who insist on the word terrorist reveals the attempt not to expose the debates existing within the community and to present a solid single Armenian stance.
3.6 The use of Language and Music in the film Ararat

Armenian language has historically been just as important element of the Armenian identity as religion, history, culture and memory of trauma. What has given major pride to Armenians around the world is the fact that the Armenian language uses its own distinct alphabet which was created at the beginning of the fifth century AD by a scholar Mesrop Mashtots and is still being used up to now in its original form with the exception of the few additional letters that were added later.

The use of Armenian language by the characters is quite extensive in both films - the Egoyan’s Ararat and the Saroyan’s Genocide. One can analyze the places where it was used and it shall become obvious that it is mainly inside the family circle. One of the first scenes of the Ararat movie shows a party in Ani’s place, where everyone speaks Armenian. Also, Ani occasionally speaks Armenian with Raffi during their private conversations (see picture 7). Parallel to this, Armenian is used in Genocide film by the mother of Arshile Gorky when she talks to her son and sends him to deliver the message of Clarence Ussher to the western diplomats. In fact it is this conversation in Armenian in my opinion is the strongest in terms of providing the viewer with the self-perception of the Armenians of the beginning of the 20th century. It is this scene that can be identified as a repository of the new post-genocidal Armenian Identity, something that can be observed “in the making” by the audience of the film.

In scene 31 Conversation in Armenian between Young Gorky and his mother Shushan says:

Shushan: If the Turks capture you, you will never give up your faith. You will never forget your mother tongue. If you survive, it will be to tell this story. Of what has happened here. Of what will happen...

Young Gorky: We will win mother
Faith, language and memories – this is what till today determines the Armenian North-American victim Diaspora. Only presently the order has been reversed. In the twenty first century North American Armenian Diaspora, descendants of those who survived Genocide choose memories, language and only then - faith. As I have already shown earlier, since for many members of post-genocidal Diaspora, victim of genocide equals with the Armenianness, it is the Genocide memory that keeps their Armenian identity alive, with the proficiency in Armenian as well as loyalty to Armenian Apostolic church on constant decline.

There is, however, something that allows for a more optimistic view of the role of language within the community. Particularly, it is the fact that Raffi as well as many other characters of the film does speak Armenian. One can see books and posters in Armenian on the walls of Ani’s apartment as well as hear Armenian poems being recited and music being listened during the gatherings.

As for the music, apart from the traditional Armenian instruments such as duduk and zurna, which can be heard throughout the film, there is also a reference made to the contemporary musicians of the Armenian Diaspora. For instance a scene, where Raffi and Celia are making love is accompanied by the music of California based Armenian American band System of the Down.

3.7 Identity portrait of the post-genocidal Diaspora

To summarize the identity that can be derived from the film and from the existing literature, it would be useful to shortly recollect its elements. The image of the post-genocidal Armenian Diaspora includes the elements of the Armenian identity, which have been reshaped due to the traumatic experience of Genocide and its denial. The critical features are the following:

- The post-Genocidal Diaspora is far from being homogenous
Heterogeneity is the result of the historical migration waves that the people belong to as well as the variety of the political and religious affiliations the aspire

Genocide became a symbol of the Armenian collectivity for the victim Diaspora, which unlike politics, church or culture, provides a strong foundational basis for the construction of the Identity

Instead of the ancient Armenian historical narratives or modern Armenian identity constituents, it is the Genocide that is often referred to as the point of origin and reference for the diasporan Armenians

Trauma of Genocide and denial seems to determine the Armenianness for many of the second, third and fourth generation, born in the Diaspora. Genocide memory and accompanying outrage over the Genocide denial by the Turkish state carries a function of the preservation of the diasporan community

Due to the fact that for the majority of the members of post-genocidal Diaspora, the “homeland” remains in Eastern Turkey, there seems to be a somewhat weak emotional link between them and the present-day Republic of Armenia

There are various identities competing within each individual member of Armenian victim Diaspora

There is an observable presence of ongoing intergenerational tensions over the place the Genocide memory should be given in the identities of the fourth generation of the Diasporans. At the same time, each generation of the survivor descendants has incorporated the Genocide trauma into its collective identity.
Chapter 4: Implications of victim Identity

The above-described community profile has very serious implications for both individuals, the overall political situation within the various Armenian Diasporas and for the Republic of Armenia.

