

***Speaking to One Another:  
Personal Memories of the Past  
in Armenia and Turkey***

*Wish they hadn't left*

LEYLA NEYZI

*Whom to forgive? What to forgive?*

HRANUSH KHARATYAN-ARAQELYAN

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“Adult Education and Oral History Contributing  
to Armenian-Turkish Reconciliation”



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## Foreword

The project “Adult Education and Oral History: Contributing to Armenian-Turkish Reconciliation” was launched in August 2009 by the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association (dvv international) in partnership with Anadolu Kültür and Armenian Centre for Ethnological Studies “Hazarashen”, with the financial support of the German Foreign Office. The main objective of the project was to contribute to the reconciliation process in this region by initiating an open dialogue through professional oral history research.

This project is an extension of the efforts of *dvv international* in one of its main spheres of work – adult education – in dealing with the past and sensitive issues in recent history. For more than fifteen years, *dvv international* has been engaged in contemporary witness and reconciliation work, as well as oral history as a means to deal with the recent past. This is how the *dvv international* History Network, which includes a number of successful projects in various regions, was created.

In Russia, the project was mainly concerned with the reconciliation between former soldiers of the German armed forces and the Red Army. In South Eastern Europe the focus was on interactive methods of teaching and learning about the recent past; one of the methods used being oral history ([www.historyproject.dvvinternational.org](http://www.historyproject.dvvinternational.org)). In Uzbekistan, methods associated with contemporary witness work (world café, biographical method, interviews with contemporary witnesses) from the projects in the Russian Federation were adapted and used for the processing of the Soviet past in Central Asia. The Uzbek *dvv international* project, which took place for the fifth time last year in Tashkent, is part of the project series “History and Identity” initiated by *dvv international* in cooperation with DAAD, FES, GI and the German Embassy ([www.istoriya.uz](http://www.istoriya.uz)). The goal is to contribute to successful awareness raising by bringing multiple perspectives about the past to the forefront.

In Armenia, an Armenian-Turkish workshop was held for the first time on the topic of Oral History titled *History and Identity - Building Bridges for Dialogue and Understanding* in October 2008. Civil society representatives, historians, anthropologists and oral historians from both countries participated in the workshop. The concept for the current project was developed at that meeting and we are now pleased to share one of its results.

We would like to express our gratitude to Leyla Neyzi and Hranush Kharatyan-Araqelyan, the main scientists from the two countries, the two partner organizations Anadolu Kültür and the Armenian Centre for Ethnological Studies “Hazarashen” from Turkey and Armenia respectively, the German Academic

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*Matthias Klingenberg, Vanya Ivanova and Nazaret Nazaretyan  
dvu international team*

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Many individuals contributed to the project by attending the workshops we organized in Turkey and Armenia. We would like to thank Anush Hovhannisyan from the Institute of Oriental Studies, Armenian National Academy of Sciences; Lusine Kharatyan and Gayane Shagoyan, from the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Armenian National Academy of Sciences; Mikayel Zolyan from Yerevan State Linguistic University after V. Brusov; Samvel Karabekyan from Yerevan State University; Christina Koulouri from the University of the Peloponnese; Günay Göksu Özdoğan from Marmara University and Nazan Maksudyan from Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, for their participation and intellectual support. The students from Armenia and Turkey who participated in the camp in Dilijan, Armenia were an integral part of the project and the research process. We would like to thank Victoria Asatryan, Anna Maria Aslanoğlu, Lusine Avagyan, Elif Ege, Mariam Grigoryan, Seda Grigoryan, Sevak Harutyunyan, Nane Khachatryan, Avedis Kheshishyan, İsmail Keskin, Nora Mildanoğlu, Nayat Muratyan, Sait Öztürk, Anna Poghosyan, Mehmet Polatoğlu, Mühdan Sağlam, Hasmik Sahakyan, Özgür Taşkaya, Norayr Yerznkyan and Dilan Yıldırım. Attaching high importance to their participation in the student camp, we appreciate also their contribution to the process of fieldwork.

We carried out the research in Turkey by mobilizing a group of highly committed assistants and students. Leyla Neyzi would like to express her gratitude to her assistants Ezgi Güner, Haydar Darıcı and Sibel Maksudyan for their hard work in every stage of the project, their intellectual and moral support, and the pleasure of their company. Ezgi Güner and Haydar Darıcı conducted interviews and contributed to the writing of the text; Sibel Maksudyan took all the photographs, and contributed to the book design. Many students, including those who took the course on Oral History at Sabancı University during Fall 2009, contributed significantly to the research. Leyla Neyzi would like to thank Şeyma Afacan, Ramazan

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The authors are also deeply grateful to all the interviewees who agreed to narrate their lives, voluntarily and readily answered the questions of the researchers and generously opened their homes to us.

## INTRODUCTION

# Speaking to One Another: Personal Memories of the Past in Armenia and Turkey

This book is the product of the research project, “Adult Education and Oral History Contributing to Armenian-Turkish Reconciliation” conducted with the support of dvv international (Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association) between August 2009 and February 2010 and financed by the German Federal Foreign Office. Local project partners in Turkey and Armenia were Anadolu Kültür; a local NGO working in the sphere of culture and the arts, and the Center for Ethnological Studies “Hazarashen” respectively. The main aim of the project is to build bridges between Turkish and Armenian societies through adult education, intercultural exchange and oral history research.

The activities of the project included a student camp in Dilijan, Armenia during 8-14 October 2009, where ten university students from Armenia and ten university students from Turkey were trained in oral history. Between October 2009 and February 2010, a research team directed by Professor Hranush Kharatyan-Araqelyan from the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Armenian National Academy of Sciences, Yerevan conducted oral history research in Armenia. During the same period, a research team directed by Professor Leyla Neyzi from Sabancı University, Istanbul conducted oral history research in Turkey. University students took an active role in the research process in each country.

Oral history is a relatively new and increasingly recognized research methodology in Armenia and Turkey. Oral historians study how ordinary individuals narrate historical events as a means of making sense of the past in the present. In remembering the past, we make use of multiple sources: our own experiences and memories, as well as other sources such as postmemory (memories transmitted by older generations), history and the media.

In this research, individuals in Turkey and Armenia from diverse backgrounds and regions were interviewed in order to record how they remembered and reconstructed recent history. One of the aims of the project was to investigate postmemory: how did individuals recount events they themselves did not experience but which were transmitted to them by older generations? While the study aimed at investigating memories of the Armenian experience in Turkey in particular, the researchers conducted open-ended life history interviews which allowed interviewees to construct their own narratives and actively engage in setting the research agenda. The deliberate choice to approach subjects without a pre-set agenda was particularly important given the political sensitivity of the subject and the limited range of discussion of this complex subject in the public sphere, especially the media. Our goal was to simply listen to ordinary individuals and to investigate how they subjectively experienced, remembered, narrated and interpreted this painful history.

The main audience of this book is ordinary people in Armenia and Turkey. The book is published in Turkish, Armenian and English, in language that is accessible to a wide audience. Throughout the book, we have attempted to narrate our interviewees' life stories and interpretations in their own words to the extent possible. The book is divided into two parts. The first part, authored by Leyla Neyzi, presents the findings of the research in Turkey ("Wish they hadn't left": The Burden of Armenian Memory in Turkey), where over one hundred oral history interviews were conducted throughout the country. In this book, the findings of the research in Turkey are presented in the form of short essays on thirteen individuals, accompanied by photographs. The second section, authored by Hranush Kharatyan-Araqelyan, presents the findings of the research in Armenia ("Whom to Forgive? What to Forgive?"). The findings in Armenia are presented in the form of selections from transcriptions of oral history interviews with 35 individuals.

What is the significance of memory in Armenian and Turkish societies? In both, though in different ways, the past continues to weigh heavily on the present. For Armenian society, the memory of 1915 concerns largely the collective memory of violence as reflected in the narratives of individuals. In Turkey, there is much heterogeneity in ways of remembering (and forgetting) between different communities, as well as differences and contradictions between public discourse, local memory and individual (post)memory. The destinies of both societies have changed radically as a result of their past. Much about the past has been silenced in various ways, though these silences have been challenged substantially in recent years. In both countries, it is imperative to study how the past is viewed in the present, as the past, especially through its reconstruction through memory and postmemory, has great purchase on the present and the future. But there is yet little comparative research and dialogue between the two countries concerning memory. Given the interconnected history of the two countries, and the fact that Turkey and Armenia are in the process of coming to terms with a complex, conflicted and intertwined past, it is evident that such research can contribute significantly to processes of democratization and reconciliation. Coming to terms with the past on the one hand, and achieving forgiveness on the other, can be a means towards a peaceful future for these two neighbors.

Oral history methodology, with its focus on ordinary people as the agents of history, collaboration and creative engagement between researcher and interviewee, and its use of memory as a means of making sense of the past in the present, allows for a fresh perspective on the past. Oral history narratives are based on spoken words and ideas, as well as on emotions which mark bodies from generation to generation and which may be unspeakable or inexpressible. Memories possess a distinct authenticity in comparison to historical events: they represent the reality or truth of the individual who remembers her past. Just as the opening up of borders makes the physical mingling of peoples possible, placing stories side by side in this book will make it possible for people in Turkey and Armenia to engage in conversation, to speak with and to listen to one another. We hope that this project will contribute to research as well as dialogue between the two societies concerning the past, the present and the future. For us, as social scientists from Armenia and Turkey, taking part in the creative process this project entails constituted exactly such an exercise in speaking, listening, and dialogue.

***“Wish they hadn’t left”:  
The Burden of Armenian Memory  
in Turkey***

LEYLA NEYZI





## **“Wish they hadn’t left”: The Burden of Armenian Memory in Turkey**

One of our Turkish interviewees, in speaking about Armenians, made the statement quoted above: “Wish they hadn’t left.” This phrase is significant as it signals a nostalgic view of the past, whereby a lost society of harmonious relations between Muslims and Christians is (re)imagined. This discourse, which romanticizes the past, also conveniently elides the tricky question of agency by implying that the sizeable population of Christians of this land “left” of their own accord.

Nevertheless, this discourse of nostalgia, which emerged in the 1990s, may be viewed as a hesitant attempt to speak of a past suppressed in the public sphere for decades. Despite the public and official silence, our research demonstrates that individuals did transmit their experiences from generation to generation, and that personal and local memory of Armenians is alive and well in Turkey. At the same time, we choose to remember the past in terms of its significance for the present. Thus, in addition to what it might tell us about the historical experience of previous generations, the burden of Armenian memory, which continues to weigh upon the peoples of Turkey, can be regarded as a metaphor for our society’s yet unresolved and schizoid relationship with the recent past, with modernity, and with national identity.

Established in 1923, the aim of the Turkish Republic was to build a new, modern nation. The discourse of modernity was extremely successful in a society largely made up of immigrants who hoped to improve the lives of their progeny. The Republic constituted a new beginning, and the generation of “Atatürk’s children” was taught to focus on the future. Yet Turkish national identity also necessitated a new history. This history, as narrated in textbooks, focused not on the recent past, associated with defeats, violence, and trauma, but on the origins of Turks in Central Asia. Being Turkish implied speaking the Turkish language, being of Sunni Muslim origin, and identifying with Turkish ethnicity. Given the multilingual, multiethnic, and multireligious character of Ottoman society, the insistence on a singular national identity required many to either deny their differences altogether or to maintain a divide between their public and private selves. This was the case for Muslim communities that didn’t quite fit the mold, such as the Kurds and the Alevis. On the other hand, Christians (and Jews), who constituted an integral part of Ottoman society, were excluded. History textbooks made little reference to them, except as “others” who posed a potential threat to the Turkish nation.

The degree to which individuals internalized national history through the educational system and the media depended on their access to these as well as to other, alternate sources of knowledge about the past. While the attempt to create a new, modern Turkish identity did produce a powerful middle-class

that embraced Turkish nationalism, the Kemalist elite was continually challenged by oppositional movements. These challenges were invariably suppressed violently. Following global trends, the strongest challenge to the Turkish nation state emerged in the 1980s, as conflicts based upon identity politics threatened the fragile basis of national identity.

Today, the stability of the nation-state necessitates bold moves in the direction of further democratization, including a reevaluation of recent history as a means of creating a new contract between citizens and the state. One way of reevaluating recent history is to challenge the disjuncture between public/national history and local and personal memory.

The political upheavals of the last thirty years since the military coup of 1980, including the secularist/Islamist conflict and the military conflict between the Turkish army and the Kurdish Workers' Party PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*), have resulted in widespread public debate on history and national identity. Revisionist histories challenge national(ist) history, and there is growing interest in the experiences of minorities. Individuals and communities have themselves begun to explore alternative histories and identities, often through recourse to memory. The persistence of personal and local memories of recent historical events facilitates access to different, if not contradictory and conflicting accounts of the past.

The burden of Armenian memory exemplifies Turkey's schizoid relationship to the past in which public silence or denial coexists with what is largely an "open secret." There are few communities and localities in Turkey not affect-

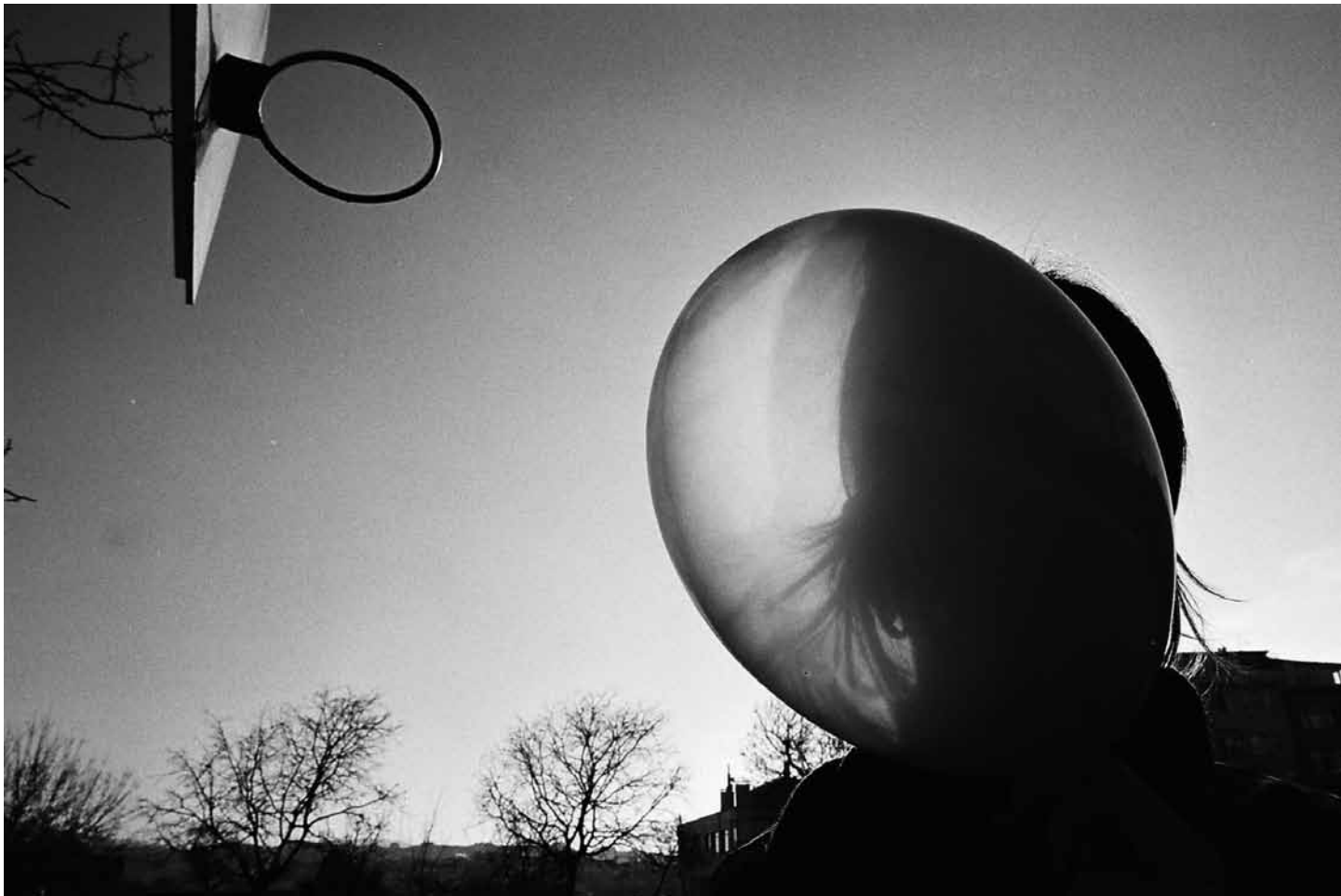




ed by 1915 and where memories of Armenians do not exist. While the debate in the media focuses largely on the international political dimensions, research on the effects of this event on individuals and localities within Turkey remains neglected. Why is recent history debated so passionately in Turkey today? How do individuals and communities construct recent history? How have the events of 1915 been transmitted from generation to generation? How do we account for contradictions and silences in memory narratives? Why are memories of Armenians so significant in the construction of national and other identities in Turkey? These are some of the questions we posed in this research.

### *Methodology*

Given the sensitivity of the subject of Armenians in Turkey, a major challenge was to find potential interviewees from all walks of life who would be willing to talk about the issue and assent to being recorded. At the same time, we didn't want to delimit the topic of the interviews in such a way as to narrow the range of possibilities of discussion. Our main strategy was to access interviewees through trusted personal contacts. For example, each interviewer searched for acquaintances in her personal network.



Through these networks, we were able to conduct interviews with ordinary people from different ethnic, religious and class backgrounds and from different genders and generations. Our own identities, and our personal relationship with the interviewees played an important role in the outcome and success of the interviews. We asked our interviewees to tell us what they knew about their family history, and the history of their place of origin. Constructed as open-ended conversations, the interviews were exercises in active listening rather than question-and-answer sessions. Our goal was to create an atmosphere which would make it possible for interviewees to structure their own narratives.

We conducted interviews in regions where Armenians had a strong presence in the past. We worked in Istanbul, Central Anatolia, Eastern Anatolia and Southeastern Anatolia in particular. Our interviewees were diverse in terms of region, class, generation and gender, including individuals who identified as Turkish, Kurdish and Armenian. Over one hundred interviews were recorded, transcribed and archived for this project.

In this section, we present the stories of thirteen individuals based on their own accounts. While each individual is unique, we tried to represent the different kinds of people we interviewed, as well as the main emerging themes in the narratives to the extent possible. As some of our interviewees demanded anonymity, we use pseudonyms throughout. Similarly, the photographs that accompany the text are not portraits in the conventional sense but rather attempts to evoke the spirit of each interview.

## *Themes*

In our interviews, we asked individuals to speak about their family history, including their place of origin. These accounts include material culled from a variety of sources, such as their own memories, memories transmitted by previous generations (postmemory), history, and the media. The narratives include detailed information about the lives of the interviewees, their parents, grandparents and sometimes great grandparents. This makes it possible to analyze the way interviewees reconstruct the recent past.

As arguably one of the most traumatic events in the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century Anatolia, 1915 was mentioned by most interviewees even before we introduced the subject ourselves. In addition to its catastrophic outcome for the Armenian population, 1915 had a tremendous impact on the spaces/places and peoples of Anatolia, the effects of which can still be felt today. Remnants of material culture such as crumbling churches, homes, cemeteries, innumerable objects such as copper trays, sewing machines or pianos are everywhere. Local stories also keep the memory of Armenians alive. Stories about particular individuals, local events involving Armenians, and buried Armenian treasures are transmitted from generation to generation. Armenians even haunt the living in their dreams and through the curses and spells they are said to have placed upon the landscape of their homeland.

1915 tends to be represented by interviewees as a distinct rupture. They described the relationship between Christians and Muslims prior to 1915 as one of peaceful coexistence. Narrators emphasized the shared culture and intertwined lives of Muslims and Christians with vivid anecdotes from everyday life. Muslims told detailed stories about individual Armenians their families had known. Often, these were neighbors or employers, such as master craftsmen [usta].

The language used to describe the events that led to the destruction of the Armenian population of Anatolia is particularly revealing. The many terms used by interviewees include mobilization [seferberlik], war [savaş], conflict [çatışma], 1915, the events of 1915 [1915 olayları], deportation [tehcir, kâfle], to leave or die [gitmek], massacre [katliam, kıyım, kırım, kesim], genocide [soykırım]. The terms used give an indication of how interviewees choose to represent this event. As an Armenian narrator put it when using the term *seferberlik* in speaking to a Muslim interviewer, “Let’s use softer terms not to cause ourselves more pain.”

Although each story is unique, comparing the narratives of individuals belonging to different communities makes it possible to delineate some underlying themes. Our interviews with Armenians suggest that the murder of Hrant Dink was a significant milestone which transformed relations within the Armenian community, as well as between the community and Turkish society. The murder of Hrant Dink and the ensuing public reaction encouraged Armenians to speak publicly about 1915. This included narrating family histories as well as speaking about the responsibility of the Ottoman state. Armenian interviewees underscored the shared culture, attachment to the land and close relationship of Muslims and Armenians, the protection of Armenians by local Muslims during 1915, and the need to acknowledge the past in order to live together as equal citizens in a democratic society.

Armenian interviewees also described what it meant to be raised within a mostly destroyed minority community whose instincts are largely defensive. They spoke of their lack of knowledge on family history due to the destruction and fragmentation of families and to the fact that 1915 was sometimes silenced within families to protect the next generation. They discussed how living as a fearful minority in Turkish/Muslim society affects the perception, representation and public performance of Armenian identity. They reflected bitterly on the fact that they are viewed as outsiders by Muslims, who themselves are often of immigrant descent. Many spoke of the symbolic role of names, discrimination in the military and civil service, and the deleterious effects of international political conflicts on Armenians living in Turkey. While Armenians reproduce their community through in-marriage and education in the Armenian language in community schools, fewer and fewer young people attend community schools, use their own language, or marry Armenians, and many immigrate abroad. It is possible that the definition of being an Armenian in Turkey is changing, as the younger generation is increasingly more comfortable publicly affirming their Armenian heritage while becoming more integrated into Turkish society.