First of all in my opinion, Ararat not only portrays the effects that the Genocide and its denial have had on the three generations of post-genocidal Armenian diasporic community members, but in fact it *cultivates victimhood*.

Of course some may ask how else one can reach the goal of recognition if not portraying the clear and blatantly distinguishable characters- villains and victims. I am confident that it is possible to present the history without villainizing the entire population. Just as the Jews did not blame the whole German nation, but only the direct perpetrators for the Holocaust, Armenians should also redefine the enemy, which might create a favourable to the recognition of the Genocide public opinion among the contemporary young generation of Turks, all of whom had absolutely no participatory role in the Genocide that was conducted 91 years ago. Thus I agree with one of the survivors who described his opinion about the modern Turks in the following words: “They were not the cause of it. They were not born yet. They did not know what was going on. Why should I hate them?” (in Miller, 1999, p.165).

In fact, had Egoyan or Saroyan introduced a single slightly positive Turkish character into the film, as it has been presented in the various memoirs, where people testified of getting occasional assistance from Turks, the film would have not been so simplistic and victimising as it is. As some survivors make a distinction between the Turks who were committing the Genocide and the ones who in some cases saved Armenian lives, Egoyan should have done the same.
More than that, I consider cultivated victimhood unhealthy for the individuals since every victimisation includes the image of the enemy, to whom as Raffi admitted he must feel hatred. Living with the hatreds as well as fears only extends the trauma to the following generations. Another accompanying argument is that it cultivates both feeling of guilt among those that survived and live in Diaspora and feeling of helplessness. This latter one is very much opposed by today’s youth and might create a precondition for the weakening of the identification with the helpless and silent victims by the following generations. Thus had Egoyan introduced an individual heroic Armenian character (besides the volunteers who were protecting the missionary), someone who did not just obediently march in the desert but who took his life into his own hands and thanks to that survived, the film would not have been so depressing and fatalistic in its nature. I am not referring to rhetoric of the revenge, but the path of resurrection and living despite the horrors and trauma, despite the memories and pain.

For the nation as a whole passive victim identity that was portrayed in the film also has negative implications. By transmitting that kind of identity to its younger generations, the older generation also transmits the message of passive abiding to the fate and conditions. In fact here one can find proximity with the Jewish victimisation.

Zionist condemnation of and the reaction to the long history of helplessness of Jews has been presented in various films, where the resistance of the character at any price was considered to represent Holocaust “survivor’s conversion into a New Jew” (Ne’eman, 2005, p.24). Although I shall not argue for the need to dissolve the diasporic identity, and form a “New Armenian” identity as many Zionists did when they talked about the Jewish identity of Diaspora, it might still be true that a revision of the defining features of the Diasporic identity would be desirable.
Implication number two follows from the first one, since it argues for the need of the positive colouring of the identity of the post-genocidal Diaspora. This is essential since identity cannot and should not be constructed on the negative ground. Surprisingly, although many scholars that have been mentioned in this paper notice the prevalence of the Genocide as a symbol of the collectiveness and Armenianness, no one seems to consider it a negative tendency. I do.

It is my strong belief that by constructing identity on the Genocide memory only, the community creates an open door to inevitable assimilation. This is especially true for the communities that are located in rather friendly and hospitable culturally and religiously close host country. In other situations, when the host country’s culture contradicts that of the community, it might take a longer time for this door to be used. Nevertheless, in any case, the forth generation of the diaspora members as well as the following generations will be less likely to associate themselves with an ethnic group which defines itself as a victim.