The fact that the Kurdish political leadership has acknowledged the role of the Kurds in 1915 has had an important effect on the public discourse of Kurds, particularly among the younger generation. Many interviewees openly discussed the responsibility of Kurds in the violence unleashed against Armenians in

southeastern Turkey. These actions were explained with reference to state policy, the influence of religious leaders, and hopes of material gain. Kurdish interviewees recounted anecdotes concerning violence against Armenians, the seizure of Armenian property and the abduction of Armenian women and children. Interviews show how widespread the practice of incorporating Armenian children into Muslim families was. Narratives demonstrate the exploitative nature of these relationships as women were taken by force to provide sexual services, labor and children.

Today, Kurdish experience of suffering due to state violence and forced migration has led many Kurds to identify with Armenian suffering in the past. A Kurdish term, *şiv u poşiv*, suggests that if Armenians could be said to have been devoured as a “first meal,” the Kurds constituted the next one. As families and individuals of Armenian descent tend to be remembered in Anatolia, stories of Armenian brides can be traced through the accounts of the next generations, including their descendants. In fact, one of the means by which Armenian women were able to express their agency was through transmitting their stories to their Muslim children. Similarly, as many homes, fields and even businesses belonging to Armenians remain known, their stories can also be traced over generations. The stories of women and property show that 1915 can hardly be relegated to the past, and remains very much part and parcel of everyday life in contemporary Turkey.

What is particularly intriguing about the narratives of Muslims is the tendency, particularly on the younger generation’s part, to rediscover and identify with the Armenians in their own families. This desire to identify with the victim may be viewed as an outcome of contemporary identity politics and a means of dealing with guilt in a society that refuses to publicly acknowledge responsibility. As a young Kurdish interviewee put it, representing oneself as a victim might be viewed as a source of power in this context.

Narratives of Turks tend to express the contradictions between national history and local memory most clearly. Turkish interviewees also emphasized the close relations between Muslims and Armenians prior to 1915. They told anecdotes about Armenians they or their families knew as neighbors, friends or co-workers. Memories of these Armenians were commonly tinged with nostalgia and regret. Often, an idealized image of the Armenian would emerge from these accounts: intelligent, hard-working, disciplined, well-educated, generous. In reconstructing the past, Muslim interviewees tended to contrast the modernity of Armenians with the Muslims’ underdevelopment. Betraying an Occidental approach, Turks identified with an idealized modernity associated with the purportedly universal values of European Enlightenment. In the past, the Muslim elite believed that Ottoman society could achieve modernity only subsequent to the elimination of local Christians who hindered the progress of Muslims. Our interviewees, in contrast, suggested nostalgically that if only the Armenians “had not left,” their village, town, city, and country might be better off today. This difference might be due to the cynicism concerning the achievements of the Republic. It might also be interpreted as an expression of guilt, given the success of the policy of elimination of Armenians.

Yet to a large extent, Turkish interviewees remained hesitant and evasive when speaking of 1915. They tended to avoid discussing agency and responsibility directly. In many cases, the expression of sadness and regret in anecdotes of local individuals and events was contrasted with silences and defensiveness characterizing general discussions of 1915. Is it surprising that Armenian and Kurdish public discourse seems to have changed more than that of Turks? Nevertheless, the cost of living with internal contradictions, silences and evasions is high, and there are indications that even among Turkish interviewees there is growing awareness of the need to bridge the gap between local memories and public discourse. This is particularly so among the younger generation whose search for a personal history is confronted with the limits of national identity.

Breaking the public silence and denial about the past and speaking to one another about the experiences of individuals, families and communities constitutes an important step towards mutual understanding and peace both within Turkey and between Armenia and Turkey. Oral history research is an important tool through which personal memories can be expressed and shared in the public sphere.

Concerning reconciliation, our interviewees continually emphasized the shared culture of Armenians and Muslims in this geography, despite the bad blood that came between these communities in the past. As one interviewee put it, “Even if you killed each other, even if you don’t look at one another’s face, the same things make you happy.” He suggested that while confronting the past and accepting responsibility is necessary, this must be accompanied by forgiveness and forgetting as the only way of moving into a shared future: “How can the pain of a broken arm be forgotten? It is forgotten through forgiving. Discussing is something, questioning is another thing, but eventually you have to love. And they have to love you in return.”

## Loneliness of Galileo: Grandpa, who are these *Gavurs*?

Kamil was a student at the Veteran Mustafa Kemal Primary School in the central Anatolian town of Akşehir in the early 1960s. Although the school building, a mysterious and frightening space, piqued Kamil and his friends' curiosity, only years later did they learn that it had once been a religious school: "You know the benches used in the churches for prayer, we studied on them. Of course that was a mystery to us. They were saying, 'Here is a *kilise* [church], or *kirse* [in the local dialect]'. There was a big organ in the basement. We were all curious about it. When we touched a key, a sound came out of it and we ran away. The teachers used to warn us not to touch it. But we knew nothing about the organ being played in church. We weren't told any of this, this was a secret. Like something hidden."

### *People don't want to talk about these things*

As a curious child, Kamil wanted to know the secret and constantly asked his grandfather: "Grandpa, who are these *gavurs*?" ["heathens"]. As he was begging his grandfather, "Grandpa please tell me, grandpa tell me please" and pushing him, his grandfather tried to escape: "Oh Kamil, I'm tired! Oh, Kamil, don't make me tell you these stories." There were places such as *gavur's* neighborhood, *gavur's* house, *gavur's hamam* [public bath] but the *gavurs* themselves weren't there, nor did anybody talk about them, to satisfy his curiosity: "And also it was as if the state, or let's not say the state, but somebody has forbidden it somehow. People don't want to speak about these things. I don't exactly know if they were afraid or what."

The knowledge that was hidden from the boy Kamil, "That this church was an Armenian church, that the people who prayed in this church were Christians of the Gregorian sect, that it was a religious school" he learned when he grew up.

Although the teachers tried to keep the children away from the organ, his grandfather used his tiredness as an excuse and 'somebody' forbade speaking about it, it is impossible to cover the traces of the *gavurs* or to inhibit a child's curiosity:

"Who was the guy who said, 'the world keeps spinning even if you hang me'? Galileo, you know, they bring him to the inquisition. He says, 'ok, the world isn't spinning.' While walking out the door, he says, 'mate, you are a fool, the world is spinning.' 'Come on, don't act like that,' he says. The Armenians and the Turks have lived together for such long years, however much we might want to shut this out, end



this, we can't. It's impossible because we've lived such a companionship, such a friendship, such neighborliness."

Kamil turns his face to official history in order to understand the history of this neighborliness, the secret of the ownerless churches or the neighborhood, houses and *hamams* which changed owners: "We came here in 1071. Who is here? Armenians are here, Greeks are here." From this date, when according to official history the doors of Anatolia are opened to Turks, until World War I, when outside forces made "the two people enemies of one another", the relationship between the Turkish population and Armenian population was "exceedingly good." However, according to the history that Kamil recounts, a



chain of “provocations” take place during World War I: England, France and Russia provoke the Armenians, Germany riles up the Turks:

“These guys were decent and honest people. Only, crap came in between, somebody derailed them, somebody indoctrinated them and the two people became enemies. According to what my grandfather told me, they were cheerful people. Until when? Until these provocations happened.”



Provoked Armenians are “subjected to deportation.” For Kamil, this is an unacceptably huge sin: “You rip men from the land on which they have been living for thousands of years and send them away. I ask you, can such a cruel thing be accepted! It can’t, right?” And those who are responsible for what happened are not Talat, Enver and Cemal Pashas, but those who provoked them: “All three of them are the most intelligent men raised by this country. But Germans stirred them up in the war. Germans helped us in this war. And in exchange for their help they stirred us up and sent Armenians away from here.”

This history explains the mystery with which Kamil was preoccupied when he was in primary school, answers the question of “who these *gavurs* are” he so persistently asked his grandfather. But it doesn’t explain why this history is not spoken of or is forbidden. Although those responsible are viewed as outsiders, this history is the history of regrets, “There is a mistake, an obvious mistake made by the Ottomans.”

**Compare the houses they lived in to the ones we live in**

This mistake was very costly for Akşehir. Kamil’s nostalgia for the Akşehir of yore and his memory of Armenians intermingle: “It had



been very advanced in trade and craftsmanship, much more advanced than Konya and Afyon. It was advanced because Armenians had lived here.” There was a great difference between Akşehir and its surroundings, between the Armenians of Akşehir and the Armenians of the surrounding areas: “In this area—I saw one church in Afyon—there isn’t another church as big, as glorious, as enormous as this one. Why not? Because those who are in Akşehir are very hardworking, professional, experts in their professions and very rich.” Kamil’s Armenian-Turk comparison is also based on a discourse of progress: “If you compare the houses they lived in to those we live in, their workplaces to our workplaces, their gardens to our gardens, the vineyards where they cultivate grapes for wine to our vineyards, there are enormous differences. Like America and Turkey.”

Kamil’s criticism of his own society goes hand in hand with an idealized Armenian image. The distinction that Kamil draws between the two societies does not create conflict, but rather solidarity. One of the apprentices the mythologized Armenian artisans “protect and look after” is Kamil’s grandfather: “His master taught geometry to my grandfather. He taught him mathematics. He was a craftsman who had a compass, a ruler, a miter, and a protractor in those times. Grandfather only knew how to read and write, but his Armenian master taught him. He used to stop my grandfather Ali while he was cutting wood: ‘Ali, my son, did you measure, did you draw it well, did you make a model, a small plan of it on paper?’” Kamil is proud of learning about culinary culture from Armenians: “These guys used to make such fabulous *meze* [appetizers] in the *meyhanes* [restaurants] of Akşehir. Cooking very delicious carp, cooking pike, making salad from carp caviar, making brain salad, these were all learned from Armenians.”

The immensity of the sin, the sense of regret this sin brings, is hidden here. When the Armenians, to whom the town owed its progress, left, Akşehir could never become what it was before: “Look, I noticed something very interesting, these men were very cultivated. And when they were gone, Turks froze in astonishment, like, ‘who is going to construct our stairs, who is going to sew our clothes, who is going to do our ironwork?’ They didn’t know anything.” The history that Kamil tells explains the nostalgia for Akşehir’s past and the regret felt today: “If there wasn’t this separation, if we were living with Armenians, maybe Akşehir would be very rich, very successful in trade and industry.” And maybe the same thing is true for Turkey: “Maybe if they stayed here, Turkey would be a very advanced society. This is one of the points about which I’m sorry.”

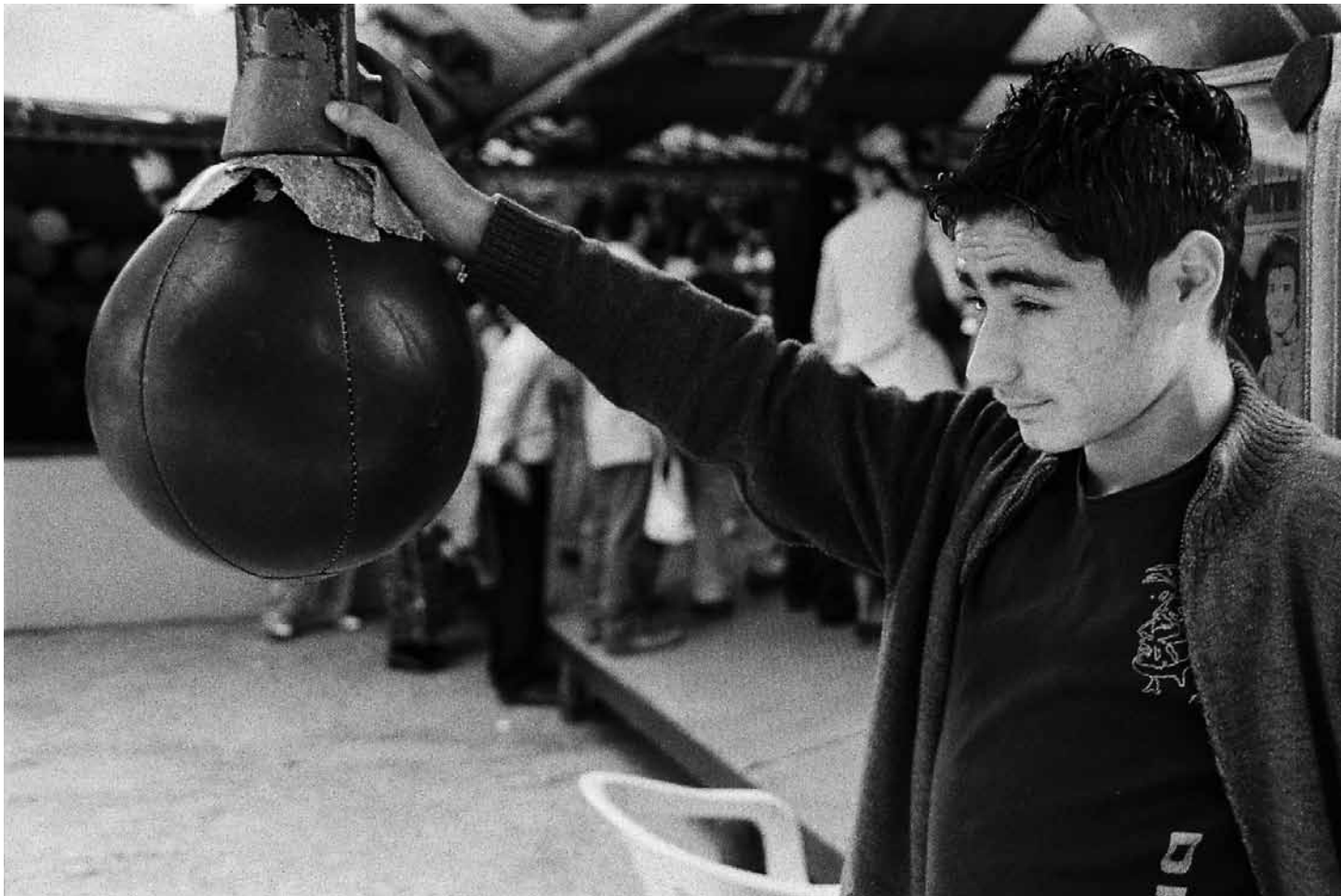
Besides those who, like Kamil, are sorry about the “separation,” there are also those who want to forget and hide the “unity.” Kamil still encounters them, as he did in his childhood, and he still protests. When it is decided that an abandoned church is to be used as a theatre, the dust of the years must be removed: “When the church is being washed, the man wants to turn the hose on one of the walls. As the sprayed water hits the wall, the paintings, this and that, appear. They whitewashed those walls because it’s not to be known that the Armenians lived here. Imagine what sort of destruction this is.” Kamil is happy about the restoration of the *hamam*, which he knew as *gavur’s hamam* in his childhood, as much as he is unhappy about the whitewashed walls. He hopes that the building that was once the religious school and his primary school will also be restored, and about the Armenian houses, which are

now occupied by riff-raff, he says “Damn, we didn’t even think about restoring one or two of them.” Restoration is a way of revealing a secret that is hidden from children, appropriating a history that has been hidden, at least paying tribute to the ‘unity’ that some want to forget, and it is very important to Kamil, just as the sewing machine that neighbors left while departing in 1915 has been handed down through the generations: “My grandfather’s father. They have a next door neighbor called Onnik. He is such a good, sincere, close neighbor that after Onnik leaves, my grandfather’s mother Fatma cries for Onnik day and night. They loved each other that much. And there is also a very well known story. They certainly left hoping that they’d return. They entrusted many of their belongings to their neighbors. A sewing machine, a manual sewing machine, which was passed on to my grandfather. It passed on to my mother’s father, my mother’s mother used it for years. Now it is in our house. Just a simple sewing machine.”

## How to Come to Terms with Phantom Pain

Aram is a 50-year-old Armenian doctor born in Istanbul. His paternal grandfather is from Bitlis, his grandmother from Kayseri. His mother is Catholic, of Italian origin. For a number of reasons, Aram is highly integrated into Turkish society. As a former national sportsman, his father is a well-known public figure. Aram, who identifies as a leftist, mostly attended non-Armenian schools. He married twice, in both cases to Turkish/Muslim women.

Aram knows little about his family history. His paternal grandmother's father, who was recruited to the army during World War I, did not return. His paternal grandmother was married to an older man at a young age around the same time her father went to war. While many family members were lost in 1915,



his grandparents survived, migrating from Bitlis to Istanbul, where they continued to speak Kurdish. Aram says the past was not talked about during his childhood: “These subjects were taboo in our childhood. They were not spoken of at home. They said we were wealthy. They had hidden cans filled with gold which remained there, and went through difficult times.” He points out that speaking about the past has only become possible in recent years: “We never investigated our Armenian side. Doing these kinds of things was considered nationalist when we were growing up. Circumstances were more dangerous and difficult. In those days, whether the Armenian question was this or that was not discussed as we are doing now.”

As a result of his father’s position, and being so well integrated into Turkish society compared to other Armenians, Aram’s family had a wide and diverse social network. At the same time, Aram speaks of the cost of achieving public recognition as an Armenian in Turkey: “He was a careful man. If you are sporting for Turkey and you are Armenian, you have to watch your back. For instance, he never went to Armenia. He probably didn’t experience open discrimination. But I think it had a price.”

Aram remembers several of his father’s anecdotes which illustrate the difficulty of being an Armenian national sportsman: “When he won a match the newspapers would write, ‘Our sportsman won the match’, but if he lost they wrote, ‘Our sportsman of Armenian origin lost the match.’ During the Cyprus events he is going to compete against a Greek. The military attaché says, ‘Don’t shame us, you have to win.’ My father gets a punch in the match, his eyebrow splits. He gets another one, his other eyebrow bursts as well. When the two eyebrows split, doctors usually stop the match. He said ‘I’ll play’ and won the match with his two eyebrows bleeding.”

### *Where are you from? Your name is so different!*

Aram speaks about his experience of living in Turkey as a third generation Armenian after 1915: “When you establish a one-to-one relationship you don’t feel discrimination. You may feel pressure from the outside. Somewhere, you always run into walls. For instance, you are traveling to another city, somebody will ask your name and you’ll have to give an account. ‘Where are you from?’ ‘Your name is so different!’ I am a citizen of the Turkish Republic, what will happen if I say ‘I am Armenian?’”

Unlike most Armenians in Turkey, Aram, who trained as a doctor, succeeded in becoming a civil servant and received a green passport issued only to high level civil servants: “They prefer that you not be an official. Having a green passport was very important to me. I was saying, ‘They are obliged to give me one too.’”

### *It is always you who has to be nice!*

As an Armenian born and raised in Istanbul, Aram worked in remote places in Anatolia where, despite the memory of Armenian neighborhoods, few of his contemporaries had met or worked with Armenians: “They were going to make friends with an Armenian for the first time. I didn’t encounter any trouble. Everybody was very kind. But it certainly depends on you too. You know, it is always you who has to be nice!” During his experience working as a doctor in Anatolia, Aram was surprised to find he was approached by Armenian converts: “There was a man called Mehmet the Kurd. He showed great interest in me. One day he brought a copper tray; there was Armenian writing on the bottom. I found out that his mother was Armenian.”

Like for other Armenians, the period when ASALA assassinated Turkish diplomats in the 1970s and 1980s was difficult for Aram: “They used to phone the house and curse. He doesn’t know you, he is not really calling you. You are seen as responsible for something wrong. I dared to get married in such an atmosphere.” While marriages between Armenian women and Muslim men do occur, the opposite is rare. Aram married a Turkish colleague during this period. His mother-in-law asked him a telling question before the couple went to Anatolia to do their compulsory service as young doctors: “My son, will you be able to protect my daughter?”

The most negative experience of Aram’s life occurred during his compulsory military service. Although he passed the exam which would allow him to select his place of service, he was denied this right, as Christians were considered security risks. He remembers expressing his disappointment to the commanding officer: “I think you are unjust. For the first time, just as I’m doing my military service, you tell me, ‘You are not one of us’.”

Aram is critical of the Armenian community as well. This may have been triggered by his awareness that his mother always felt excluded: “There is the implication of another nation, an otherness in the Armenian way of saying ‘He’s a Turk’. That side does the same thing too. It also lives with the same feeling, it also excludes.” His discussion of the psychology of minorities is perceptive: “A structure which is always excluded has to defend itself. Those who have to live within it become conservative, fearful. They don’t get involved with pol-



itics. They say, 'May they not touch me, may I not be involved. Let's not diminish, extinguish, lose our culture.' Where does nationalism start, where is it really about protecting a culture, it's hard to say. Each school has its own association. They always go to the Princes' Islands for girls and boys of the same age to get together. It's normal to consider Turks as the other as long as they live amongst themselves."

Like many Armenians in Turkey, Aram has relatives abroad. While some were survivors of 1915, others were victims of discrimination against Christians during the Turkish Republic. For example, his maternal uncle, an Italian citizen, left for Italy during the 1960s, as it became difficult for foreign nationals to work in Turkey. Unlike many of his Armenian friends and relatives, Aram never considered leaving Turkey. This is due to the sense of belonging he feels within his social network and the neighborhood in which he lives: "Lots of tiny relationships create a connection. You always live in the same area. Wandering in Şişli, I can grab a handful of nuts from the local store. Many of my childhood friends are the children of my father's childhood friends. This continuity is a special feeling. I have lived it with a sense of fulfillment. To be rooted somewhere. This is why I don't go abroad." He emphasizes Turks' and Armenians' shared culture and attachment to place: "I don't think I am culturally different. Because you belong to the same land. You belong here. You talk through the feeling of here. Even if you killed each other, even if you don't look at one another's face, the same thing makes you happy."

Aram tells a moving anecdote to express his feelings about coming to terms with the past as an Armenian in Turkey: "A husband and wife can't get along, they will divorce. The next day the girl says to her friend, 'We've decided to carry on.' When the friend asks 'Why?' She says, 'He is good at somersaults.' When asked, 'What does it have to do with that?' she says, 'I am willing to get along'. How can the pain of a broken arm be forgotten? It is forgotten through forgiving. Discussing is something, questioning is another thing, but eventually you have to love. And they have to love you in return." Aram's discussion of the willingness to forgive, to love and to demand love in return, is an important contribution to thinking about reconciliation in Turkey.



## Of Men and Family Secrets

Mete is a 24-year-old man engaged in a video project focused on his relationship with his family, the past, and his myriad identities. Since March 2009, his video camera has become part of the household as Mete obsessively recorded conversations with and among family members: “A conversation begins, the camera is on.” This is how Mete articulates how he embarked on this project: “It’s a very autobiographic project. It’s about the question, ‘Who am I?’ I interrogated my father, masculinity, and my different identities.” During his undergraduate years, Mete began to rediscover his family’s past as a way of coming to terms with his own identity: “My ancestors’ roots are very complex, and I knew little of them. As a child, this never seemed important, but now it is.” As Mete spoke with his grandmother, mother and father, he discovered a familial past he had barely acknowledged before. He claims that his lack of interest was due



to the way he was raised: “They forgot, wanted to forget. It was as if there was nothing to fear because we are Turks. We are not workers, leftists or poor. We are bourgeois Turks.” Forcing family members to speak about the past meant peeling away the veneer of newly acquired wealth to face the fears within.

Why would an intelligent, handsome man belonging to a wealthy family stir up a tempest in his secure world? For Mete, the trigger was a crisis in high school concerning his sexual identity. It was a shock to realize that he was a stranger to himself. This crisis, though painful, freed him and forced him to uncover other aspects of his identity linked to family secrets. Raised to represent himself as a middle-class heterosexual Turk, Mete now discovered Armenians, Kurds and Arabs lurking in the family tree. For him, the challenge would be to connect issues of sexual identity to fear and secrecy surrounding other silenced identities in Turkey.

### *Where does this dark skin come from?*

Mete was born in Istanbul and grew up in middle-class neighborhoods. As the only son of a wealthy family, he was doted upon by his parents and attended expensive private schools. He was aware that his family had Arab origins, as older relatives, such as his maternal grandmother, spoke Arabic. While the younger generation was not taught Arabic, Mete claims that his father associated Arab culture with pride in the Ottoman past: “There is this notion that our lineage goes back to Sultan Murad. My father is a fan of the Ottomans.” Yet the family comes not from Istanbul, the crown of the Ottoman Empire, but the town of Siirt in Southeastern Anatolia. Mete both knows and denies this as a child: “In primary school they made fun of me, calling me ‘Dirty Kurd’ because of my dark skin.” I knew that we were from Siirt but this shamed me. The most disturbing question for me was ‘Where are you from?’ I would quickly respond, ‘I am from Istanbul.’” It was the association of Southeastern Turkey with Kurdishness that was the source of Mete’s discomfort: “‘Are you from the East?’ This was the real question. Where does this dark skin come from? With whom is their child making friends? Where do they come from; are they a clan or bandits?” Born after the rise of the PKK, Mete distanced himself from any connection to the Southeast: “I identified it, since I was born, with terror, banditry, PKK. There is this evil thing, there is violence, and I don’t have anything to do with it.”

As he worked on his family project, Mete had to come to terms with the fact that his family was not only Arab but also Kurdish and Armenian. He says that his father avoided discussing his own father’s Kurdish origins: “I have sheepdogs in our country house. When I was in high school, I was walking the dogs and one of the guards said something to me in a language I couldn’t understand. He said, ‘You are a Kurd, how come you don’t understand?’ Apparently, people called us ‘the Kurds from Siirt.’ I went and asked my father. He evaded the question in such a way so as to say neither yes nor no. The subject was closed then and there.” The issue of Kurdish origins has to do with class as much as ethnicity. Mete had heard rumors that his father’s grandfather had been a porter— though his father denied this. He also could never account for how the family’s wealth was generated in such a short time by his grandfather,



who came to Istanbul as a boy. These were silenced parts of the family's history. Mete expresses his anger towards his father: "We watch the news; didn't you ever say 'We are Kurds too. Not all are ugly, savages, terrorists' – using his terms. 'They might be human too.' The sense of inferiority of my father's side. They raised themselves up by crushing their Kurdishness, by stepping on those at the bottom." Yet Mete also acknowledges his family's desire to protect their children: "I started to challenge my father but realized that he also wants to protect me. Sometimes I become rebellious and want to hurt him." Ultimately, it is the irony in the contrast between the performance of masculinity and the palpable fear that is the basis of Mete's challenge: "You cannot imagine how a man who is so masculine, fearless, sure of himself can have so much fear of openness and honesty. I am trying to reach his core, but he resists."

The biggest secret and source of fear in Mete's family is connected to Armenian identity. He discovers the debate on 1915 in Turkey as a high school student: "When I first heard about it, I thought, 'Could something like this happen?' What genocide? The Nazis did it. They try to associate this with the Holocaust because we all know the Nazis and nothing else."

### *The color of her eyes was navy blue, violet*

While working on his project, Mete realized that the silencing of the fact that his mother's paternal grandmother was Armenian provided a key to understanding his family. By speaking to his grandmother, he learned more about Silva, who was renamed Şükran after her marriage to his great grandfather. His grandmother recounts in mythic fashion the context in which Silva was orphaned in Siirt: "The prayer leader was preaching in the mosque: 'We received news from the state, these infidels will kill us. We must kill them before they kill us.' They spread this rumor. The Muslims started the massacre on Friday as soon as they left the mosque." Zabel, Silva's mother, was a married woman whose husband and brothers were killed. She was left with only one daughter. Mete's mother's grandfather was married to an Arab woman but had no sons. While his family claimed that this man took in Zabel and her daughter Silva as an act of charity, Mete questions the integrity of his motives as he soon married the daughter: "I started to think that Silva's mother Zabel might have had an affair with Silva's husband. For the woman was very young. They rave about my great grandmother's beauty. The color of her eyes was unique, navy blue, violet. There is always a reference to the infidel's beauty in the family."

The discussion of Armenianness in Mete's narrative is fraught with gender issues. Mete claims that one of the main reasons the story of Silva can still be told is because Zabel repeatedly recounted her story to Mete's grandmother. Mete contrasts this with the cowardly silence of men: "My mother's grandmother's mother constantly told my grandmother, 'They did this and this to us, they murdered my brothers, they destroyed us.' The women sit and talk and it remains there, maybe the kids listen in. But my mother doesn't recall her father saying anything about these things. Having an Armenian mother makes him the child of a victim, but he never identified with the role of the victim. Men stay silent. It is this that I am trying to break." Yet having heard these stories does not necessarily make the women in the family

empathize with Armenians: “My aunt’s husband doesn’t know that his wife’s grandmother was Armenian. ‘Would I tell him, what if we fight some day and he calls me ‘Armenian seed’? And my grandmother used to say to her husband when they fought: ‘Oh, Osman you have Armenian blood.’”

Nevertheless, Mete suggests that his project is transforming both himself and his family: “I wrote such poems. Why do I feel this? How come nobody in the whole family thinks about this? I got so carried away that there were times my mother and I cried together. My mother found the gold coin with Arabic inscription from Syria that her grandmother had given to her before she died. These days she is into Arabic, Kurdish and Armenian songs.” Mete even manages to record an anecdote told by his father: “When he was doing his military service in Iskenderun, there was a sign which resembled a cross on the shoulder of his uniform. When he was downtown with his friends, an old woman clung to his shoulder, saying in bad Turkish, ‘Give me my cross. If you only knew what they did to us.’” Mete finds out that Silva is not the only one, but that there is at least one other Armenian bride in his father’s family.

### *I am behind the camera, in a safe place*

Mete reflects on the role played by his video camera, which records the emotional ups and downs, changing self-perceptions and intimate relationships of a family in Turkey as exposed by a member of the younger generation: “My mother is crying, I am behind the camera, in a safe place. When the camera is on my father is a different man. When the camera is off he is more moderate, playing the role of the father who is trying to understand, and secretly proud. ‘I can’t talk, you dig deep, I’ll play this role, sometimes we’ll fight but you’re on the right track, I guess. On the other hand, I’m afraid for you.’ Of course, he never said this in so many words. We fight, he sings the Turkish National Anthem, I turn off the camera, things get better; I turn it on, sometimes it’s okay, sometimes he gets emotional. It was the first time my father ever cried.” Mete’s story suggests that shifts in Turkey’s political and cultural context resulting in increased public debate on the recent past is also transforming the way families and individuals remember that past, including attributing increased relevance and positive meaning to previously silenced memories and identities.

## Sosi's Green Eyes: Why am I different?

Adil was born in Diyarbakır in 1983, the first grandson of his grandfather. Grandfather Ali was a respected and powerful man in the village, and always coddled Adil. He had a happy childhood but also felt strange when he went outside wearing the clothes his mother made: "You know, everybody's dark, with black hair and dirty clothes. My hair is blond, my clothes are new. I'd ask my mother, 'Why am I different? Everybody calls me *bozo* [blond], they call me *zero* [blond]. Why do they make fun of me? Why isn't my hair black? Why are my eyes like this? Why my clothes?'" Blond, green-eyed Adil is the only grandchild who takes after Sosi, the Armenian bride.

When Adil's grandfather's mother Sosi was thirteen years old, "They seized her, as was done many times in many places." Sosi, who lost her entire family in 1915, survived. Adil's great-grandfather "bought" Sosi from the villager who hid her in a basket, and married her, although he was twenty years older. Adil vaguely remembers Sosi: "She was a very sweet woman, a devout Muslim. She prayed all the time and didn't interfere with anything." But he does not forget her stories: "It was so affecting and painful for a child. She'd cry and I would get upset."



Adil is not the only one marked by the memories of Armenians in this village once full of them. His grandfather mentioned a man called Hüseyin who spoke to him at the end of his life: “He said ‘We rounded up all the Armenians from the villages around midnight. There is a very deep cliff at Eskar. We took them there, and threw them down the cliff one by one. I can no longer sleep. Whenever I close my eyes, the children I threw off that cliff take hold of my hands and pull me towards the cliff.’”

### *The priest's field*

Adil recounts the history that made Sosi cry and Hüseyin feel guilty as if he himself has lived it: “There is a sense of guilt. I mean it. We were living together, we didn’t interfere with each other, then I don’t know what happened, but we seized their property. For example, much of our land used to belong to Armenians. My grandfather spent fifty years with court cases. He ended up getting all the land, yet many of the fields in our village have Armenian names. Rıcm, Dize, Elvi, Keşiş [priest] for example. ‘The priest’s field.’ It is quite obvious. For example there are rumors that an ancient Armenian king lived in Dize. Our grandfather spent much of his life searching for gold in Dize. I remember my father making fun of my grandfather saying, ‘you spent twenty to thirty years but found three Ottoman coins. There is this belief that the Armenians who were deported want to come back. This is why they buried their gold here. All over Kulp people are digging, looking for gold.’”

The villagers fear that the Armenians will return some day: “When the PKK emerged, I remember very well, I was a high school student. Three guerillas were killed. They laid them out naked in front of the hospital. People said, ‘They aren’t circumcised, they’re Armenians, they’ll come to take what they’ve left behind.’ There’s a place we used to go with our herds. Our village guard said to the guerillas there, ‘We know what you’re after, you’re all Armenians, you’re going to take the land from us.’ This is exactly what he said. And you can be sure that this is one of the reasons why people become village guards.”

Under changing conditions, the game is similar, but the players are different. Sultan Abdulhamid’s troops of Ottoman times are replaced by the village guards, and the Kurds, who remember the Armenian massacres with guilt, have themselves become victims: “Our village was very lively before the village guards. Violence began to increase because of events related to security. Those who refused to become village guards migrated elsewhere. Those who became village guards remained in the village.”

One of Adil’s cousins chose to become a village guard while another joined the PKK: “They had land where he built a wonderful house for himself over five years. It was one of the most luxurious houses at that time. He moved into his house in the summer. When a conflict took place in the autumn, they pressured everybody to become a village guard. Our cousin resisted. He said, ‘I built this house in five years, I won’t leave. I’ll stay no matter what and I’ll become a village guard if necessary.’ Another cousin of ours made a pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia; he didn’t come back for one or two years. Then it was understood that he had joined the PKK.” The one who kills Adil’s cousin on a windy August night by mistaking him

for another village guard, is this cousin: “When he sees my cousin, he is devastated. He goes back and forth several times, embraces the body, wants to stay, and then is taken away by force. Each time I tell this story, I ache inside. Given that one more person will know about it, perhaps I am sharing it out, giving each a bouquet, saying, here, you feel it too. This gives me relief.”

### *Being a victim makes people pat your head*

The life experience Adil accumulated in the village, at school and in Istanbul made him reconsider Sosi’s Armenianness and the discrimination Abdullah, his only Armenian schoolmate, experienced. He links his own experience of victimhood to that of Sosi: “Being so interested in my grandmother’s Armenian-



ness may be an attempt to overcome this sense of guilt.” Adil says that this is not peculiar to him but that Kurds who used to boast about how many Armenians their grandfathers had killed are now claiming their Armenian grandmothers in a similar way. He thinks that this is due to the changing discourse of the Kurdish movement and the desire to create a relationship with the oppressed: “Creating a link to Armenians, developing kinship relationships with them, has become a privilege. Taking on the victim’s grievance, feeling that responsibility opens up a space of power. For being a victim is satisfying, it makes people pat your head.”



## What Was Wrong Came From Above

Necmi is a 70 year-old retired teacher with great powers of observation, a prodigious memory, and the rare ability to turn a tale. Since childhood, he enjoyed listening to stories of the elderly in Divriği, the conservative Anatolian town where he grew up: “My father frequented a coffeehouse. I used to listen to the elderly talk when I was eight or ten years old.” He is unusual in his appreciation of oral accounts as a source of local history: “All our old people died. It is a loss neither archives nor libraries can make up for. This is our biggest loss, a catastrophe.” According to Necmi, unschooled elderly women make the most authentic storytellers: “Those who make the truest, most objective judgments are the illiterate women. They used to say very interesting things perhaps instinctively, with a god-given gift of judgment.”

Necmi depicts a geographically isolated and introverted town: “Divriği was a blind spot, a dead-end street in-between cities. You couldn’t go anywhere from there. It was a place of wild nature, cliffs, mountains. Istanbul was very far and unimaginable, like the moon.” Both the late encounter with mo-



dernity and the oral transmission of history meant that the texture of life in Divriği in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries could be still traced during Necmi's childhood. As 1915 had a major impact on the demographic, economic and cultural life of the town, the event was ever-present in the narratives Necmi heard during his childhood. In addition, he came to know families of returned survivors, and was a witness to social relations between Muslim and Armenian neighbors in the town.

Referring to the fact that 1915 was only the culmination of a series of similar events, Necmi recounts what he heard from the elderly concerning the events of 1895: "Most of the *ağas* [local power holders] are of Kurdish origin. Those who come from rural areas have the ambition to profit, to grab and to rise. They are blood and thunder. It makes you fearful. They have horses and guns. In 1895, Kurdish tribes who made an agreement with the warlords raided Armenian houses and seized property. And the next day the warlords distributed bread for free, saying 'It's a pity what happened to the Armenians in our land.' The elderly people used to say, 'Our warlords got their share of what the robbers seized from the Armenians and built mansions of their own'."

According to Necmi, an important theme in Muslim-Christian relations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was economic inequality and the envy that accompanied it: "Local Muslims are more resigned, abstinent and isolated from the outside world. It's impossible to enter industry for fear of sin. The best is to work in a bakery, butchery or run a *hamam* because the price is fixed. But you risk the religiously forbidden in jobs like iron working, tinsmith work, clock making. These jobs are left to non-Muslims. And these productive people get wealthy. And there's no place to transfer this wealth. They accumulate gold and rumors spread. This results in certain ambitions and intentions of takeover. Intermediaries are found and the ignorant are provoked. While not the reason for the deportation, there was such a distribution subsequent to it."

### *We didn't see a good day after the star arose*

Ordinary people in the town said that the suffering experienced stemmed from forces above and beyond the local domain: "'My child, what was wrong came from above' they used to say. They meant from the government, having nothing to do with us. Our Armenian neighbor we called 'grandmother' used to say this too. They said, 'The star arose and our homeland was finished. Armenian and Kurd fought each other, war began, scarcity began, epidemics began. After that we didn't see a good day'." [The star refers to Halley's comet which appeared to the naked eye in 1910].

Yet Necmi suggests elsewhere that local Armenians may have been provoked, and local Muslims led to believe that they themselves were in danger: "Everybody accepted that provocations originated from Armenian organizations and that hostility came from other sources. It happened, and they were armed. The Euphrates has a branch called Çaltı Water which passes below Divriği. It was no longer possible to go to the river since there were Armenian neighborhoods above it. Armenian children began throwing stones at Muslims from the roofs, just like in the Southeastern cities of today. When my father was going to





the mill with his own father early one morning, a boy threw a stone at them and it hit my father's head. 'That's nothing yet' says the kid, 'We're going to kill your father walking ahead of you.' So the fear began. People were made to believe that if they waited one more day, the Armenians would kill all the Turks."

Concerning cruelty and violence, Necmi points to state officials, bandits, and local elites, attempting to exonerate ordinary people of modest means, who he suggests largely tried to save neighbors, co-workers, friends and even strangers: "The community found its solutions within itself. Those who attempt to intervene do very bad things. And official intervention without an understanding of the local can be disastrous. Now, you can always find a murderer. There is nothing easier than finding an executioner. But Muslims never did wrong vis-à-vis Armenians in Divriği. Those who left took with them all their belongings of value. Anatolia was full of bandits. All the fugitive soldiers were in the mountains. Arbitrary practices were common. The head of an official bureau in one town may be cruel. But if there is someone more humane in the next town he may act differently. As for the people, Turks tried hard to protect Armenians. Some became Muslims, some were married, some were hidden in homes. The man tried to save his master from whom he learned his craft. Even if he couldn't save his master, he tried to save the children left behind. At least he tried to provide them with bread. He saved and hid them if he could." Necmi's father became a jeweler because his own father saved an Armenian craftsman: "With the convoys arrived the lists. My grandfather was a clerk in the municipality. He saw a jeweler master's name on the list. He pulled the guy aside and said, 'you're going to an unknown land. I'll untie you from this convoy if you will teach jewelry-making to my sons. Later on, his master said to my father, 'you'll teach all that you learned from me to a non-Muslim boy.'"

### *A soup pot with spoons around it*

At the same time, when it came to describing events surrounding the rounding up of local Armenians by official decree, Necmi depicts ordinary people as passive bystanders. His language suggests a silencing both on the part of witnesses and on his own: “During the deportation, a branch passed through Divriği. They were taken through side roads so that the crowd wouldn’t be noticeable. My mother used to say, ‘One night we heard footsteps out on the street. We went to the gate of the courtyard and looked. People tied to one another by ropes were going by in silence. Many were moaning and coughing. They just walked off.’ And my father used to say, ‘We woke up one morning and there weren’t any Armenians left in Divriği. We went into the houses and they just stood empty. In one of the houses, the dinner table was set, with a soup pot with spoons around it.’ It seems that the order came so suddenly. In the marketplace it was announced: ‘Let the Armenians gather.’ They said ‘It was announced, the town crier cried, the shops were closed. They took the Armenians behind the municipality. We don’t know what happened. Everyone ran to their homes. We don’t know what happened afterwards.’ We can’t find the witnesses of that moment.”

Yet Necmi insists that relations between Muslim families and their Armenian neighbors were close, before and even after 1915. He emphasizes the shared culture of the town: “There was a small group of musicians. If they were going to an Armenian wedding, they sang in Armenian. If it was a Turkish wedding, they sang the same songs in Turkish, and if it was a Kurdish wedding, in Kurdish. They knew them all. An Armenian family lived next to us. There were also one or two Armenians below the Muslim family who lived on the other side. These were families who had been deported. Our Armenian neighbors were invited to dinner one evening during Ramadan. The neighbor said, ‘Tell us beforehand so that we can fast.’ As we shared a wall, we knocked on their wall when we woke up at night to eat our last meal before fasting. They’d say ‘Yes, we heard you, neighbor.’ They’d follow the traditions, breaking the fast just like Muslims. While we were praying, you could tell their lips were moving as well. There was the wife of the last priest in town. The poor woman had suffered all the trials of the deportation. My mother told me the story. While they were running away, a crowd appeared at the edge of a cliff. They felt the need to hide. But her youngest daughter began to cry. Fearing that they would be discovered, she threw her own daughter from that cliff three hundred meters high. She used to cry as she told my mother. Her husband, Vardan Efendi, used to gather kittens, put them in his sack and take them to the slaughterhouse for the animals to find some food. On his way he would ring our bell for a chat with my father. And when the sounds of the kittens were heard, he would say, ‘I’m bringing the Armenian convoy.’ He would joke like this.” While Necmi suggests that the fact that survivors spoke about 1915 with their Muslim neighbors demonstrates their intimacy, joking is also a means of expressing emotions like anger which can be difficult to express directly.

Necmi states that the town was impoverished as a result of the destruction of the Armenian community. But his account also shows that locals gained property as a result: “The locals gained nothing. There were very few Armenian artisans left downtown. All those neighborhoods were demolished. As a child,

I used to go into the garden. The church was across our house. A man used to climb up the tower from time to time, with a hammer in his hand. They auctioned the Armenian houses. Those who bought them ripped out the stones to sell them to builders.” Necmi’s own father purchased a house that the family used to rent during the summers in what was once an Armenian neighborhood.

Necmi’s account, based on what was transmitted to him by his elders and his own experiences as a child, reveals a sensitivity to the complexity of Muslim-Christian relations in the day-to-day life of an ordinary Turkish town. Unsurprisingly, his narrative is marked by a number of silences. For example, what might have gone unsaid in survivors’ accounts? In the accounts of local Muslims? Some of the internal contradictions in the narrative suggest that as a native son who is also a keen observer of local affairs, Necmi himself may be of two minds about some key issues, as are many individuals of Muslim origin in Turkey.

## What if My Mother is Armenian?

Ruhi is a 77 year-old Turkish man born in Trabzon. In his life story, he recounts the event which will generate the singular obsession of his life: “They beat my mother in the neighborhood. To whom are you going to talk about your troubles? Those who rule the roost, those who lead in the neighborhood, the tyrants. Their commands are obeyed. We were children then. I was only eight years old. We had a neighbor who owned a gambling joint. His son rang the bell. When my mother opened the door, he slapped her, saying ‘Armenian girl.’” Ruhi ironically suggests that his discovery of his mother’s identity was also the moment of its loss: “After I learned that my mother was Armenian, my mother’s identity was lost.”