I see two sources of the more positive and what is even more important – contemporary non-victimised Armenian identity. The first source is the new economically driven immigrants, what Armstrong (1976) calls “proletarian” Diaspora. In the Armenian context I am talking about the immigrants of the 1990-2006 from Armenia, who speak Armenian, are familiar with the contemporary Armenian realities, have the knowledge of the Armenian contemporary culture and its developments. This is what Panossian calls Post-Soviet Diaspora (Panossian, 2003, p.142). The problem here, however, is the fact that there is still an on-going tension between these two important parts of the Armenian nation, which is determined largely by the presence of the 70 year Soviet experience that had its effect on the Eastern Armenians that comprise the new Immigration wave. As Cohen argues, the ideological divide between the cold war enemies – USA and Soviet Union had its impact on the relationships between these two parts of Armenian ethnic group. He
writes: “despite the evidence of the rebuilding of Soviet Armenia, the diasporic Armenian communities [meaning victim Diaspora] remained strongly divided” (Cohen, 1997, p. 53). This negative attitude to everything Soviet was set aside only in the 1980s following the earthquake in Soviet Armenia, when millions of dollars from the Diaspora were poured into the country and later when the independence of the Armenia was proclaimed (Cohen, 1997, p. 54). However although it was set aside there is still visible divide between two often-competing Armenian identities. This however can be solved once the new migrants settle down and hopefully join the existing community institutions. For that to happen, a certain degree of openness and tolerance on the side of both communities is desirable.

The second, better choice in my opinion is to draw on the new positive identity from the developing Armenian Republic. There is an immediate need to connect all parts of the Armenian Diaspora with the “existing homeland”, because only something that is alive and developing can produce a new and changing identity. Of course I am not trying to say that the Armenian identity of the Diaspora is less true then the identity of the Armenians in Armenia. However I do believe that Armenians in Armenia are exposed to the various cultural developments and identity debates on a daily basis, whereas the Armenianness for the Diasporans has certain degree of stillness, which brings along various taboos and old-fashioned (often perceived as the real) Armenian traditions, just as the stones and ruined churches, which Raffi visited. I do think that these historic places with the scars of trauma are not capable of providing a sense of thriving Armenian identity besides the victim one. Thus the need to bring Diaspora closer to Armenia and not vice versa is essential, since it is the existing Armenian statehood that largely carries the function of the developing the culture and preserving the traditions of the preceding generations.
However, this is possible only if there exists a deliberate and accurate Armenia-Diaspora policy, which includes all the segments of Armenian ethnic communities, which is unfortunately not the case right now.

Despite the fact that there have been two Armenia-Diaspora Conferences during which specially organized committees discussed issues dealing with politics, education, economy and culture, the result of these talks is largely symbolic. Both of the conferences – the one of 1999 and the one of 2002 demonstrated the interest of the then new president of the Armenia Robert Kocharian in the establishment of the links between the two parts of the Armenian nation – Armenia and Diaspora. Nevertheless, after the second conference most of the Diaspora representatives have been quite critical of the Armenian authorities, which continue to be quite corrupt and bureaucratic (Petrosian, June 7th, 2002). Thus other actors should engage in the establishing of the predominantly cultural (linguistic, artistic and educational) ties between the Diaspora and Armenia, waiting until the developments in the country will lead to a more constructive political and economic cooperation. What is most important is the establishment of the links of any kind since it will allow for an exchange of information, ideas and enrichment of the identities of the both sides, which in my view could be a way to resurrect the victimized Armenianness that is prevalent in post-Genocidal Diaspora.

This need for a constructive dialog brings me to the third implication where I suppose that victim identity, as it is enforced by, not solely but largely, the Victim Diaspora is an impediment to the building up of the relationships in the region.

Of course I am not trying to say that Genocide recognition is out of the Armenia’s interests, because it one of the key priorities (but only one). I believe that for a country that is struggling with

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17 I am not saying that the Armenian identity of victim diaspora is false, but it is its highlighted accent on the Genocide, that I find problematic.
on going emigration due to economic hardships, economic and political wellbeing, which includes the productive relationships with its neighbours, is an essential part of the immediate agenda.

Being so far away from the region, the North American Diaspora does not seem to entirely understand that it might be in the interests of the Armenia to have normal economic relationships with Turkey, its neighbour. In fact it is in the interests of both countries to establish normal economic and politic relationships. Turkey is interested in the development of its relationships with Armenia since it would give access to its goods to the Republics of Central Asia. At the same time for Armenia, Turkey is the country that would provide it with access to the Western Europe through its sea ports (Masih and Krikorian, 1999, p.98)

Although I remember that it was not the Genocide issue but the Nagornyy- Karabakh conflict that was the motive for Turkey’s decision to close the border with Armenia, it is also true that occasional territorial claims (for the return of historical Armenian lands) that are voiced by some radical members of the Diaspora play its role in the ongoing tensions. By saying this in no way do I intend to say that the Diasporan Armenians should stop any claims for the recognition of the Genocide, the point that I intend to make is the need for more strategic and “smart campaigning” which does not disregard the interests of the Republic of Armenia.