During Ruhi’s childhood, it was difficult to speak of the past: “Nobody dared speak back then. My mother didn’t even tell me her father’s name. Nor did I ask.” Nevertheless, Ruhi managed to piece together some of the events shaping his mother’s life. She was born in Batumi, though her family later moved to Trabzon: “They raid the house and kill her parents when the events of 1915 explode. Our mother is eight or nine years old when this happens. That night they take her and leave her in the basement of a building which later on became a school. There are other female children like my mother. Whoever wants can take them. ‘We’re sitting there’ she says, ‘in a corner. The men come. One of them holds my arm. Looks at me and goes. Then another comes and looks at me. And then your father came and took me.’”

Ruhi’s hatred for his father is undisguised: “My father is married but he can’t have a child. He takes my mother as a daughter but later marries her. She’s taken as a daughter and then becomes a wife. This is an uncivilized time and my mother gives birth to her first child at the age of fifteen.” He underscores the way Armenian property and women were freely exploited by Muslims: “The houses were shared amongst

those who would take them. It was so dangerous that we didn’t even dare to see our mother’s house. My mother says, ‘I told your father, there are lots of houses, go and register, they’ll give you a key.’ But the stupid guy has found such a beautiful girl, does he give a damn about the house? He says, ‘Even a cottage is enough for me.’”



## *The psychology of girls changes fast*

According to Ruhi, while his mother did try to escape, she resigned herself to her fate as an Armenian woman under those circumstances: “There was an Armenian family who wanted to help my mother escape. The man was a highly-esteemed artisan. If they didn’t kill him, it’s because of his artisanship. They heard my mother’s story and wanted to help her. But the bandit who’s supposed to be my father locked my mother in the house. My mother tried hard to escape but she couldn’t. The psychology of female children changes fast; she didn’t have any other option.”

Of his siblings, Ruhi was the only one who identified with his mother’s suffering and took up her cause: “We were living eight people in a cottage. It could be demolished with one kick. We used to go barefoot to school. A family of converts was living opposite us, they gave us leftovers. My mother loved me the most because I was the one who was beaten the most. My brother beat me, he tied my hands and feet.” Ruhi finally ran away, an exodus that would take him to Istanbul and many other places, including Germany: “The time my mother was slapped, the events concerning Armenianness and our poverty affected me. I could not stay anywhere for a long time. I would start a job, but run away after a while. It was always like that in my childhood. I left home when I was fifteen. I worked as a porter in Istanbul. I had a goal: to go to America. I knew that Armenians were there.”

After several years, Ruhi was forced to return to Trabzon, and, after the death of his father, the family came to Istanbul to live with his mother’s uncle: “My mother’s uncle, who escaped in 1915, lived in Beşiktaş. When we found him we all came here packed like sardines.” Eventually, they moved to Germany, where Ruhi lived for several decades. His mother died there in the late 1970s: “The night of June 6<sup>th</sup> at quarter past two, my mother passed away in my arms.” Ruhi’s narrative suggests that his experiences in Germany had a major impact on how he reconstructs the past, his relationship to his mother, and his own identity: “I wasn’t idle in Germany. I acquired knowledge. I’m a person who knows the civilized life. If I hadn’t gone to Germany, I wouldn’t find all this odd. There we learned humanity. Ignorance is incomprehensible. I’ve said it wherever I could: My mother is an Armenian girl and what has been done is a massacre. Leaving my mother on the streets when she was eight, handing her over to a villager who hasn’t heard of civilization, to whom she had no emotional attachment; these events cannot be easily forgotten. I really should sue the Turkish government. I’d sue and win if I was in Germany. My life has been turned upside down.”

Yet he is aware of the risks taking a stand in Turkey still entail: “It takes courage to speak openly about these subjects in Turkey. It’s the same thing if I burn myself with a gallon of gas or if I say ‘You killed my grandparents, you seized their house, I demand compensation.’”





### *If I were younger I'd get baptized*

In his narrative, Ruhi constructs an opposition between Islam and Christianity, East and West, Turks and Armenians, choosing to identify with the latter, even though both he and his mother form part of a Turkish/Muslim family: "I defend my mother's identity everywhere with pride. So what if my mother is Armenian? Germany developed Turkey; the Christian world developed it. If I were younger I'd go to church and be baptized without hesitation. Because I don't feel any sympathy towards Islam. Which religious doctrine, which religious conscience can justify what my mother went through?"

When his mother died, the family brought her back to Turkey for burial. Yet Ruhi persists in his desire to discover his mother's family name and to have her reburied in a Christian cemetery: "I went to Trabzon, but was frightened. My mother's house is a hundred meters above. Why shouldn't her records be there? But I didn't dare. I'm also from Trabzon, but my people are intolerant. I want to go to Batumi, to find my mother's records and her identity. Here she is, my mother! This is her name! This is her surname! She's from here! I want to discover this. My mother officially lost her identity, but I made it possible for her to live like a human being. I also wanted to bury her in an Armenian cem-

etry. If I were more clever back then, I'd have taken my mother to church and have her baptized again. 'Mother', I'd say, 'this is your place.' I wish I'd said this to my mother. If I had more money today, I'd like to do what I couldn't do then. I'd try to move her grave. These kinds of things are important if one is wounded inside."

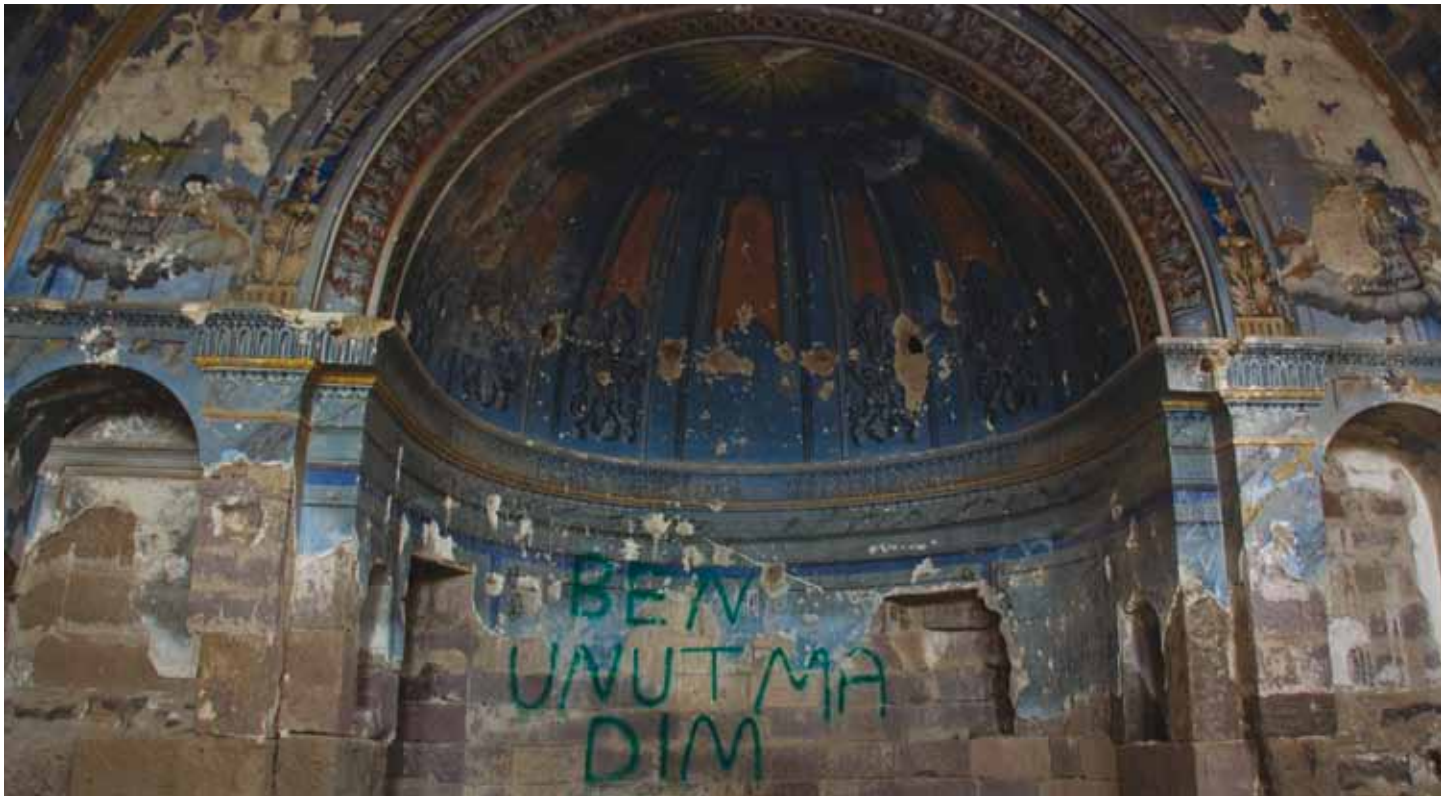
Ruhi's mother lives on in her son's imagination, and it is in his imagination that she becomes the Armenian woman he longs her to be, so that he can become the son who overcomes the accident of his birth to choose an alternate civilization he idealizes, laying aside the burden of guilt he has inherited.

## A wedding and a curse: How did this village end up like this?

Salih is born into a village where “Armenians, Greeks and Turks were united.” When he was born, there were only traces of this “unity” left. These include the stories told by grandparents to grandson, the remains of old stone houses, and the “last” Armenian neighbor left.

Salih tells the story of his grandparents’ wedding to depict life before the deportation and population exchange removed Armenians and Greeks from the village:

“My grandfather worked a lot with Greeks and Armenians, for he was a butcher. And he had an apprentice. ‘Take this and give it to Agop, my boy.’ ‘The apprentice,’ he says, ‘would shake his ass out of pleasure, I mean he’d shake his hips, swing, cheer up.’ Because when he gets there, the Christian tips him. ‘That’s why the apprentice,’ he says, ‘waits at the threshold to take meat to the Armenians and Greeks.’ Since Armenians and Greeks had very good relationships with my grandfather, they participated in the wedding ceremony. ‘And,’ he says, ‘they all brought *baklava* [pastry].’ They used to bring huge trays of *baklava* as wedding gifts. People said, ‘Put those brought by the rich in a different pot, for they are made



with butter. We'll serve the important guests from that pot.' Pehlivanoğlu Çorbacı Ağa [a Christian] is the man, I guess, whose baklava was of finest quality. They used to make baklava with sixty layers. People said, 'Everyplace is covered with baklava of high quality, that pot is full. Where shall we put them?' 'Just put them anywhere, put them in any pot we have.'"

Although the past is idealized as a wedding ceremony in which Armenians, Greeks and Turks participated, it was also made up of events which make this very participation impossible:

"My grandmother said that the Armenians of Derevenk went over this hill. 'While leaving,' she says, 'they were crying.' My grandmother says that. 'Turks, may you not be happy!' I mean, 'May you not survive!' My grandmother used to say that they left crying and saying 'May you end up like us.' I mean not all of them were terrorists or anarchists! I mean, I don't believe all Kurds support PKK. It was in this way that the Armenians left."

Salih also heard a witness who told him what happened on the road and in the village after the Armenians left:

### *Red coins inside a jar under the threshold*

"They called him Derviş-the-Noseless, half of his nose was missing. He was the one who told me. He drove a horse-drawn carriage. He carried the belongings of a family from Derevenk. Armenians are leaving, you know, it was the deportation. According to him, they were going to Maraş. Bandits stopped them on the way from Kayseri to Maraş. 'Their mouths,' he says, 'were covered.' You know what the terrorists wear now in the streets of Istanbul. He says, 'they robbed them all.' 'They didn't kill them,' he says, 'the bandits took all their valuable belongings.' 'They told me, just drive away. They didn't take anything from me, from my cart. The drivers who were robbed complained to the gendarme, who beat me. We saved our necks there and delivered them to the spot.' 'There,' he says, 'when the Armenian got off he said, "Derviş, my son, you saved our lives, god bless, you are a good man. You know the house where you loaded the belongings,' he says, 'there are red coins inside a small jar under the threshold. You take it, he says, we won't be coming back.' 'Some days passed, I arrived at Derevenk,' he says. 'There wasn't a single house standing. None were left, only ruins. I couldn't even find where the house was, let alone the threshold.' Those who demolished Derevenk were our raiders, I mean the raiders of Talas and Tavlusun. The stone bricks of the old houses in Kayseri are Talas, Tavlusun and Germir's bricks. The bricks of the houses demolished here, they took them and sold them. They took the window and sold it, they ripped the door out and sold it. They took all the bricks, the columns and sold them. Our men did that."

This is how "unity" is lost, stirring up a longing for the past. When Salih is born there is only one Armenian family left and it is as if all the values of the romanticized past are attributed to Gevorg, the oldest member of this family.





### *A man of economy, he didn't use matches*

“Gevorg was a well educated, wise man. He also played the violin. He knew the Latin alphabet and the Arabic alphabet. It was always Gevorg who read the letters that came from Istanbul, the letters from those who worked there. In those days he rolled his cigarettes with filters, I don't know how. He smoked tobacco, but with filters. Why he did it, how he did it, we can't know. We were children then. He didn't use matches. In sunny days—he was a man of economy—you know the glass lenses, he used to take the cigarette in his hand and we watched. He held the lens like that, he smoked when smoke was coming out of its tip. Then, they used to take the sick, the children, to Gevorg for him to pray over them. You know, how we take them to the preacher for prayer or to a sacred tomb. They took them to Gevorg just like that and made him pray, for the *gavur's* breath is a strong one.”

Despite the good qualities Salih attributes to Gevorg, there is a story of corruption told about the old man. Gevorg works as a supplier for the monastery, he takes care of the students' needs. According, again, to Salih's grandmother, “Armenians persistently say that he is eating our money.” This does not reduce the admiration Salih has for Gevorg: “This happens, we still do it now. For instance, the one who buys for the *medrese* [religious school] makes an agreement with the greengrocer, let's say he buys the lettuce for thirty cents, but he makes him write fifty cents. It's not a big deal, he pockets the twenty. And this is what they thought about Gevorg.” So Gevorg, according to a bizarre local narrative, “is afraid of the Armenian community because the Armenians might kill him,” and therefore doesn't join the deportation, staying instead in the village and converting to Islam. He changes his name to Ismail and goes to the mosque. But after some time he stops going to the mosque and when the villagers ask why he doesn't come, he answers with a riddle: “In the pen the chicken, everybody for their own religion.”

Gevorg's grandson is Vasak, and Salih says that they have been through everything together. Vasak is terrified of being called to the army because his father, the ironsmith Gavrik died in the military and his uncle died after having been sent home from military to convalesce. Because of this fear, without telling his family, he gets circumcised to hide his Christianity at the age of seventeen. He doesn't go to school that day and sleeps in Salih's bed. When Vasak returns in 2003 “as a tourist” from Beirut, where he had migrated in 1958, he opens up to Salih for the first time: “Listen Salih, I never told anyone before. I ran away because I was afraid of the military.”

In addition to neighbors, there is also an Armenian craftsman in the village. Artisanry, one of the most valuable qualities attributed to Armenians, is expressed in Gavrik's art:

“I got into carpentry in 1953 so as to learn the craft. A big cinema was being constructed in Kayseri then. My master did some work for it. Who will do the polishing? They said Gavrik would. This is the Armenian Gavrik. He was the one and only artisan in Kayseri. There was no other master like him. I say now if there were five such masters as in Turkey, he was one of those five. Architect, engineer. He had technical drawings.”

The time Salih and Gavrik are working in the cinema coincides with the month of Ramadan. Gavrik “doesn’t even drink water” since his Muslim friends are fasting. Although they insist that he eat during the lunch break he doesn’t eat, but wraps the egged bread and takes it home like the others. Respect for local religious practice is one of the most distinct components of the memory of Armenians. Saying that “these were very decent people,” Salih expresses both the longing for the lost “unity” and the good qualities that are associated with Armenianness.

There is a big difference between the past, remembered as a wedding ceremony with Armenians, Greeks and Turks and the present day. Those who are gone were crying as they left, they were afraid and “they were such nice people.” Those who are left behind try to understand the reason for the difference between the past and the present: “I asked why Tavlusun has been ruined—this village was a wonderful village. ‘How did this village become like this?’ I asked, ‘Is it the *gavurs*’ curse, master?’ I asked Napolyon [whose nickname made reference to the fancy boots he wore]. ‘No, he said, ‘We were getting along very well with the *gavurs*. The *gavurs* never complained about us. There were no quarrels, no conflicts. Nor did we confiscate their property.’”

But Napolyon answers Salih’s question with the story of Basri Efendi who “jumps on the Greek girl,” and of his son whom he never acknowledged, but who still writes letters from Greece:

“Now Napolyon says, during the War of Independence, the government gave the soldiers’ families wheat for bread, with the papers that the village headman provided. The women went to the building where the government distributed wheat. Women brought their sacks and waited in line. On the day they gave out wheat, he says, they got the wheat for free. One of them is a court clerk and the other is a recording officer. They are brothers-in-law. He says, ‘They choose two women from there. Just two of them.’ ‘You look like a nice lady, today rye will be distributed, I am in charge here, tomorrow wheat will be distributed. Now go without saying anything to anybody and come back tomorrow at nine.’ ‘Indeed there is nothing tomorrow,’ he says. ‘What could the woman do, man,’ he says, ‘her children are at home, hungry. Hungry!’ She believes him and comes the next day. Salih Baba has a horse carriage, covered you know. ‘The carriage comes in the morning’, he says, ‘and takes the women: “We’re going to the warehouse to give you the wheat.” They have their own men with them. They bring them here,’ he says, ‘to the garden, you know, to the house in that garden. And they come in the afternoon, they drink raki, they booze, they play, they dance and the women are raped.’”

Napolyon puts a picture of the damned next to the wedding picture in the album of the past: “They destroyed Tavlusun, my boy. If Tavlusun is cursed, it’s because of them. ‘And it is our bastards who did it,’ said Napolyon. The man who lived through this said it, not me. He said, ‘I didn’t hear this from someone. I’m the one who has seen this.’”

## Shame and blame: How come my granddaughter doesn't speak Armenian?

Selin is a 24 year-old Armenian woman who is a graduate student in Istanbul. For Selin, her endless search for a sense of belonging is tied up with her intimate relationship with her maternal grandfather and her parents. Although she doesn't know a great deal about her family history, she knows it affects her own life: "My grandmother's mother is from Van. My maternal great great grandfather wasn't mentally stable because he was witness to terrible events. He found his own father's corpse in a sack in the church. After that he lost his ability to speak. All family members have some kind of problem. All these things that have to do with their being Armenian affect me. My mother's way of denying her own existence is passed on to me."



Turkey's changing context is refracted in the different experiences, choices and feelings of three generations in the family. Selin's grandfather's life was bound up with the events of 1915. His family lost their home, farm and flour mills in Bursa. This is how Selin recounts the experience of her grandfather's mother: "When she goes to the mills she sees that the workers have appropriated them. She becomes very upset and has a stroke. She has a misshapen lip for the rest of her life. The workers pity her and give her six months' profits." Having lost everything, Selin's grandfather grows up selling trinkets on the streets. His eventual success as a trader is repeatedly thwarted by actions against non-Muslims. During World War II, he is drafted into units made up exclusively of non-Muslims. Subjected to the notorious wealth tax, he goes heavily into debt. During 6-7 September 1955, he is forced to defend his home against marauders. Struggling to make up their losses and living in fear, the family turns their hopes to America. Selin's maternal aunt is made to marry a man she does not care for so that she can move to the U.S. Selin's mother is also sent to the U.S. as an adolescent; an experience which cuts her off from family and friends and which she regrets bitterly. Ultimately, Selin's grandfather is unable to make the move abroad, and her aunt's unhappy marriage is the only reminder of this unfulfilled dream.

According to Selin, her grandfather is very attached to his Armenian identity: "My grandfather was a conservative Armenian. He was going to go to the States, he was going to leave this disgusting country. That made sense for him, he'd been through so much." Though Selin is very close to her grandfather, her own life was shaped by the experiences, choices and feelings of her parents. Her parents chose not to send their children to Armenian schools or to teach them the Armenian language. They also replaced their Armenian surname with a Turkish one: "They spoke Armenian when my brother was a child but his friends in kindergarten made fun of his accent. Then they stopped speaking Armenian. They spoke Armenian when my grandfather came and when he left they went back to Turkish. They changed their surname right before my brother was born."

### *It doesn't matter who you marry*

Selin tries to explain the reasons behind her parents' decisions: "My family has a dilemma. They are attached to their identity but they also want to protect their children. Their lives are based on self-protection. Since they grew up under various pressures, they tried to protect us." According to Selin, her parents were more liberal than most Armenians of their generation: "Armenians grow up in a more closed environment. They go to Armenian schools, they are among themselves on weekends. A conservative Armenian is someone who views Turks as different, who doesn't want their child to be friends with or date a Turk, who is attached to traditions, who lives detached from what happens in their own country, who wants to attain certain positions within the community, who is closed-minded, who lives with the psychology of self-protection. Because of what she lived through, and because both she and her sister suffered a great deal, my mother said she didn't want to transmit to her daughter things like 'we're different, we're Armenian.' She used to say, 'It doesn't matter who you marry.' She always took a universalistic position. Armenians call Turks 'Dacik'. It's a somewhat derogative term. My parents get angry with

people who speak this way.” Yet Selin admits that her parents stand between a rock and a hard place: “Armenians are proud to be Christian. It’s like regarding Muslims as inferior. Sacrificing animals for instance, what happens during the Feast of Sacrifice. They have such a distinction in their mind. Even my mother and father do. But they get along better with their Turkish friends because Armenians have a nationalism which closes itself to the outside. I’m sure my parents often experience internal conflict. They are minorities on every side.”

Selin suggests that while her parents themselves grew up with a distinct identity, they chose not to transmit it to their children. How did her parents’ decisions affect Selin growing up? “There is a language spoken at home which I don’t understand. My friends’ families are different from mine. There is a problem, which I try to figure out. I ask ‘Mom, what am I?’” She feels alienated from the Armenian community: “I always avoided the community because I don’t speak Armenian. In fact, young people don’t speak Armenian amongst themselves. But my grandfather was a conservative Armenian and he used to say in anger, ‘How come my granddaughter doesn’t speak Armenian?’ And I used to feel ashamed, upset and blamed myself.” While all her friends were Turkish, she felt pressure to define who she was. As with many Armenians, her name was a distinct sign of difference: “As a child, when I said my name they always asked me, ‘Are you Turkish?’ You are obliged to feel Armenian if you live in Turkey. They always remind you of your identity. I used to feel uneasy, then I would repeat what my mother told me to say: ‘I’m a Turk of Armenian origin.’”

### *I felt lonely during Muslim holidays*

Selin had difficulty figuring out where she belonged: “I’ve never been either Armenian or Turkish. I could never fully define myself. My strongest feeling as a child was of exclusion. I used to feel very lonely during the Muslim holidays. It was a source of guilt not to feel any different from Turks, not to know Armenian and not to have Armenian friends. Probably it was my grandfather who made me feel this way. Despite the things he’s been through, his granddaughter is like a Turk.”

According to Selin, although she frequently expressed anger towards her parents, it was Hrant Dink’s murder that broke the silence within the family: “I reacted to them all my life. It was after Hrant Dink’s death that they took me seriously for the first time. I made a big scene at home after his death. I was mad because they couldn’t even feel sad at his death. I was mad because they left me without an identity. They have something which they don’t share with me and which makes me feel excluded. That’s why I was so angry. That was the first time they said, ‘We changed our surname so you wouldn’t have any problems.’ These subjects are taboo in our house, they are not spoken of. They built such a barrier in my childhood that you couldn’t question, you couldn’t think.”

Selin suggests that her family initially reacted to Dink’s murder in a relatively passive way: “When I heard on television that Hrant Dink had died and told my mother, she didn’t show any reaction. She said

'It was to be expected.' And my grandfather said 'He had gone too far.'" This reaction, Selin believes, is mainly due to fear and habit: "In those days, they spoke a lot about him at home: 'There, he's writing again.' They found his writing extreme and were angry probably because he was so brave and they were not. You'd also be irritated if you lived in fear, if you couldn't even transmit your culture to your children. Their lives are based on the notion: Let us protect ourselves, we have to live here, we must adjust to the circumstances."

An important observation on Selin's part is that the way the media and the Turkish public reacted to Dink's murder played an even more important role than the murder itself in changing her parents' attitude. For the first time, they were faced with the limits of habit: "I think their reactions to Hrant's death were shaped by the media. If it wasn't covered by the media that much, if that many people didn't get up and demonstrate, if it was just passed over by saying 'An Armenian was killed,' then they wouldn't react as much. They were very surprised by the slogan, 'We are all Armenians!' These reactions affected them more than his death itself. They became more brave when they saw Turks were protesting. They made comparisons with the past, saying, 'How come this is happening?' and were continually surprised. Maybe they were so affected when they realized the difference between their first reactions and how in fact they should have reacted. They saw they couldn't express their feelings."

Selin recounts the changes in her parents since Dink's murder: "Hrant Dink is central for my mother and father. They were very much affected and completely changed their attitude towards me. 'Go abroad if you can' they said for the first time, 'we cannot hold on here for very long.' Before, I was 'a Turk of Armenian origin,' now I'm Armenian. Because the political context has changed. For the first time I observe reactions from my father like, 'I'm a citizen who pays his taxes.' I see his anger for the first time. When we speak now, his eyes are full of tears and he even says, 'Should I take my surname back?' When I was younger and the PKK events were taking place, they had an anti-Kurdish stance. Their reaction towards the Kurds has changed. They have become defenders of minority rights. What seemed normal before seems offensive now."

Selin herself has also changed, though she experiences her new closeness to her Armenian identity with the familiar sense of guilt she always felt about her Turkish identity. Selin's story raises the question of whether it is possible to belong without excluding others: "Hrant Dink's death made me feel so ashamed because he was someone who was trying to mobilize people like me. I used to read him before and say 'This doesn't fit me because I'm not completely Armenian.' I didn't have anything to do with politics. Hrant Dink's death made me become more concerned with political events and allowed me to get outside myself. I began learning Armenian. I never had an Armenian boyfriend. I met Serhat after Hrant Dink. He was talking about Dink and it all started around the issue of Armenianness. I feel guilty because it makes me happy that he's Armenian. I hate all forms of extreme nationalism. Yet I think I will always feel the lack of a sense of belonging."



## The Three Poles: What are We, Brother?

Ayhan was born in 1979 in a village in Sason, in Southeastern Turkey. His great grandfather who survived 1915 lived amongst Kurdish tribes and adopted a Muslim name. The only sign passed on to Ayhan's generation about their ancestors' roots is the word "Christian" in their identity cards. Ayhan's story is that of claiming his lost Armenian identity. In order to do this, Ayhan, who grew up thinking Kurdish was "the only means of expression on earth" had to come to the realization that he lived at the juncture of three poles.

### *Filla*

The only memory Ayhan has concerning Armenianness is the "ant game" played among shepherds in the village: "The field ants are big and red. The other ants are black and small. Children pitted them





against one another. The feet of the field ants were ripped off so that the black ants could kill them. The field ants were the *filla*. *Filla* means Christian. This stuck in my mind.”

In 1982, one of Ayhan’s uncles migrated to Istanbul, settled in Kurtuluş and opened a store. His father followed soon after and Ayhan found himself in the city. Migration meant not only entering a new space but also a new language: “People speak Turkish on the streets. When you go to the store, you say ‘bread’ in Turkish. So you want to learn Turkish.” His father wanted to send Ayhan to the Armenian school, but they were handed a list requiring “Ten pairs of socks, twenty pairs of underwear, a sweat suit, regular shoes, training shoes.” Since his father couldn’t afford the items on the list, Ayhan went to the public school two streets over.

### *Crossing myself, I confuse right and left*

Even if he couldn’t go to the Armenian school, Ayhan was sent to the Kinaliada summer camp for Armenian children from low-income families. This time he encountered another language: “*Te* means tea, I shall keep this in mind, learn Armenian.” In the camp, there were also religious practices to which Ayhan needed to adjust: “We prayed before meals, but it’s a different prayer this time and we crossed ourselves. Up and down, right and left. I always confused right and left. First right or left? I was always watching someone and doing as they did.”

### *Kurds at home Turks at school Armenians at camp*

Ayhan experiences a similar difficulty in religion classes at school: “I was trying to memorize the prayers in middle school. I tried to write them down but I could not memorize the Arabic words. My mother used to pray but she never told us that we should. Even though our identity cards say we are Christian, my father never said we should go to church.” Ayhan and his cousins, who move between languages and identities, make a joke of their situation: “What are we, brother?” They define their identities by context: “We are three things. We are Kurds at home, we speak Kurdish. Second, we are Turks at school, we speak Turkish. Third, we are Armenians at the camp, we speak Armenian. We are Armenians in summer, Turks in school in winter and Kurds at home. We felt most comfortable being Kurdish.”

As he discovered the Kurdish movement at university, his Armenian identity emerged out of Kurdishness: “What I have to do first of all is to claim my Kurdish identity. I claimed it emotionally. Then I began to claim my Armenian identity. I realized that there was an identity problem and that I had become assimilated from Armenianness to Kurdishness and from Kurdishness to Turkishness.” Assimilation seems like the price of surviving 1915: “I consider myself Kurdish because of this event. I learn that I’m not, but don’t know if this loss can be redeemed.”

Ayhan's effort to learn Armenian and to investigate his family history in college is an attempt to redeem this loss. His search leads him to work in an Armenian school, take up a new name, and to practically turn into a "project": "I went to the school and said, 'I'm Armenian, I don't know Armenian, but I want to work in an Armenian school.' The director looked at me and said, 'It's a good thing that you have such a wish.' She asked me for my baptismal name. And I hesitated, because nobody in our family was baptized. I said, 'I don't have a baptismal name.' 'So,' she said, 'We need to baptize you. You showed up suddenly, so your name should be Norayr, meaning newcomer'. I am a new graduate, full of fervour. The director introduced me to the founders of the association. They're like, 'we'll raise this young man, we'll do this and that, he'll be very useful.' They wanted to turn me into a project."

Like Ayhan's Armenianness, which emerged from his Kurdishness, Norayr's Kurdishness emerged from his Armenianness: "After Hrant Dink's death there were many Kurds at the funeral. Some Armenian friends believed we ought to walk silently in order to avoid provocations, but the Kurds were shouting at the top of their lungs. They were saying, 'This is the time to make our voice heard.' I believed them and felt closer to them." Ayhan's father, who says "We're Kurds among the Armenians of Istanbul and Armenians among the Kurds," experiences this distinction more sharply as a member of the previous generation. The Kurdish movement has a different perception of Armenianness, at least among the younger generation.

Ayhan's relationship to Kurdishness, Turkishness and Armenianness and the way this varies with time and space invites us to rethink the definition of identity while his lifestory demonstrates the significance 1915 can still hold for the young generation in Turkey today.

## Fear of Losing a City

Zübeyde was born into one of Van's wealthy families in 1940. Her grandfather was a merchant who owned nine shops in the city center. Although Zübeyde never met her grandfather, she grew up listening to stories about how he migrated from Van by oxcart, leaving his shops and house behind. She saw Aram Pasha's house where her grandfather settled when the Armenians were "expelled" from Van, and remains inspired by the thought of the gold believed to be buried here and in the entire city of Van, and filled with the fear that the former owners will return one day to take their houses, gold and the whole city back. Zübeyde's story sheds light on how the recent history of Van is remembered by its Muslim inhabitants.

Zübeyde uses the term *seferberlik* [mobilization] to refer to the capture of Van by the Russians and Armenians and the subsequent migration of Muslims: "Van belonged to the Armenians. The city center, the fields surrounding the castle belonged to the Turks. After the *seferberlik*, they persecuted Muslims a lot. There were none left, they were all conscripted." One of them is Zübeyde's grandfather: "My grandfather went to the army, my grandmother and my uncle died. Only my mother survived. Back then buses did not exist; there were ships, but not enough for everyone. They escaped with ox carts. My mother remembers their wheels rolling over the corpses. The majority died because of the smell." Before he set off on his journey from Van to Diyarbakır, Zübeyde's grandfather destroyed his property: "They opened the barn doors. They let the animals out, and they set their house on fire so that it won't be left to the Armenians." And he buried the gold, source of inspiration for many legends: "In those days the currency was gold or silver. They left the gold, thinking they would come back. My grandfather, while going to *seferberlik*, buried cans filled with gold."

### *Our soldiers were hardly picking beets*

With the changing of power relations in the city, the period Zübeyde calls *seferberlik* came to an end: "Turkish soldiers expelled the Armenians. As they said in the old days, 'They repelled the enemy'." Now the persecuted Muslims became the persecutors: "Sure, Armenians were also killed, were our soldiers picking beets? It was blood for blood, death for death, the strong against the weak." And those who left their property behind this time were the Armenians: "They took their lives and went. They didn't take anything. They said, let's leave this house right now, just like that." According to Zübeyde's account, their departure did not differ much from that of the Muslims; they set their houses on fire, buried cans of gold.



Muslims returned to Van, but not to their own houses: “After a while all the people returned, but those who returned settled in the Armenian quarter. They weren’t buying anything. Everybody came, found a place, and settled.” Zübeyde’s grandfather moved into the five storey house of the well-known Aram Pasha. Zübeyde defended her grandfather and his generation, saying that they didn’t have ‘designs on property’: “People of olden times didn’t have an ambition for money. There was fraternity, sharing. But now?” However, the hidden treasures, cans of gold and the stories about them charmed everyone, including Zübeyde: “Our house used to belong to Aram Pasha. In the old days, the kitchen was full of jars of food: rice, couscous, lentils. There were two big jars of gold. They came and took two jars of gold from behind the bricks. My mother didn’t know. The Armenians moved the wall, the bricks where they hid everything, inside the wall.” According to Zübeyde’s narrative, some Armenians returned to Van to take the gold they hid: “The Armenian comes and says, ‘This is my house.’ They come after four-five years and say, ‘Look, here is a treasure. Remove this or that stone, here is a treasure.’ They say, ‘Half for you,

half for me.' But what do our Muslims do? They beat him good and send him away. They didn't give him five cents." And some Armenians come and take their gold "without letting anybody know." Nevertheless, neither the treasures end, nor their stories: "They still remain in the land of Van. Wherever new estates are built, treasure is found when the hammer hits the ground." Treasure promises progress as well as sudden wealth: "The Armenians say 'When the doors of the houses in Van are made of gold, and the windows of silver, then we will say that they have discovered all of our treasures.'" The stories about "Armenian spells" only serve to reinforce the mystery. The gold on which Armenians have put a spell, "make some faint, and others die".

### *We'll cover the castle of Van with a red cloth*

The Armenians as imagined by Zübeyde do not only want the treasures hidden in the land of Van or in their old houses back, but the entire city: "They want Van since eternity. I swear that they always wanted it; this side belongs to the Armenians. The Armenians have always said, 'If we conquer the castle of Van, we'll cover it from top to bottom with a red cloth to shade it from the sun'." Armenians' attachment to Van is a source of fear for Zübeyde. While their houses and gold possess a mysterious charm, the image of the Armenian who will return one day to take his house and gold along with the city he once owned spreads fear. Every issue, even the Kurdish issue is explained in reference to this image: "Why would a Turk kill a Turk otherwise? Why would a Muslim kill a Muslim? The Turks and Kurds are brothers, brothers in religion if it were not for the Armenians. I swear that the Armenians do it. There wasn't anything with the Kurds. They used to fight among themselves, they'd shoot each other and kill each other. They didn't have problems with Turks."

Besides the Armenians of the time of *seferberlik* who live in stories or the Armenians of an unknown future who will return to take back their city, there are also Armenians who live in the present. Zübeyde, who differentiates communities on the basis of religion, distinguishes her Islamicized Armenian neighbors from the Armenians in her stories. According to her, the Islamicized Armenians are "just like us": "There was my neighbor's mother, she also passed away. She had had a child, forty days old. Armenians became captives among Turks. The father of our neighbor here took one. One of his sons was left behind by the Armenians. Now we don't call him Armenian. He became Muslim like us. He used to pray and fast. He didn't drop the rosary from his hand."

The Armenians in Zübeyde's memory are mythical figures who oblige her grandfather to migrate, who migrate when it is their turn, putting a spell on and then burying their gold. They still want to return to take the city, and push the Turks and Kurds into war. They certainly don't resemble Zübeyde's neighbors. Why is there such pervasive fear in Zübeyde's narrative, when Armenians and Turks alike have suffered in Van, and Turkish victory prevailed?



## I Didn't Love You to Forget You

Vera is an 81 year-old Armenian woman born and raised in Ankara. She now lives alone in Istanbul, having lost her husband, her son and her daughter. Although she has relatives abroad, she prefers to remain in Istanbul, in her own home and close to her friends. She is extremely courageous and attached to life, despite having suffered greatly due to the tragic loss of her son and her daughter to cancer. A story of unrequited love for a Turkish man, however, forms the crux of her life, even today.

When asked about her family, Vera speaks of 1915: "I didn't know my grandfathers. They went during the genocide. We are Armenian Catholics. We are attached to the Pope. When my grandfather was taken and cut down, they were saying 'this is for Catholics too.' My grandmother was blind. Probably because of crying too much. My father escaped and survived. Three of my grandmother's daughters survived. She married my mother to my father because she didn't know where she would end up. My father was 16 years older than my mother. My grandmother took the rest of her children and went to France. My mother did not see her mother for 28 years."

According to Vera, her family refrained from discussing 1915: "I had many Muslim friends in Ankara. My mother and my relatives did not discuss the subject so as not to cause resentment. I didn't want it to



be discussed when the kids were around after they grew up. Because I'm in Turkey. My friends, whom I love very much, are Muslims.”

Vera said she felt sad upon reading Fethiye Çetin's book, My Grandmother, as the book reminded her of her mother-in-law's experience: “My mother-in-law lived it. An *ağa* from Diyarbakır came along when they were taking her grandmother, mother and father in Tokat. He took my mother-in-law on to his horse. Her name is Silva, he renamed her Zeynep. They had always called her ‘*Gavur* girl, *gavur* girl, *gavur* girl.’ She couldn't bear this word. One day she had the cross in her pocket, the crucifix. The cross fell when she was taking the key out. The lady of the house said, ‘*Gavur* girl, are you still carrying this?’ Then she ran away. She went to the house of my husband's uncle, found shelter there. Their father had escaped to Aleppo at the time of the massacre. My father-in-law came from there and saw my mother-in-law. They got married, had children.”

### *I the gavur, wet the chestnuts*

Vera tells an interesting anecdote about a conversation she had with Turkish women with whom she was friends. She overheard one friend telling another that she had done right to move out of her apartment: “‘You did the right thing by renting that house,’ she said, ‘there were *gavurs* in the lower floor.’ I stared at her. The most civilized, most cultivated of them says ‘*gavur*’. Previously she had told me to wet the chestnuts. When she asked about it, I said ‘the Muslim asked me to, and I, the *gavur*, wet them.’ ‘Are you talking to me?’ she said. ‘No,’ I said, ‘You are not Zehra. I am talking to another Zehra.’ ‘But,’ she said, ‘you said they killed your grandfather.’ I said ‘I stand behind my words. They did kill him. Maybe Armenians did too, but we know about what they went through. I am not the Ottoman's child. I am the Republic's child. I have closed that book.’”

Vera remembers the discrimination her elder sister experienced in high school, and how it affected her life choices: “My father can't go to the high school to get my sister enrolled. Our tenant Mehmet says, ‘I'll do it but there are only two Christians in the entire school. Let's not call her Naira, but Lale. Let their friends call her Lale.’ My sister was very successful at school. One of the teachers asked, ‘Lale, do you have another name?’ ‘Arat's daughter Naira.’ ‘Ok’ she says, ‘are you proud of saying I am a Christian or I am a Turk?’ Then my sister graduated with an average degree. Mehmet went to see the supervisor, who said, ‘Arat's daughter Naira, what does it matter if her degree is average or high?’ Then my sister didn't go to school. After she married a Greek, they called her children ‘*Makarios*’ children.’ [President of Republic of Cyprus who fought for union with Greece]. That's why my sister left.”



*Nobody cared. Nobody cared.  
Nobody.*

Vera also remembers how 6-7 September, 1955 was experienced in her neighborhood: “I hung a flag in the window. They didn’t stone our house because I speak proper Turkish. They stoned the next door neighbors, they broke the windows. They entered the cemeteries. They carried the skulls on sticks. Nobody cared. Nobody cared. Nobody. There were Muslims next to us. I asked them about what happened the next day. They said, ‘The kids were excited, my dear, they were bound to do that much.’”

Vera’s final comment to her friend with whom she argued about the term ‘gavur’ expresses her claims to this land: “I leave that history aside. I turn to current history. September 6, the Wealth Tax, conscription of non-Muslims. We’ve been through all that. But still, I am a child of this place. Still, I don’t go. I’m more of a Muslim and Turk than you. You don’t know where you come from, I do. I come from Ankara and I’m in Istanbul.”

*One in misery is better than two*

When asked about her childhood, Vera remembers years of happiness growing up in Ankara, and her Turkish boyfriend, who still means the world to her: “When I was at school my boyfriend was Muslim. His sister was my friend. We dated for seven years. He was a Muslim.” She claims that their marriage was made im-





possible by the difference in religion: “We couldn’t get married because of that difference. We separated in 1950 when my mother died. He said, ‘I’m getting married.’ ‘Well done,’ I said, ‘One in misery is better than two.’ His family wouldn’t want it. No way, would they want a *gavur* girl? My family is very conservative, his family is also very conservative. And we suffered as a result of it. But he said: ‘They were going to talk for forty days, but they were going to forget on the forty-first. You always focused on the issue of religion.’”

Although she married another man and moved to Istanbul, Vera never forgot her first love: “However I still cannot forget. That’s for sure.” Years later, after both had married and raised children, she decided to visit him in Ankara: “I am curious, I want to hear his voice. I called the office. ‘Ok’ he said, ‘come tomorrow.’ I went to his office. We sat there face to face. ‘You,’ he said, ‘packed your bags and went to Istanbul. You left all the memories here to me. Are you happy?’ And one day he called me. I got up and went to the Çırağan Hotel. He’s performing there. He sang a song: ‘I didn’t love you just to forget you.’”

Vera had an unhappy and loveless marriage. She felt that her husband's family, with whom she was forced to live, never accepted her. She recounts how her mother-in-law excluded her from the family photo taken by a professional photographer. She had to spend years looking at a framed photograph marked by her absence. Vera was devastated by the death of both her son and her daughter as young adults. It was through the support of her children that she had survived the constant abuse of her husband. This is how she describes one of her husband's attacks of anger: "The house turned into 6 September. Everything is thrown about, broken." She says she would have divorced if it had not been for the children. Although both her children died abroad, they wanted their ashes to be brought back to Turkey. This meant a lot to Vera, who visits her children's graves often. She suggests that this is one more reason to remain in Turkey, and to join her children at her own death. While she is extremely strong, the pain remains: "The pain is in my heart. I cry every time I swim in the sea. What do I have to do in the sea? My children are not here, not with me."

Even at the age of 81, Vera dreams of seeing her love again, though she is concerned that she is no longer at her best: "I would call Ahmet, but I don't want to be seen in this state." Vera's story expresses the deep attachment of Armenians in Turkey to this land as well as the tragedy of unrequited love.

## The Charm of Ararat

Mehmet is a 62-year-old man born in an Azeri village in Iğdır, a city on the slopes of Mount Ararat. He narrates the history of his village: “My people migrated to this side during the war with the Armenians. My father is from Azerbaijan, and my mother is from Iran. A slaughter, a war took place there, which is why my paternal grandfather escaped to this side.” It is the magnificent Mount Ararat, situated at the borders of four countries, that shapes Mehmet’s own life, as much as it did the lives of his ancestors: “During that period there were intense border conflicts. Our village, Iğdır and Mount Ararat were constantly changing hands. For example, one face of Greater Ararat would come to belong to Russia, the other face to us. One face of Lesser Ararat belonged to the Iranians, and its other face to us. A mountain is not an apple you can divide into two, saying one half is yours and the other mine.”