Of course a change in the relationships between the two countries requires efforts and desire of both, so I would call for constructive dialog which would include both sides. For that to be possible, another conflict should be tackled first – Nagornyy- Karabakh. However, since it is not the focus of the paper, I shall not plunge into the one going debate and controversies.
Conclusions

As a result of this analysis, what became obvious is the fact that the film Ararat, although a product of a particular director Atom Egoyan, can also be looked at as a creation of a particular community which it represents.

The analysis of the historical waves of the immigration as well as the look into the institutional characteristics and political and religious rivalries in fact provided an extensive basis for the analysis, which facilitated the deeper and more conscious understanding of the film.

It became obvious that the historical conditions had a great influence on the shaping of the North American post-genocidal Armenian Diaspora. It was the on going influx of the immigrants in the years preceding the Genocide as well as the years after it that turned the post-genocidal Diaspora into a multicolored and multi-cultural entity with its own structural and ideational volatility. Despite the explosive nature of the community that was formed, it was the memory of collective trauma of the Genocide that permitted the solidification of the group around the common cause of recognition of the Genocide. One can even argue that if it hadn’t been for the perseverance of Genocide trauma and its transmission to the following generations, in the situation of the ideological rivalries, the community would not have become as affluent and influential as it presently is.

However this proliferation of Genocide memory and its effect on the lives of the 4th generation of the survivor descendants should not be considered a positive one. Although in fact Genocide memory keeps the community unified over a greater cause, it also has negative effects in both short and long-time perspectives.

As the multiple identities of the film characters showed, despite the fact that each generation had its own way of coping with the trauma, Genocide has had and still has major
influence on all of them. Film analysis revealed the subordinated nature of the Armenian symbols, which are only perceived by different generations through the narratives of the survivors of the Genocide. Due to the nature of the diasporic experience, the geographical distance from what I would call a “core of a nation”, the linkage to its symbols is carried out by means of the generational transmission. In the case of the post-genocidal Diaspora its founding generation had transmitted these symbols, if I could say “in a package” with the Genocide memories, the latter being more tragic and horrifying and thus explicit and more dominating in their nature. This domination of trauma in the self-image, in my estimation is detrimental to the preservation of national Armenian symbols as part of the identity of the younger Diasporans.

The reference to the homeland in the film that does not include modern Armenia with its culture developing in the environment of Armenian statehood, reveals the divided identity of the Armenians in the Post-Genocidal Diaspora and explains the weakness of the links of these communities with the new wave of the Armenian immigrants from Armenia of the 1990-2006. Although, I would not claim that there is indifference toward the Armenian state among the post-genocidal Diaspora in real life, still, absence of references to Armenian Republic in the film could be a signal of such an attitude, which is present among some (hopefully not many) Armenians in Diaspora.

Genocide is established as a point of origin for the post-Genocidal Diaspora, which is done by the demarcation of the history into the pre-1915 and post 1915. In this case, by seeing Genocide as the only point of reference for the Armenians of Diaspora, one disregards the largest history of the Armenians as an ethnic group, together with its ancient culture, language and religion. Unfortunately this is what many researchers see happening among the Diaspora members where such symbols of Armenian ethnic group as Armenian language, its unique church and culture are
loosing there prevalent place as the identity construction blocks, leaving the Genocide central status in the self-image of the diasporans.