### *The Aras River was the border of fear*

Mehmet expresses the effect the border had on people on both sides using examples from his own life, making a distinction between old and new generations: “Our people came over to this side because of the conflict with the Armenians. These are historical events. But the perpetrators are not alive. I wonder to what extent today’s Armenian generation resembles those of the past, or to what extent we resemble our grandfathers back then. I spent my childhood on the banks of the Aras River. The Aras is all there is between us and the Armenians; the border. It was the border of fear. Russia was feared. My mother could not say “Russian,” she would say *otay*. In the Azeri language, *otay* means “the other side of the water.” The Armenians were not seen as a source of evil. My mother was always hoeing the cotton fields on the shore of the Aras. When she stood up, she would see the men and women over on the Armenian side, about this close to her. It was like a neighborhood. Rice used to be grown in Iğdır years ago. We had buffalos to do the heavy work. After working the field with them, my father would say ‘son, go and take them to graze, but be careful, do not let them cross to the Armenian side.’ In the heat of July, after cooling themselves in the river, our buffaloes would get out and start to graze in fields over on the Armenian side, as if they were born and bred there. You cannot tell them this is Armenia, or about the wars in the past. We were scared, of course. We would be crying over on this side. For our father used to beat us. They would see us crying and shrieking from the other side, where they were working in the fields just like us. They would drive the buffaloes over to this side and we would jump with joy. Thinking about it now, those people could have just taken the buffaloes. The Armenians that my father used to describe were people who were armed, aggressive, hostile, murderous. I think of the kind of people who would drive the buffaloes over to this side and would have to ask myself if these could really be their sons and daughters.



There are no problems between the people in that region. But we cannot erase what happened in the past. In fact, the present generation is not responsible for the events of the past. They just inherited that history. Yes, there was conflict and hostility between the Armenians and our people, but the feelings of enmity are not deeply-rooted enough to persist into the future.”

Mehmet finds traces of Armenian history in his village in the architecture of the bathhouse. For him, it is evidence of a highly developed

civilization: “We need to acknowledge that there are some brilliant craftsmen among the Armenians. Their cities and their architecture are sophisticated, very sound and refined. The settlements over on our side are built carelessly by poor people, mixing together sand and clay. The Armenians built an impressive bathhouse at the entrance of our village. During my childhood, we would go in and look around. It is obvious that other people used to live here before us. I knew that it was not built by the Turks; I could sense this from the inscriptions. That bathhouse still stands. I get the impression that the Armenians who lived here in the past were concerned about cleanliness. If there is no bathhouse in a village, you know that there is no custom of hygiene. Why is there a bathhouse in our village and not in the other villages? Who brought it here? And why is it made of stone, when all the houses in the village are made of clay?”

### *On Ararat children roam free*

Mehmet, whose family were farmers, used to spend summers on Mount Ararat: “We were the wealthiest family in the village, but also the largest. There were 36 of us in total, and 40 if you counted the dogs as well. Dogs were as important as people there. We had herds of sheep up on the slopes of Ararat. These

dogs protected the sheep against wolves. We used to summer in an area called Serdarbulak located between two mountain peaks. Serdarbulak means ‘free spring water’. After leaving my lambs to graze, I would gaze across at Russia. In the evenings, there was no electricity over on our side back then. There were only gas-lamps and torches. On the other side, though, there were so many lights all along the border that we children used to be filled with envy. We even used to play under those lights. On Mount Ararat children were free to think about anything they wanted, even things which were forbidden. That was the best thing about it, clearing your mind completely of fear and of the border. What I dreamed about back then was to be the prime minister of Russia. Russia seemed very strong, it had so many lights. I could tell that it was very developed. Our villages, in contrast, were so dim.”

### *Are you sure that they will not dump us in prison there?*

Mehmet’s mother Ayşe Bacı’s feelings at the time the borders opened demonstrate the mark it left on people: “After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the borders were opened. People could now cross over to the other side of the river Aras at Dilucu. They saw that there was not only Armenia but also Nahcevan, Azeri country, beyond the river. Years later, I was going to travel to Nahcevan, and offered to take my mother. ‘Where are you taking me?’ she asked. ‘To otay,’ I said, and she immediately knew that I meant across the Aras River. I saw that she really wanted to go but was still anxious. We travelled towards Nahcevan by car, passing the Turkish customs. The bridge over the Aras took you straight to Nahcevan and Armenia. My mother, who spent her youth in the banks of the Aras, was now passing to the other side. When we were on the bridge, her hands and legs began to tremble. She said in Azerbaijani Turkish, ‘*oğul eminsen, bak bizi orda dama gahmazlar mı?*’ [son, are you sure they will not dump us in prison there?] My mother trembled, held my hand, and I understood how she felt, going over to the other side she had gazed at with fear for fifty, sixty years.”

Mehmet’s Azerbaijani relatives remained in Iran and Azerbaijan. Family members could not meet for years and were forced to live separately. Mehmet is reminded of this pain in the narratives of the people he meets in Nahcevan: “We searched for my mother’s relatives. None were left, all had died. They offered us tea in the coffeehouse. I noticed that all the houses were built in such a way so as to have a view of Mount Ararat. It looked amazing from Nahcevan: two conical peaks standing side by side, half-covered with snow. People there told us, ‘for years we couldn’t approach the Aras river, or even just look over to your side’. This side of the river was afraid of the other side of the river, just like the other side was afraid of this side. They said, ‘Our elders died looking at the mountain with longing.’ This affected me deeply. Mount Ararat has an incredible impact on people. It has an enormous impact on Armenia. Longing and nostalgia. It is there in Azerbaijan, in Iran. There is something mysterious about Mount Ararat. People from different countries want to come and see it, research it. The key to this region’s attraction is Mount Ararat and the fact that it is located at the border of four countries. Climb up the foothills, and you will hear the sound of the roosters in Armenia, and when the weather is clear, you can even see people working.”

Mehmet, who eventually succeeded in getting an education and becoming a university lecturer in Ankara, never lost his ties to Iğdır. He longs for the opening up of the borders and of Mount Ararat to the world so that the people living around it can come together: “Ararat is like a magnet. Many religious beliefs, civilizations, countries have existed here. It is known world over. If I go to Holland or Paris and say that I am from Iğdır, it will not mean anything to anyone. If I say I am from Turkey, they still might not understand. But if I say I am from Mount Ararat, it will ring a bell. It is the highest volcanic mountain in Europe, and the second highest in the world. Yet it is empty, useless. It is off limits. Why? I am in favor of sharing. Let us open Mount Ararat to tourism. Let everyone come and find traces of their ancestors, or whatever else they want to find on Mount Ararat. The mountain is getting poorer with each passing day. The mountain has a soul. It too is alive. The summit of Ararat is always covered with snow. The mountain absorbs this snow right at the summit, releasing it along its slopes during summertime. And all its creatures, the wolves, deer, mountain goats and snakes are nourished by those springs. Because of excessive grazing and hunting, wildlife in Mount Ararat is under threat. We are being blind about Mount Ararat, unable to see the huge mountain under our nose. Mount Ararat is great, as great as the poverty to be found on its slopes. How can the height of Mount Ararat be converted into bread for those poor people to eat?”

According to Mehmet, the opening of the border between Turkey and Armenia will make Mount Ararat a symbol of communication rather than a border: “What is being said at the moment is, ‘zero problems with neighboring countries’. How is that going to happen? Armenia is on the other side of Aras, I am on this side, and in-between is the border. But, come on, let us become friends! How can you have a friendship on command? Once the border is open, they will be free to come and go, we will be free to come and go. They will get to know our generation, we will get to know theirs. The previous generations on both sides might have made mistakes, but we will talk and come to understand one another. How can we be friends without a relationship? Are we afraid of showing Mount Ararat to the world? When people see the mountain, will some magical energy in their eyes make the mountain vanish, as if cursed by the evil eye? Either we are afraid of sharing the mountain with the world or we have closed our eyes so tight that we cannot see this rich natural wonder so close to us.”

In Turkey, people living along the border feel fear and suspicion towards those on the other side of the border. This is because they are brought up with the bitter stories of previous generations. But, despite being brought up in Ararat at the borders of four countries, Mehmet did not accept this heritage, and was able to distinguish between the experiences of previous generations and his own. Most importantly, the divisions between peoples in the region where he was brought up led him to view others as individuals rather than as members of ethnic/religious communities or nations. For him, Ararat should be a symbol which unites rather than separates different peoples. His greatest endeavor both in his professional and in his personal life is to protect Mount Ararat’s natural resources and to develop its economy. This allows him to maintain his belief in the possibility of dialogue between peoples who have experienced conflict in the past.



## The Story of the “Night People”

Born in 1954 in Istanbul, Dikran tells a story which begins well before and far afield. “The story that I’m going to tell” he says, “is indeed the life story of many Armenians.” He tells it, filled not with hatred, but with love: “If I tell it with feelings of hatred or revenge, then there’s no meaning in telling it. If it’d be blood for blood, feelings of revenge will persist.” This is a bitter history, but for Dikran it must be told to ensure it is not repeated. Telling it is a difficult decision: “They wouldn’t say a lot about what they knew in our fami-



ly, nor do we tell it to our children because we don't want our children to feel hatred towards the society they live in. This was what my father thought." However, Dikran had heard some stories from his father, but it was a while before he could see the big picture: "My father and our relatives used to talk about the *seferberlik* [mobilization]. Details were not told. And I used to think that this happened only in our village. Then I realized that what had happened in our village had also happened in Muş, Van, and in other places. I was an adult when we finally began to learn about the Armenian genocide." This is a "thorny" story of roots and rootlessness. It explains why he doesn't receive anything from his homeland, while his Turkish friends are sent apricots from Malatya, watermelons from Diyarbakır: "I don't receive anything from anywhere because I don't have anybody. I don't have roots, nor do I have a past. We didn't come out of the earth; I mean, we came from somewhere. See, we don't have this 'somewhere'. Our past is very short; I can only speak about my grandfather when I talk to you. Well, where was he born, but I can't go beyond that. I can't tell you about it because those people don't exist. I can't tell you anything about them; I don't have anybody in my father's homeland. Because it doesn't exist. They tore me from my father's land."

### *We didn't come from somewhere, we were here*

Dikran uses the very same story to explain that he didn't come from anywhere; that he was here in the first place. As an Armenian in Turkey he is used to being asked where he comes from: "Who was here back in 1070? It wasn't an empty field. There were Armenians and Greeks; I mean, we are them. We've been here for five thousand years. We didn't come from anywhere. And you do feel resentment sometimes. You know they call you 'stranger.' For instance, I am doing my military service, I will be demobilized in a few months, we're on guard with a sergeant. And we've been serving together with that sergeant for almost a year. 'My lieutenant,' he says 'why is your name Dikran?' 'Man,' I say, 'I am Armenian.' 'Oh,' he says, 'where did you come from?' They often ask about this. I said, 'We didn't come from somewhere, we were here.' I gave him a short summary. He was surprised, he stared at me for a while. We've been serving for one year; the guy doesn't know that I'm Armenian. He doesn't know what an Armenian is, these are strange sorts of things."

This is the way Dikran tells the story of his family:

"Our history begins with my grandfather. My grandfather is actually from Gürün, which is a district of Sivas. When the *seferberlik* happens—let's use softer terms not to cause ourselves more pain—my grandfather is serving in the military. *Seferberlik* ends and my grandfather comes to Gürün. Before his military service my grandfather is an ironsmith, he has an iron workshop there, he's also a tinsmith. He comes to his workshop, but there are things going on. I don't really know what. I mean, he's anxious while coming back, he knows something is going on in his homeland. He comes and sees that nobody's there. His apprentice carries on with the shop. He asks, 'What happened, my son?' 'Master,' he says, 'nobody from your community is here.' The apprentice is also anxious, because the master might take the shop from him. And my grandfather says, 'My son, it is already yours, I will be leaving.'"



“I don’t know why, but my grandfather leaves that evening. He is afraid. But he learns that his sister is in Afşin. Why is his sister there? Now the convoy leaves Gürün but some are massacred there. They set the women off on the road. While the women are on the way, Lieutenant Mehmet sees Nikyar and takes her as a bride for his son. He has a son called Osman. He marries our aunt to Osman. After Nikyar is married she becomes Nuran. This is Osman’s third wife; he already has two wives. He takes her as a third wife because she’s a beautiful Armenian girl. When he learns about this, my grandfather comes to Afşin. His brother-in-law takes care of him when he arrives. You know, he doesn’t let him in the city, they are afraid something might happen. He sends my grandfather to work in the fields. A relative of his brother-in-law, a man called Hasan the Tall is at home. They call him *doçdrej* in Kurdish, which means somebody tall, I guess. He asks, ‘What is your profession, my boy?’ And my grandfather says, ‘I’m a tin-smith.’ ‘Well,’ he says, ‘I’ll take you to our village then. There are forty, forty-five Armenians in our village. We hide them in a cave, they’re all safe from the *seferberlik*. Because they might kill you here if they see you.’ While going to the village, Hasan the Tall buys him copper, ammonium and a ventilator. He gives him 22 liras. He says, ‘you do your job in the village and then you’ll pay me the money back.’ My grandfather goes to the village. Since our village is an Alevi Kurdish village, it is against the state. And that’s why they hid our people.”

### *Marişave*

They call our people ‘night people’ or *marişave* in Kurdish. They are called this because our people appear at night; they are afraid during the day because the gendarme can capture them. The villagers bring food from the village to the cave for the entire time they are there. One day the gendarme comes to the village to search for fugitive soldiers. He captures a soldier, because there are many fugitive soldiers in those days, you know it’s a time of war. He captures one of the Kurds. Upon this, the fugitive says to the lieutenant, ‘Take us away and then our wives will be left to the *gavurs*.’ He asks, ‘What *gavur*?’ The gendarme then captures both the fugitives and the Armenians. Then Hasan the Tall says ‘I won’t hand over any of the Armenians.’ He gives the lieutenant a bribe of a hundred lira. A hundred lira is a lot of money. He says to the fugitive soldiers, ‘You will all give five lira each.’ He takes five lira from each, and ten lira from the one who informed the lieutenant. He gets his hundred lira back and saves our people.”

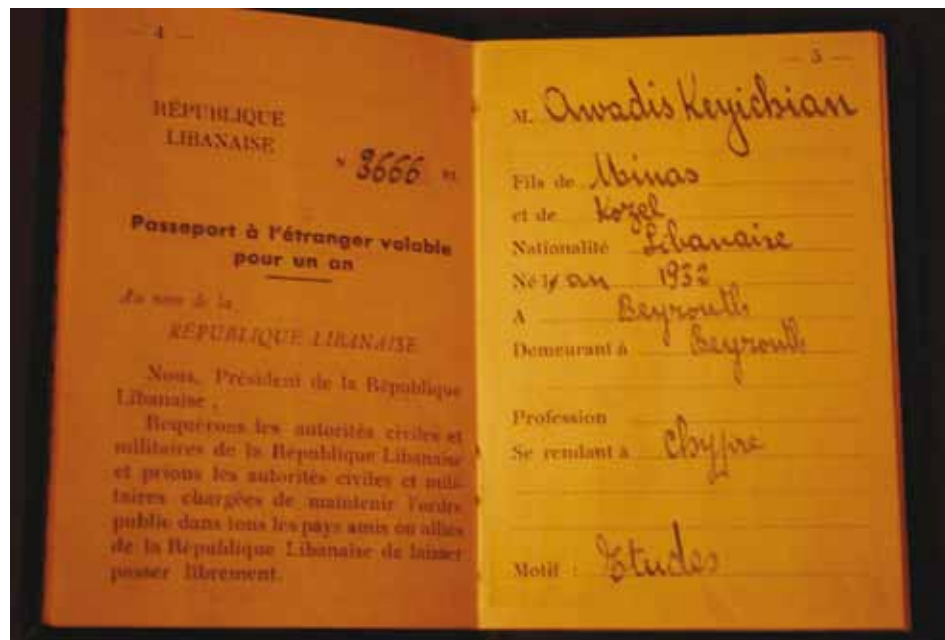
“My grandfather grows up to be a young man. And it is now peaceful in Turkey, things settle down. Hasan the Tall gets all the Armenians together and says, ‘It’s peaceful now, get out of the cave.’ Before he was married, my grandfather loved a Kurdish girl there. Hasan the Tall says ‘No, we brought you here so that you could remain Armenian, there’s an Armenian girl in Kerevin, let’s get her for you, *Bozo*.’ They call him *Bozo* because he’s blond. My grandmother’s name is Baydzar, they take her and marry her to my grandfather.”

“I saw that cave, we walked there from our village in two hours. That cave used to be in a forest back then. It is not a hidden place anymore. I couldn’t enter because they built a wall in the mouth of the cave.

It's probably because of the conflict with PKK they built the wall. They welcomed me very warmly; they still love our people there. There are people who name their daughters Baydzar or Maryam, although we're not there anymore. Baydzar means "to shine" in Armenian. I mean, they still remember us fondly. There was a blind woman. I went to her house, we were going to sleep there that night. 'Guess who I brought you,' her daughter said, 'tell me if you know him.' The woman can't see. 'Wait,' she said, 'let me hug you, my dear.' She hugged me. 'Oh,' she said, 'you smell like Zaven.' I said, 'I am Zaven's son.' 'Oh my dear, wait, I'll hug you again.'"

# Research in Armenia: “Whom to Forgive? What to Forgive?”

H RANUSH KHARATYAN-ARAQELYAN





## Brief Historical Summary

The perception, and to a significant extent, the attitude of Armenia's present population to Turkey and the Turkish people, along with the possibility of developing Armenia-Turkey relations, has been largely shaped by the Armenian Genocide; massacres and deportation that started in Ottoman Turkey at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and reached its obvious conclusion in 1915-1922, followed by the lengthy "official reticence" of the USSR and Soviet Armenian authorities in regard to these massacres.

Those Armenians, who survived the massacres in the western part<sup>1</sup> of the historical Armenia, inherited by Ottoman Empire from Byzantium (which in this text is sometimes referred to as Western Armenia

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1 This part, sometimes only vilayets of Van and Erzurum, is called Armenieh, Armenia, Ermenistan in the maps up to XIXc inclusive (also in Turkish maps). For example, Islamic world map is dated 977 AH/1570 CE and is from the manuscript entitled Kitab al- bad'w al-Tarikh (Book of the Beginnings and History). The manuscript is attributed to Ibn-Said or al-Šawi al-Farsi. Below the Caspian (to its west) lies a large mountain range – possibly the Caucasus – with a second one further south, which is probably the depiction of the Armenian Highlands. Between the two mountain ranges lies Armanieh, Armenia. Khorasan is situated to the west of Armenia. To its south the cities of Hamadan and Baghdad are shown. Size c. 28,5mm dia. Bodleian Library – Oxford, MS Laud. Or.317 ff 9v–10r (Rouben Galichian, Historic Maps of Armenia. The Cartographic Heritage London, I.B.Tauris, 2004, pp. 120-121); The Map of 'Turkey in Asia' is from the Ottoman World Atlas, printed in Üsküdar (one of the districts of Istanbul) in 1803–4, which in itself is the translation of William Faden's (1750–1836) General Atlas published in London in 1797... while the regions of Van and Erzurum are called Ermenistan, i.e. Armenia. Size 72x54cm British Library, OIOC 14999.h.2(2), f.18(Rouben Galichian, Historic Maps of Armenia. The Cartographic Heritage London, I.B.Tauris, 2004, pp. 196-197); The German map was printed in Berlin in 1844 as 'The Map of the Turkish Empire'. Ottoman Turkish map is a translation of an original German map by Heinrich Kiepert (1818–99), based on the observations of von Vincke, Fischer and von Moltke, as well as Kiepert himself, and prepared for the General Staff of the German Army. The German map was printed in Berlin in 1844 as 'The Map of the Turkish Empire' (Fig. 116b). In this map the area of Lake Van, Erzurum, Kharput, Bitlis, Kars and Ararat, located within the Ottoman Empire, is denoted as Armenia, with Kurdistan south of Lake Van.(Rouben Galichian, Historic Maps of Armenia. The Cartographic Heritage London, I.B.Tauris, 2004, pp. 240);

In the Ottoman maps of 1803 the area of Van and Erzurum is shown in bold letters as 'Ermenistan', i.e. Armenia, while in this map of 1854, the name of the same area, while still shown as basically Armenia, appears here in much smaller letters merely as Ermani, which translates as 'Armenian' (see title underlined with double blue lines), while Kurdistan is boldly written in the area to the south of Lake Van. (Rouben Galichian. Historic Maps of Armenia. The Cartographic Heritage London, I.B.Tauris, 2004, pp. 240); Map of the 'Ottoman Country' (Turkey) is from the atlas of the world printed in Arabic in Constantinople in 1867. In this map the territory of Armenia is divided between the Russian and the Ottoman Empires. The regions of Van and Erzurum, although within the territory of the Ottoman Empire, bear the name Bilad Arman (Region of Armenia) and are considered to be Armenian lands. This area includes the cities of Bayazid, Van, Erzurum, Bitlis, Moush and Erzinjan. The territory to the south of Armenia, below the region of Van and Bitlis, is named Kurdistan. Size 42x29cm British Library – London, Maps 42.d.1, f.2 (Rouben Galichian, Historic Maps of Armenia. The Cartographic Heritage London, I.B.Tauris, 2004, pp. 214-215).

Starting from 1880 it was banned to use the name 'Armenia' in the official documents. During the rule of Abdul Hamid, a Turkish anglophile statesmen, great vezir Kyamil Pasha writes the following: 'We and England do not recognize the word Armenia and we have to smash any jaw which will dare to utter this word. Therefore, to reach this goal, it is necessary to clean the earth from Armenian nation without any trace, to destroy completely'. (Новая история Армении в трудах современных зарубежных авторов, отв. редактор Саакян Р.Г. Ереван, 1993, էջ 15,17)

and can generally be located in Turkey's region, which, starting from 1923, is called Eastern Anatolia), as well as those fleeing other parts of Turkey found refuge in the territory of Eastern Armenia, at that time a part of Tsarist Russia, as well as in present Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, Iran, Greece, Russia, Georgia and elsewhere. Some of them later moved from these countries, to Western Europe and to the American continent. In those years, many foreign governments and people helped Armenians by opening orphanages, which for many years remained the only chance of survival for the orphaned children. In the twenties, towns and villages in all Arab countries, Greece, Russia and Georgia were full of Armenians living in self-built wooden houses. While they were looking for jobs on the one hand, on the other they were trying to find their missing children, parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends with whom they had started the dangerous journey of deportation, only to either lose them because of multiple attacks, or to leave the weakest and sickest along the way. There was no time to mourn the losses; the survivors had to look after each other to be able to start their lives all over again. There was no time for grief, as they had to find those who were lost or missing, so they searched the newly opened orphanages. Young widows and widowers that lost their spouses joined together to help each other and raise their surviving children.

Eastern Armenia was full of orphans, starving, emaciated and homeless people who begged every passer-by for a piece of bread. Those who asked for food largely outnumbered those who could provide it. The population of Eastern Armenia, who was fighting in World War I on the side of Russia, was struggling through a difficult period due to both the war and the persisting unstable political situation in Russia as well as to the crisis that turned into genocide against the Armenians in Turkey. Additionally, there was a significant Turkish-speaking<sup>1</sup> Muslim population on the territory of Eastern Armenia whose sympathies lay with the Turkish side. Therefore those Armenians who survived the massacres could only look for sympathy and support among the Armenian population in Eastern Armenia, which was the minority of the country's population. The resources of the Etchmiadzin Catholicosate and Armenian charitable organizations were not sufficient enough to provide adequate food to the survivors. Soon, epidemic diseases spread among the tired, frightened, orphaned and broken people and part of them died from disease, cold and hunger. During these years, hearses collected people who died overnight from their wounds, hunger, cold and epidemic diseases from the streets of Etchmiadzin and Yerevan every day.

In 1916-1917, some of the refugees began to return to their homeland, and in 1919 the rumor spread among the refugees that there was a coup d'état in Turkey and Armenians could now return home. Some people believed the rumors and returned with great hardship. However, the massacres were repeated, and in 1918-22 after losing more people, the returnee Armenians became refugees again, evicted from Western Turkey. The second wave of massacres in the environs of Van took place in the spring of 1918. These were the very events which became the main reference point for the perception and mem-

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1 In this context the term "Turkish-speaking" was chosen because of the absence of a proper term denoting the identity of this group. In the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century their identity was expressed through religious affiliation – Muslim. Russian sources called the Turkish-speaking Muslims in Southern Caucasus "Caucasian Tatars"; Armenians were calling them "Turks".

ories about Turkey and Turks for many Armenians, thus reshaping the attitude towards Turkey and Turks.

This attitude, however, was suppressed because of the friendly relations between Bolshevik Russia and Kemalist Turkey, as after 1920, Bolshevik Armenia could not have a conflicting policy from that of communist Russia and later the USSR. Therefore, the official ideology of Soviet Armenia considered it inappropriate to express negative opinions towards Turkey, and thus the attitudes of Armenians (those living in Armenia) toward Turkey were confined within individual or family circles.

Family memories of the present generation of Genocide survivors among the population of the Republic of Armenia, along with their apprehension about Turks and their influence on general public opinion, are represented in biographical materials which were used as sources for this work.



## **“Whom to Forgive? What to Forgive?”: Sources of “Oral Stories”**

The only materials used in this work are those exclusively collected on the territory of the Republic of Armenia since October 2009.. Other sources such as published or archive materials as well as research or analytical texts related to the Genocide have not been used in this research. The materials have mainly been recorded among second and third generation survivors, mostly in their homes, and in certain cases at their places of employment. While interviewing an individual family member, very often other members of the family also participated in the conversation. Merely 35 out of numerous recorded narrations have been used in this work, although there is no doubt that all the conversations and observations have influenced the logic of the text. The list of all respondents who were mentioned or quoted at some point, along with their photographs and brief biographical information, is attached as an annex to this publication. All the respondents were asked to recount the biographies of the last three or four generations of their families, to the extent they could remember, with a focus on their past or present relations with Turks. All the respondents have been informed that their family histories were being recorded for research purposes on Armenian-Turkish relations, however, they have been asked not to limit themselves to the “Turkish” past of their families. All respondents have been informed that their narrations, fully or partially, may be published as a part of the book. All but two respondents permitted the publication of their names, photographs and narrations. Those two women currently have relations with Turkey. One of them is married in Istanbul while the other one has trading links with Istanbul and their names both in the list of respondents and in the text have been changed. All the narrations have been audio-recorded: our conversations with 12 of them have been fully videotaped, and over five hundred photographs have been taken. Recorded narrations have been transcribed, and the total textual material exceeds a thousand pages. These materials are related to various segments of the history of our respondents. All the audio and video recordings, photographs and texts are presently deposited in personal archive of the project leader and author of this text, H. Kharatyan, however it is planned that in the future, they will be donated to the archives of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Armenian National Academy of Sciences.

The text is based on the principle of presenting particular materials which serve as the basis for the attitude towards Turkey and Turks. Quotation marks are used in the text to separate quotations from narrated materials. In fact, these are actually the very materials of our exposition, and our 35 narrators can be truly called the authors of this text. Therefore the list of the names and biographies of the real authors of this book are presented in a table at the end of the text, along with some photos and brief information about the relatives they mentioned in their stories.

Select excerpts from three biographies are also published at the end of the book. One of them represents a few episodes from the past life of one family's forefathers on the territory of Turkey ("Dear Almast, please write, please write"). The second story presents the roving of one family who lost their native land as a result of the Genocide, along with the problems they faced in the Soviet period, with atomization of the human, material, and spiritual potential of the family. This story presents the family biography in chronological order, up to the 1970 ("My father used to tell us at home"). The third story is related to a problem which plays an important role in the lives of the present generation of Genocide survivors which can be coined as "returning to the past", representing the issue of the quest for the Motherland ("...Our house was demolished...").

The toponyms used in the narratives are presented as they exist in the memories of the respondents. Since most of the memories date back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a part of the toponyms might not correspond to those used in the present Turkey and Armenia. Both countries have undergone changes of names of settlements and, partly, geographic objects. This fact is important to mention particularly regarding the toponyms used by Armenians, since, for example, according to "Refugee Resettlement Order" ("İşkân-ı Muhacirin Nizamnâmesi"), adopted in Turkey on 13 May 1913, turkification of the toponyms in the territory of Turkish Empire is justified and with the decree (**Emirname**) of Enver Pasha, the military minister of the Young Turks, **"changing the names of provinces, towns, villages, mountains, rivers ... and all other names belonging to Armenian, Greek, Bulgarian and other non-islamic nations in the Ottoman state into the Turkish ones"** only speeds up. The Armenians who fled from those areas, naturally, did not know the new turkified names of former Armenian settlements, and the younger generations continued using the traditional ones, preserved in the memories. Whenever possible, the location of the mentioned settlements are explained in the footnotes.

In this introduction it is important to emphasize that memory fragments from family narratives, which are quoted in the text and sometimes include accounts on atrocities, do not intend to form an attitude towards Turkish nation (or Kurds, who are also often mentioned in the family memories). These quotes mainly "tell" that the most important "fragments" recalled from indirect experience of interaction with Turks or Kurds are the specific events that have reversed the life paths of people and families. At the same time these very events are the last period when Armenians, currently living in the Republic of Armenia, and Turks actually interacted. Unfortunately, these events became the core memories which were passed down the generations and later the perceptions of Turks were largely based on those fragments. The sole purpose of presenting these fragments in the book is to show what the current perceptions are based on.

## “Private Stories”

After the establishment of Soviet rule the survivors that settled in the Russian part of the historical Armenia, i.e. Eastern Armenia, had great trouble speaking about their tragic experience. Following the establishment of friendly relations between Turkey and the Soviet Union, there was no official discussion of Turks. During Stalin era and partially the post-Stalin era, even private conversations and stories about Turks were defined by the official propaganda as “Dashnak agitation”<sup>1</sup> and nationalism to be persecuted by the authorities. The histories we collected also contain multiple references to this persecution. Vazgen Ghukasyan recounted memories from his childhood when sometimes, especially in winter evenings, men gathered in their house and sang about their lost homeland. During those evenings, his mother sent him or his elder brother up to the roof of the house to keep watch for villagers that were known as informers, and to quickly tell singers if an informer approached the house, since they could be accused of “anti-Stalinism” and even be deported or executed. This was in the 1930s Albert Mamikonyan, whose parents settled in Armenia in 1946 after wandering for long years, recalled from his childhood in the 1950s that they talked about their massacred relatives only within their family: “There was big fear during Stalin’s time... that is why we could not speak, talk when outsiders were present ...”. It was very easy to make political accusations against any person under the pretext of “nationalism”, especially against those defenseless people or to accuse them in connection with the political enemy, Dashnaks. Probably this was one of the reasons, if not the most important one, why the common tragedy of Armenians that was called “Yeghern” later, remained as a tragedy of families and individuals, i.e. a private issue, in the Republic of Armenia. At the same time public/collective memories were “locked” within families.

The absence of political and public debates or openly declared condolences made the issue mystical and the memories personal, family, kin, i.e. kind of “private”, and as such much deeper. What happened to them, and later, from their children’s standpoint what happened to their parents, became the source of family story and family tragedy, which at least for the second generation started to become a new tragedy. In the thirties, those who found refuge in orphanages grew up, many of them received an education; they tried to understand what happened and recapture it... But that did not play well with the official ideology, making their desire in some way dissident. If this was not politicizing people’s behaviors at least Under Stalin’s rule it led to behavioral bifurcation to say the least and made them look for ways to speak out about their tragedy or attract attention on it. And so they talked. They talked to each other, talked among the trusted acquaintances, wrote memoirs.

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1 Communist propaganda portrayed Dashnak party as an anti-communist nationalist party, and any sympathy towards Dashnaks was viewed as political opposition and punished.

During the Second World War as Turkey was considered an implicit ally of Germany in the Soviet Union the restrictions to talk about Turkey and Turks in Eastern Armenia were significantly eased. The family tragedy was relived particularly when finding the lost ones. People were continuously finding each other even after decades. Currently living in the village of Dashtadem one of our interviewees Mushegh Gevorgyan's great-grandmother who escaped from Artshesh<sup>1</sup> of Van region died in her nineties (1982) without finding her daughter who she lost at the age 15.. However, few years after her death, in 1987, Mushegh found the daughter of his great-grandmother, his grandmother's sister. The woman was a distinguished Hamshen Armenian senior, in one of the villages surrounding city of Sukhumi. She was kidnapped by a local Armenian youngster, who later married her, when orphans were brought to the port of Batumi to board the ship that was destined for America. The finding of this grandmother brought together Dashtademis, many descendants of refugees from Van, Sasun and locals. They remembered the tough life/plight of the great-grandmother, who was the only one who survived in her family; those who lost their lives; those who were missing and the hardship of children.

The grandmother spent a week in Mushegh's house, which during that time became a place of pilgrimage for descendants of refugees from Van and Mush, who refreshed sorrows. These stories had much greater impact on shaping the attitude toward Turks and Turkey than any propaganda or ideology. Therefore, among the sources developing/revealing the attitude of the population of Armenia towards Turkey the impact of true "oral history" is very strong; probably even more than the subsequent academic writing and publicizing of history.



Zulo Hovsepyan died in 1982. She did not live long enough to see her daughter lost from orphanage in 1926 and found in 1987.

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1 Artshesh- Arthshesh was located in the northern shore of Lake Van, in the estuary of a small river Artshesh. During different times, Artshesh was referred to as a village, town, fort and port. When the water level of Lake Van rose, Artshesh gradually went under water. Later on, a new town called Akants (Nor Artshesh, Erjish in Turkish) was founded on the higher lands to the north of the former settlement.

## Recalling Memories

Oral history differs from family memories to some extent, especially if these are memories of the second or third generation about specific events. Although this book is called “Oral history”, in reality, the materials are actually family memories. Family history becomes oral history from the moment when the storyteller becomes a participant or even an actor in the given events. At least partially, the memory of the family’s past is “socialized” history: it bears the sign of the social past and life experience of those who lived the history, and of course, the storyteller. When we started collecting materials related to Armenian-Turkish relations in Armenia and employed the oral history method for that, we understood that the long term absence of such relationships does not allow us to view these stories as classic oral histories. More than ninety percent of the Armenian population has not seen Turks in the last eighty-ninety years, so they have no personal biographical memories about them. When we started collection of materials we in fact partially tried to collect “memories about memories”, and partially to record individual views and feelings about Turkey and Turks, as well as generalized social memories among people having secondary memories of Turks. In fact, according to the collected materials, next to quite minimal experience of personal views and relationships, “memories about memories of specific stories”, we received and witnessed exciting personal and sensitively rich material, which is almost “not burdened” by the pressure of collective memories. “I saw how my mother cried every time she remembered her lost sister”, or “My grandma did not rejoice in anything in her life. She died in pain and repeatedly said that it is pay back for her sin: she left her small daughter on the road... I don’t know, it is a very sad story, in the middle of the road they couldn’t find food to feed. They had four children, this one was a baby girl, she cried all the time. A Turkish soldier was coming and hitting her all the time, saying “be quick, don’t lag behind”. She told that her grandfather said; “let us leave this child here on the road and go, at least, we will be able to rescue the three boys... (The storyteller gets upset, silent, tries to collect his thoughts ...). It took a long time for my grandma to die. She would open her eyes and say “I suffer for that child that I left behind”. Until the very last moment of her life she has never forgiven herself... (the storyteller gets upset, her voice mumbling, eyes filled with tears) that she left her on the road” (From the story of Anahit Hovanisyan). Or “my mother was fourteen years old. Her mother was killed in front of her and in the morning she saw how wolfs or dogs gnawed her mother’s stomach and ate her entrails. My mother died when she was eighty years old and left this world with that pain in her. You wouldn’t believe it, but every day I tell this story and cry” (from the story of Almast Harutyunyan); or “my father always talked about Turks with hate” (From the story of Vard Abajyan), “All things my father talked about were their houses, their birthplaces, their hopes, until his death. For example, my father’s dreams were about those places and that life. Whoever met him and asked, “Where are you going” he would say (singing), “my only desire, only dream is there”. Whomever he met, in any street, in any place, if asked, he would

say (singing), “I would go to gravestones of my father and mother, walk in our houses” (From the story of Vazgen Ghukasyan); “In the spring time my mother would take me with her, sit on the green, sing, worry, mumble. When I remember it, my mother’s heart was hungry, that is why she sang, her country, her world was taken away... My mother was very sick, she would say “sister, get up and let’s go and sing, collect some khavrtsil”<sup>1</sup>, she would say brother, I would not be able to, but should go, go to our house, when I die I will get over there. This is how she died”. (From the story of the Nranhat, Grish Badalyan’s sister). Those, who recounted these memories never, saw a Turk. These are witnessed accounts containing fragments of storytellers’ biographies, not secondary memories, at the same time they are very personal and not the “product” of social or collective views. And they could not be as such, because as it was said “the topic was taboo” in Soviet Armenia and, quite naturally, the population of the country did not accumulate social ideology and experience toward Turkey and Turks, so people’s stories actually for most part are individual. This is an important confirmation, because, despite this fact, these stories are in many respects similar, i.e. individual and family stories of the survivor Armenians from different parts of Turkey have much in common, and as the collected accounts reveal, they have created a common attitude. This is important since it affirms that the common attitude was formed without public/social memory factor, and is rather based on each one’s personal experience.<sup>2</sup>

To return to the issue of genocide publicity in Armenia we should mention that in the sixties the memories partly “went beyond families”, and in the eighties the young generation, again partially, stopped being the direct bearer of “family memories”. I will dare to say that they stopped being the “prisoner” of them. After the 1965 rallies, the construction of the monument for the victims of the Genocide in Yerevan,<sup>3</sup> the bringing public processions of April 24 to proper order, monuments were built and books and articles were published by the initiatives of individuals and groups, despite active or passive resistance from authorities. This was facilitated, to a certain extent, by the publication of the “Anlireli Zangakatun” [Never-abating Bell-tower] poem by Paruyr Sevak; the relatively public, kind of street- and saloon- discussions by Hovhannes Shiraz; and the publication of some of his poems. The works by Paruyr Sevak and Hovhannes Shiraz were circulated from hand to hand, being recited at the meetings of student groups and in the homes of people. During this very period those survivors who were already reaching a mature age, along with their second generation, were making timorous attempts of publishing “from beneath” those memories that were torturing them.

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1 Sort of wild herbs that used to put in their food.

2 During the first years of Soviet rule those few materials that were accessible, to this or that extent, as a publication on the theme, were partially available through poetry (Hovhannes Tumanyan, Yeghisheh Charents), and partially through scientific works: in 1928-1929 Bagrat Boryan compiled a source-book: “Armenia, International Diplomacy, and USSR”. In relation with territorial claims presented to Turkey by Stalin in 1946-1951, historiography partially raised the problem of territories that were abandoned by Armenians; however, on the one hand, this phenomenon was not presented comprehensively and on the other, these discussions were completely out of the context of survivors, who neither directly participated in discussions, nor even had the capacity of mass or public expression of their views at that time. The problem remained in the domain of high politics and the public was mostly unaware of the sufferings of particular persons.

3 The monument devoted to the Genocide victims was opened on November 28, 1967.





Andranik Monument in the village of Ujan.

In the village of Ujan, where the villagers initiated the construction of monument of Andranik<sup>1</sup> in 1967, problems with the various levels of authorities were frequent. Villagers had collected the money for the monument construction. It was installed on April 11, 1967. According to Saribek Tovmasyan, who was 13 at the time: “In one night, secretly, villagers built the fence around the place where they intended to erect the monument. I remember clearly when, how and what they brought, the car that brought it. Around 1:30-2:00 am the monument was brought and installed. We, all the children and adults, were helping. I was there, too. It was put up secretly during the night. Guards were placed around so that nobody could interfere. Even 3-4 years old kids in our village knew that it was prohibited. We were aware that this is anti-soviet action. Then, authorities tried to demolish it, but our villagers didn’t let them. Police came to demolish it several times, but our villagers would fight them with shovels and pitchforks. Almost ten years they guarded the monument at night time. Then authorities probably got used to it.” Even in this period people were still afraid to speak about their heroes. The mother of our interlocutor from the Chqnağh village of Aparan was the only survivor in their family line. Russian soldiers found her among dead corpses when she was ten and delivered her to an orphan asylum. Only at the age of 60 she dared to show her husband the photographs of Andranik, which she had been carefully hiding: “My mother said that in 1965, when the Movement was

initiated in Armenia, at that time she called my father, telling him: «Come, I am going to tell you some-

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1 Andranik – Ozanyan Toros Andranik, born in 1865 in Shapin Garahisar, died in 1927 in USA, near Sacramento. Armenian general and freedom fighter, he was member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnakcutyun party, left it in 1907, was restored in 1914, and then left again in 1917, making a public announcement. Andranik participated in the defense battles, displaying personal valor. He fought in the Balkan war (1912-1913). MoushIn 1916-1917 he exerted major efforts to help out the Armenian refugees. In 1918 received the title of Major-General. He fought at the Caucasian front. After 1922 he lived in the USA. He has been awarded with highest military awards of Russia, Bulgaria, Greece and France. Andranik’s relics were buried at the *Père Lachaise* cemetery in Paris. Numerous monuments have been placed in his memory, many streets named after him. The grandparents of some of our respondents knew Andranik personally and took part in defense battles with him.



thing, but don't tell this to anyone, it's a secret»; it was only then my father found out that we had [pictures of] Andranik... she said, we had [pictures of] saints, and had shown him the pictures; these were very pale, dim photographs of Andranik, I don't know where she managed to get them... well, it is clear that it was a great risk to mention Andranik's name at that time, she told me how she had shown [these photos to my father], telling that this is our saint, Andranik..." (from the story of Hovhannes Mkrtchyan).

After the monument to Andranik was built, the grandsons of the brother of Gevork Chaush, one of the leaders of Armenian resistance detachments, initiated the construction of home-museum of Gevork Chaush in Ashnak village.<sup>1</sup> This story in many respects resembles the building and installment of monument for Andranik. The current museum was built in the place of one of the brother's former cowsheds. From the story of the daughter-in-law of the family that built the museum, Tsovinar "my father-in-law's cowshed, we slaughtered the animals, demolished the building, then the brothers decided to built it together with the help of some of our villagers. Some would bring cement, others worked as laborers or would bring food for the workers. But mostly we built the house ourselves and currently maintain it. Although, there are many visitors to the museum we never received any assistance from the state. The opposite was very often the case, they hindered it, prevented it: Construction of this building started in 1960, and for fifteen years continually they had to struggle, without interruption, they were in constant turmoil, in constant struggle... Four brothers, with the help of the whole village... The person who built this building is buried inside of it, he was the Dean of the Mathematics [or] Physics Department of the University, professor – Melkonyan Gevorg... At that time, who would risk it to mention the names of fidayees<sup>2</sup> But this person was struggling with everyone; he completed this building, and died... on his funeral day the whole village came along with shovels and pickaxes to stop the police, because they were not allowing them to bury him here (i.e. inside the museum- H. Kh.)... Up to this day I am not able to understand, why they (that is, the authorities - H.Kh.) had to interfere with this".

There were more local initiatives after the recognition of April 24 as the day of mourning for the genocide victims and the building of the memorial in Yerevan. There were different approaches to this issue. On April 24, thousands of people accompanied by mourning music silently march through the alley of victims, reach eternal flame, lay flowers around the flame, take a moment of silence with their heads bowed down and leave through the exit in front giving place to others. Procession continues until midnight and whole next day. This is how this day is remembered in Yerevan City.

The same types of processions are also taking place in different towns of the Republic which do not have special monuments for the victims of genocide. Villages populated by genocide survivors, where in fact

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1 **Gevorg Chavush** – Gevorg Aroyi Ghazaryan, born in 1870 in the Mktenk village of Sasoun. Armenian freedom fighter. Moush He first fought in Arabo's group. Participated in the battles for the defense of Sasoun in 1891-1894. Has been arrested many times (was kept in prisons of Bitlis, then Moush). Escaped from the prison and settled in Sasoun, participated in Sasoun's defense in 1904. The battles organized by Chavush almost always were successful for the Armenian side. Died during Solukh battle in 1907.

2 Fidayee (haydook) is a volunteer freedom fighter.



The home-museum of Gevork Chaush in the village of Ashnak.

all the families have lost some members, have different forms of mourning for the victims with the direct intention of “reminding Turks and what they did”. Particularly in places close to the border where survivors tried to settle with the hope to go back soon or on high mountains and in neighborhoods located on high elevations, locals light fires choosing spots most visible from Turkey. Usually, they burn used tires, which burn for a long time with visible fire and smoke. In the village of Ujan “On April 24 ninety percent of the village population visits Tsitsernakaberd, when we come back, the youngsters lift these heavy tires up the mountain with great effort... thousands and thousands of tires... We have a mountain called “wooden chest”, fires from that mountain are visible not only in Turkey, but also in many other countries. Young boys take them to the mountain, and it does not matter if it is raining or hailing, the fire shall burn and all of us shall walk around the village. ... Everyone helps how he/she can, some would supply fuel, some would provide their vehicles, others would bring food and water, this is the way we organize it. We write with the fire 90, 91, 92; in order to remind the Turk how many years passed since the genocide” (From the story of Arakel, the headman of Ujan village).