Additionally, the fact that Genocide is constantly reconstructed in the identity of each of the following generations affects the views of the Diaspora over the current political conflict around Nagornyy Karabakh. As Razmik Panossian said the struggle over Karabakh is redefined as continued battle between the Christian Armenians and Muslim “Turks”, a battle that questions “who was there first, and therefore has a right to the land, Armenians or Azerbaijani”, as a “perennial struggle against a destructive race” or “a continuation of genocidal policies from 1915 to expel Armenian from their historic lands” (Panossian, 2002, p.139). As it becomes obvious from these various interpretations of the on-going conflict, all of them are based on the opposition of the victim - evil, where Armenians always end up as victims. One can even say that this victimization is projected at the Armenian state. Moreover, the link between the modern Armenia and Diaspora is also victimized in the wake of the conflict, but this time what might seem like a different conflict is in fact considered by some as the continuation of the trauma. Having understood these discourses which are present among the diasporans it is than easy to understand diaspora’s support for the people of Karabakh, who are viewed as going through the same tragedy that survivors of the Genocide had to go through.

With the Ararat film being presented to public in 2002-87 years after the Genocide, it is obvious that Genocide is still causing pain to the Armenians, not only in Diaspora. But for the ones whose fate it determined, the preservation of this memory as well as the fight for the recognition gives the feeling of a nation which is joined by a “collective belief of origin”, different from the origin of the others. I see this as both positive and negative element. What is positive is the fact that it preserves the solidity of the community, what is negative is that it joins the community around
common trauma, instead of something more positive. By doing so, it creates a threat of the white genocide, when youth, which does not usually like to be victimized, might choose to abstain from the “grieving association” that Armenian Diaspora seems to look like.

To avoid white genocide, I would urge for the establishment of the more intense cultural, educational and scientific relationships between the modern state of Armenia and all the diasporic communities, which would give these communities a sense of the contemporary Armenia and allow them to redefine the notion of symbolic “homeland”, from the small village in Anatolia to a modern and developing state of Armenians. This however requires the actions on both sides- Diaspora and Armenia, which is unfortunately not the case presently.

As Egoyan showed in the film, that only after his visit to Anatolia, Raffi partially reconciled with his identity, I argue that had he visited the country that is on the other side of Ararat, he might have reconciled with it more fully. Had it been included into the film, I believe that is something that would show to the Diaspora that the Genocide did not achieve its goal, unlike many in the post-genocidal Diaspora seem to claim.

The ideas and conclusions that are presented in this thesis can be well elaborated further since they provide a great source for further intellectual exercise and empirical work. One of the further elaborations of the present academic paper could be testing the other features of the Diaspora presence in such spheres as art, music, science, and politics. This would allow the measuring of the Diaspora influence on the everyday life of the Armenia, supporting or negating my perception of the growing influence of the various diasporic groups on the Armenian state.

An anthropological work could also be effectively employed to further the research of the community in question and compare the features of the identity of its members with the features of the Armenian self- perception in either Armenia or other Diasporic communities. This would
allow for a deeper qualitative analysis which could be effectively used for the creation of the Armenia- Diaspora policy by highlighting the features of identity that need more attention and directed measures in order to survive in the conditions of diaspora.

Present thesis could also be developed further by comparing film Ararat with the films devoted to the Holocaust. Such comparative study might help in the understanding of the role of trauma for the ethnic groups in Diasporic setting.

All the above mentioned areas deserve further research since they can be very useful in portraying the nature of the diasporic identity, which in its turn determines the relations of the community with both host state and the “homeland”. It is my strong conviction that only after general public and state officials understand the inside discourses and identities of such communities can one hope for a more thought - through state policy regarding the minority groups within the state as well as with regard to the state’s diasporas abroad. The need for such policies in the twenty first-century Europe or North America is definitely vital.

18 This is what actually many young diasporans do- travel to Republic of Armenia in search if the Armenian identity.
APPENDIXES

**Picture 1:** Edward Saroyan (played by Charles Aznavour) in the centre
Ruben, screenwriter (played by Eric Bogosian) to the left of Saroyan
Martin Harcourt, actor playing Clarence Ussher (played by Bruce Greenwood)
to the right of Saroyan

**Picture 2:** Raffî (played by David Alpay)
Appendix (page 2)

Picture 3: Raffi and Celia (played by Marie-Josee Croze)

Picture 4: Ani (played by Arsinee Khanjian)
Appendix (page 3)

Picture 5: Customs officer David (played by Christopher Plummer)

Picture 6: Ali, actor playing Jevdet Bey (played by Elias Koteas)
Picture 7: Private conversation between mother and son

Picture 8 (Gorky and his mother marching through the desert)
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