March of April 24.

In the Ashnak village, fires burn and the bells ring on the recently built memorial with personal donations, dedicated to the memories of the victims. The memorial was built based on the combination of two different types of stones symbolizing “Breached destiny” of Armenians from Trebizond, Kharberd, Bitlis, Erzerum, Tigranakert, Van and Sebastia.

With time, there were significantly more individual and community initiatives publicizing beloved characters from the genocide era: those were either people that helped Armenians survive or those who publicized the genocide issue, such as the Austrian Franz Werfel<sup>1</sup>, Norwegian Fridtyof Nansen<sup>2</sup>, leaders of Armenian self defense forces, those who took care of orphans. Busts and memorials were built, books,

1 Franz Werfel (1890 –1945) Austrian, Austrian writer and humanitarian. In 1932-33 he wrote a book “40 Days of Musa Dagh” (Musa Ler in Armenian) based on the resistance of the Armenian population that lived around the Musa Dagh against Turkish forces.

2 Fridtyof Nansen, (1861 - 1930) Norwegian explorer, scientist and renowned humanitarian, head of the international office for refugees of the League of Nations . League of Nations had to accept Nansen’s initiative to issue identification cards to Armenian refugees who lost their homeland. 320000 Armenian refugees in different countries received so called Nansen’s passports, which were their internationally recognized personal identification documents. Even now, there are still some Armenians that grew up with these passports. In 1938, Nansen’s International Refugee Office received the Nobel Prize for their role in creation of Nansen’s passports.



Memorial in the Ashnak village dedicated to the victims of Genocide.

articles and calendars were published, information was distributed through the Internet. Memories of the personal tragedies of people leaving their “hiding places” became topics of public debates for several years and of course, they were no longer as personal or unique. During that time many names, words and terms lost their “dissident” nature, becoming partially part of everyday life. As a result, current views of young people are more collective and social compared to the views of previous generations. The present generation, however, lacks personal contact with and conception of Turks. It should also be mentioned that this experience is accumulated based on the stories of people who went to and returned from Turkey, or those who temporary lived there, as well as the experience of students of international exchange programs having contact with Turkish youth and those who use the internet. Anyway, most of Armenian population’s views regarding Turkey and Turks are still influenced by family stories, so, the process of understanding the attitude of the Armenian public toward Armenian-Turkish relationships through an analysis of “oral history” can help to reveal some answers.



## Ritualization of Past Memories

It is hard to estimate the exact number of Armenians comprising 97 percent of the population of the Republic of Armenia who are directly related to Western Armenia and have family or personal memories related to Turkey and Turks. In addition to Armenians (mostly from Van, Kars, Sasoun, Moush and Bitlis) that survived massacres led by Young Turks and moved to Eastern Armenia, which was under Russian rule, some Armenian refugees who previously escaped to other countries (Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Iran, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, France, Argentine etc.) later on in the twenties, forties and sixties, settled in Armenia in several waves, bringing with them particular stories of their families. These were survivors and their descendants from Western and Southern Turkey, particularly from Adana, Sebastia, Marash, Kesaria etc. They were not only the bearers of memories of massacres that took place in Turkey, but they were also breeding the environment for those memories and feelings.

The family stories of those who managed to escape the massacres have penetrated into the families representing the native population of Eastern Armenia, currently the Republic of Armenia. The ways of “penetration” were various. First of all, most of the initial survivors who managed to escape to Eastern Armenia lived in the houses of locals or in constructions adjacent to them thus making their hosts witness their grief, their sorrow, their feelings and memories. Second, these stories “penetrated” through marriages, as well as through neighborly and work relationships between the survivors’ descendants and locals. Actually, there are few people in the Republic of Armenia that would not be able to tell a specific story about the events of 1915-1922: “Of the entire family of my daughter-in-law’s grandfather, he was *the only one to survive*” (and then follows the story of rescue). “The aunt of my uncle’s granddaughter’s husband escaped from the harem of one of the Turkish Beks...”. “The neighbor of our neighbor’s grandfather threw him over *his shoulder* and *carried him home*...”; “My co-worker’s grandfather was raised in an American orphanage and until the end of his life he could not forget how his parents were slaughtered in front of him”... Stories starting with such introductions could be found everywhere.

Similar memories have the descendants of those Yezidis and their families who together with Armenians survived the Turkish massacres in 1915-20. . It is safe to say that the majority of Armenia’s current population is the bearer of such “memories”.

In addition to this, there are regions in the Republic of Armenia, which are densely populated with people bearing and living with such family memories: there are entire villages and urban districts, where survivors and those who moved to Armenia after extended wandering live together. Current villages in some regions of the Republic of Armenia such as Talin, Kotayk, Armavir, Vardenis and many villages of

other regions are entirely populated with Armenians who escaped massacres in urban and rural areas of Van, Bitlis, Sasoun, Moush, Alashkert. Yerevan districts of Aresh, Zeitun, Sebastia, Butanya and Malatia are populated by people that escaped from the similarly named towns in Turkey and moved to Armenia in the forties and the sixties. For these neighborhoods the past is not only a topic for memories, but also a part of present life, because people with mixed cognation, grandsons and granddaughters of aunts and uncles, former fellow townsmen and villagers, former friends' descendants of second and third generations continue to find each other and the past, even if it is partly mythologized, "return" to present life together with the burdens of years past: current Armenian-English-Arabic-Spanish vernacular is sometimes full of Turkish or Kurdish words. As an inheritance from Turkish or Kurdish speaking parents there is still a generation that understands these languages, part of this generation learned the languages of countries where they moved to, but not Armenian, and when they meet each other, Turkish, not Armenian, becomes the language of conversation, which they use to speak about their present, or to tell stories about their lives, full of memories of shared victims, or "verbal silence», when they cannot find common language carrier. These meetings are full of anxieties and new memories about the destinies of certain people: ("I saw your aunt in the year ...., in Australia, she survived...", "...my father met the sister of your grandmother in 1920 in Ardvin, when he was leaving the city, she was married to some Turk...", "your uncle had also survived, when he was five years old he was left in Dayr az-Zawr in a local Arab's marquee. I saw him, he became an old Arab, a real Muslim, but he still remembers the past. He even remembered your father's name. When I told him that his father had survived and had stores and children in Aleppo, he showed no interest"), and listeners often become obsessed with the desire to find their distant relatives. Our respondents told us numerous similar stories. Some people of our generation sometimes get more information about their parents, when they find their missing, because often their parents do not want to share their tragic histories, (this is how Aida Topuzyan, born in Beirut



**Aida Topuzyan, born in Beirut to parents from Adabazar and Mersin recalls the story of her father's aunt.**

to parents from Adabazar and Mersin, faced her past, when in the seventies she found her father's aunt in the USA).

The last twenty years have provided such memories with a new feed source. There is now an opportunity to visit Turkey and see their lost homeland (the narrative of such story is included in this book). People go and find the villages of their predecessors, sometimes also the house they lived in, important places their grandfathers told them about; the cemetery, church, sacred places, trees, forests. When they tell their story they usually say "our village", "our house", "and our forest». And with sacred fear they bring with them flowers and fruits their predecessor's saw and loved, the stream water they cherished. They sometimes even meet people who remember the past and talk with them, and these visits become new



Flowers from the outskirts of the Khastur<sup>1</sup> village of Alashkert<sup>2</sup>, brought in 2007.

1 Khastur (Khanzer, Hatstur).

2 Alashkert-(Alashgerd, Elishkirt, Toprakkale, Toprakghala, Toprakkhala, Toprakkala, Toprakkale, Topraghkala, Topraghkale, Topragkale, Topraqkala, Topraqkale, Topraqqale, Valashkert, Valarkert, Vaghashakert, Vagharshakert). Up to 1914 was a settlement in Bayazet, in Karin /Erzurum/ state, with the center in Alashkert. It was located in the bed of one of the tributaries of Sharian river, a right-side tributary of Eastern Euphrates, on the road of Trabzon-Erzrum-Maku-Tabriz.



sources and materials for their memories. Compatriots and relatives gather around them, drink the little bit of water from the homeland, strew some soil brought back on the graves.... The connection with the past is ritualized in quite spontaneous and very natural way.

These flowers were brought from the outskirts of the Khastur village of Alashkert in 2007 by the former Khasturis Rafael Simonyan, who distributed them among his countrymen. Gyoza Hovanisyan's family also received some of these flowers, and "they gave us a small bouquet with love as a sacred part of their family". Rafael Sahakyan established "Hayrenakanch" (The call of the homeland) newspaper, and periodically publishes stories about his travel experience to the "Ergir" in different issues.

Another example of ritualizing past memories and publicizing past events is the annual celebration dedicated to the rescue of the villagers of Musa Ler (Musa Dagh). The event takes place around the memorial situated in fifteen kilometers from Yerevan, on each Sunday following September 20, when the villagers, who lived at the foot of the Musa Mountain, located on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, organized their defense and were able to resist attacks of Turkish army for forty days. Every year on that day, the

The "Hayrenakanch" newspaper.



descendants of rescued villagers from different countries of the world gather in Armenia. During the night from Saturday to Sunday traditional harisa is cooked in big pots on open fires near the monument. People from Musa Ler and their friends and relatives from Armenia and residents of surrounding villages gather around the monument and spend the night near fireplaces cooking harisa, remember their grandfathers' stories and tell each other about the wanderings of their parents and relatives after the survival. These gatherings are accompanied by rhythmic drumbeats through the night, which add more significance and ritualism to the event. Our narrator in this case was local and not someone from Musa Ler:



2009 celebration of the Survival of Armenian Populations of Musa Ler.

“We here (meaning Armenian residents of places surrounding the monument devoted to the rescue of the Armenian population of Musa Ler ) wait the entire year for the Musaler Day and get prepared for that day. Everyone cooks harisa on that day, but we try to bring it from that place, because that one is sacred. People from Musa Ler collect money ... no, not from us ... and then we receive assistance from somewhere. They prepare more than hundred pots this way. The number increases every year, as well as the number of sacrificed animals. We do not know exactly how many pots; we just see them lined up. If you ask them they would say 100, 110 and 120. The number of pots depends on the age of Musa Ler. . Initially 40 pots were being prepared in memory of the 40 days of resistance, but now the number depends on the anniversary date. The priest does not sanctify the meat during the slaughter; he comes in the afternoon between 1 and 1:30 when the harisa is ready and blesses it, and only after that the harisa is distributed. The celebration starts on Saturday evening and ends the next day, Sunday evening, because as soon as harisa is distributed an artistic performance starts, then those guests who have their own food with them sit under the trees and keep on celebrating until the late night...they leave only when everything is over.”

## Ergir's Soil is Strong, Ergir's Fruits are Sweet, Ergir's Water is as Clear as the Eye of a Crane

“Our grandfathers who came from the Ergir dreamed their country’s soil would cover their graves. My father used to say: ‘Even if I am not buried there, bring just a handful of soil when you go there.’” (from the story of Vard Abajyan). Three years ago like many others, Radik Sharoyan from Mjgheq, which is in Sasoun, also brought some soil from the homeland: “It was distributed among those from Mjgheq to pour on the graves of their deceased relatives. This is how much fell to my lot..” (from the story of Hamlet Hovsepyan).

A social network of Western Armenians is created in Armenia, which symbolically may be defined as “Ergirian” network. This social network includes former compatriots and dictates some norms of behavior and relationship, such as using dialect when talking with each other, helping each other, participating in all significant events of the life circle such as wedding and baptisms ceremonies and funerals, dancing “Er-

Hamlet Hovsepyan from Ashnak shows the handful of soil from “Ergir”.





Every year descendants of survivors from Khastur village of Alashkert gather from different parts of Armenia and Russia in order to spend a day together.

girs's" dances, preparing "Ergirs's" food etc. Many of them have special days for periodic meetings, especially in cases where former fellow-countrymen are separated and live in different places.

The "Ergirian" microworld renders homage to "Ergir's" intellectuals, to the leaders who organized self-defense during the massacres, to those perished in the self-defense movement; it keeps worshipping Andranik, whose high devotion and fidelity made it possible to save the surviving part of the population of the "Ergir" ; this world shares the impressions of those who visited the "Ergir"; it makes sure the genocide memories are inherited by the next generation; it condemns any form of retreat from the "Ergir's" customs, etc.

Almost all of our narrators bear firmly in their mind their grandfathers' stories about the splendid landscape , streams, water, flowers and forests of their "Ergir"; *"My mother used to tell me that everything grew perfectly well there, everything was perfectly tasteful ... "we could smell the ripening apples in the neighboring village and . we would say that apples in Tapavan are grown"* (An extract from the story of Arpik Shahinyan). *"We had a woman from Bingyol, an old woman born in Bingyol. Well, whenever we offered her to taste some fruit she would say: "Dear my! Where is my Bingyol water, my Bingyoul fruits...This is completely uneatable... how you can eat this?" ... She would say: "Look , we had watermelons of such size that when children sat on them their feet could not reach the ground. In Bingyol, we had a spring twelve months a year"* (from the story of Vard Abajyan). Hrachya Hov-





Tatevik, the granddaughter of Mihran Hovanisyan from Khastur village of Alashkert, who was seven years old when he survived massacres and was raised in American orphanage, dances “Ergir’s” dances for four-five hours. “I can dance our govind all night long,” Tatevik says.

hannisyan from Alashkert dreams to visit his father’s village: “Granddad always said that our village was like a manna from heaven, we were so wealthy there, we lacked nothing just because of the nature, , the nature would give us everything ...,and he used to repeat ‘manna from heaven, manna from heaven.... Wemanaged to feed the entire Sasoun with our wheat. It was a very rich village, it was a boundless, a huge village The barn was completely full of wheat, at that time, before the genocide, we were able to provide bread for the entire Sasoun...Look baby, there wasn’t even a single stone over there... just soil and nothing else. There was a stream in Khastur, he said, with a fresh and clear water, it was as clear as a crane’s eye”. Many parents “entrusted” their children with visiting Ergir: Grish Badalyan’s mother, who lived a tough life even after survival, always insisted that her children should take every opportunity to tell their story to the world and to go and see their home: “When I die, when the time comes, you should tell everything, they will let you go there, and you should go and see my father’s home... you should go through a thin and narrow country roads. At the end of the village you will find our house... It is the last house, that village was like on the chest, oval area...”

Various stories about the “Ergir’s” unbelievable beauty created illusions among many people and some of them are worried that if reality does not meet their expectations it could lead to a great disappointment. In 2000, Vasak Toroyan managed to visit his grandfather’s village of Arpi, located near Motkan of Bitlis region. He said that while approaching the village he experienced an ambiguous feeling: “...I went through a lot of stress ...there was a big drought that year, that August. I am getting closer and closer to the village wondering if I was going to see the paradise my father used to tell me about, but I

do not see the trees of this paradise. So I am getting closer and closer and to be frank, I asked to stop the car. Now there were two things: what is more important? The memory or the loss of memory... What if the loss is better... I was hesitating whether to go back or go and see the truth. At the end I decided to go” (the narrative of Vasak Toroyan is published in this book).

Of course, the “Ergirian” social network forms its views about Turks and Turkey’s Kurds based mainly on memories of their life in homeland, and here we deal with a case, which makes it possible to speak about the influence of collective social memory. In this publication, “ergirian” social network is represented by examples from the stories of the residents of Ashnak and Ujan villages, though Hovhanisyan from Khastur village of Alashkert, respondents from villages of Dalarik and Dashtadem, Vasak Toroyan, who visited the “Ergir” and Aregnaz Poghosyan from Sasoun, are also participants of this network. In this network family stories are transmitted with all possible scrutiny.

## The Past in the Present and the Present in the Past (“My Father’s Name is Serob, my Mother’s Name is Soseh”)

It is even hard to imagine how detailed were the narratives that were retold from generation to generation, which lead to the accumulation of personal experience of “pain and reconsideration of memories” (children from generation to generation are named after the victims of massacres). “My grandfather was the only survivor of his family. His wife and kids were killed. Then he married here for the second time and the newly born children were named after his kids killed during the massacres” (from the story of Pavel Avetisyan). “My grandmother named me Vardan and my brother Serob after her massacred brothers; my sister was given the name Maro after her daughter, who died while fleeing. Five children died when they were fleeing” (from the story of Vardan Hakobyan); “... My father-in-law’s brother would have a table set up every year on April 24... He would gather all the relatives and sort of report to them: he was telling each of them who had lost how many men and how many were born to replace them. Can you imagine? He would tell his son: “you should have three”, “you- two,” so the places of our lost and killed are filled. He named his granddaughter Nargiz after his sister. His daughter-in-law stood up against this saying, - “what is that name Nargiz?” He said- “I am naming her Nargiz. Before my eyes my sister,”- he continued, “left this world bleeding” (from the story of Anahit Bardakchyan). Anthroponomy was significantly constructed through reproduction of the toponym of “Ergir” (many personal names derive from toponyms of the historical homeland, such as Sipan<sup>1</sup>, Talvorik<sup>2</sup>, Sasun<sup>3</sup>, Mush<sup>4</sup>, Taron<sup>5</sup>...). In Dzoragyugh village of Talin there was a woman called Zozan, named after pasture called Zozan in the native village Gvartz of Sasoun. “Hidden symbols” of the homeland have been formed through reproduction of resistance leaders` personal names in families (“when my grandson was born we intended to name him Arakel, i.e. after me. But, I disagreed and demanded to give him Andranik’s name. I said until we do not have Andranik

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1 Sipan – mountain in the Armenian highlands, not far away from Lake Van; the height is 4443m.

2 Talvorik – Talvori, Ghalvorik – Region and village located in the Sasoun region of Bitlis province, on the shores of Shatakh (historically Aspakan) river. In 1915 inhabitants of Talvorik tried to defend themselves. A small part of the population survived and took refuge in Eastern Armenia.

3 Sasoun– geographical region situated in the system of the Armenian Tavros. According to the Ottoman administrative division the provinces of Sasoun were part of the Moush and Genj sanjaks of Bitlis vilayet. At the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Sasoun became the center of the Armenian freedom movement. In 1915 the population of Sasoun (Sasoun’s self-defense) resisted the attacks of the Turkish army and Kurdish armed groups for about 6 months, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy. Survivors went to Eastern Armenia, settling in the present Talin and Ashtarak districts.

4 Moush – city and province in the Moush region of the Bitlis county with the center in Moush. MoushIn 1915, of approximately 109 villages of Moush only 1500 Armenians survived at the most. Cultural losses of Moush too were major (Monasteries, churches).

5 Taron – one of the most important regions in historic Armenia. The capital city is Moush. Traditionally, Armenians called it Taron after Noah’s heir Tarban.. Creator of the Armenian alphabet Mesrop Mashtots was born in Taron.



The “Ergir” restaurant on the road to Talin.

*in our family there will be no future. My dad’s name is Serob after Akhbyur Serob<sup>1</sup>, my mom’s name is Soseh<sup>2</sup>. We have boys named Andranik in every family of our village, many families have Serob, Gevork (from the story of Arakel, head of Ujan village), passing over self-made maps of the abandoned places to heirs, sanctification of books brought from the homeland, strict usage of the homeland’s dialects, songs and dances, periodical gathering of fellow countrymen... and, finally, the word “Ergir”. The word Yerkir, which has sev-*

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- 1 **Aghbyur Serob** – Vardanian Serob, born in 1864 in Khlat province. He organized the Armenian freedom movement in Khlat in 1895 and was wounded during the resistance at the Geliegyuzan village in 1898. He was poisoned in 1899. His son and two brothers were also killed.
  - 2 **Soseh** – Soseh mayrik (Vardanyan Soseh), born in 1868, died in Egypt in 1953 with Aghbyur Serob’s wife and sister in arms. She participated in many defense battles. She was wounded in the Geliegyuzan battle in 1899 and lost her son. Her other son was killed during the massacre in Karin. Later she moved to Caucasus and after the establishment the Soviet rule in Armenia – to Alexandria.



eral meanings in Armenian -"whole world", "part of the country, administrative region", "ground, soil"- in the dialect of Moush and Sasoun refugees also denotes "homeland". In Moush-Sasoun dialect this word sounds like "Ergir". People from Moush and Sasoun use word "Ergir" only in reference to the homeland that they had left: when they say "Ergir's songs", "Ergir's fruits", and "Ergir's soil" they mean songs, fruits and soil of Moush or Sasoun. From this dialect the word "Ergir" gradually gained the new sense of "homeland", meaning Western Armenia: "I went to Ergir" means "I went to the homeland" or "I went to Western Armenia". In the "Ergirian" social network newspapers, restaurants, poems also bear the name "Ergir." On Yerevan- Talin road, closer to Talin, which is mainly populated by people from "Ergir," there is a restaurant called "Ergir." Right in front of that restaurant there is another one called "Karot" (Home-sickness) thus bringing together nostalgia about "Ergir."

"Ergir" by its micro culture, language, behavioral norms, identity and plans of people from "Ergir" and the "present day" of the past, makes you feel as if the time has stopped. The life of these people is to a great extent still there, in "Ergir", at the beginning of 20th century. This is especially striking when one is using verbs in present while telling stories about the past.

In 2009, when planning to collect oral histories from the past of various families, or more precisely memories of those histories, we couldn't imagine how vivid, how detailed these stories would be, and to what extent they would be "present." Convinced that, by retrospection of his life story, a person, often unwillingly, presents his "socialized" past, we expected our respondents to tell the life stories of their families using notions and terms which were formed as a result of ideology or social culture of the respondent's lifetime. This phenomenon, however, was only confirmed partially. When telling the "family version" of the history of their parents or grandparents they frequently use, for example, the expression "during the genocide" which is, no doubt, a term that was developed in the subsequent period. However, for the narrator, this is his understanding of the particular events he is referring to. Today's narrators sometimes present those people who murdered their relatives in a generalized way. For example, when telling the story of the killing of her mother-in-law's mother-in-law. Gyozał Hovhannisian says, "*They wanted gold, she said, they don't have it, then a Kurd and a Turk caught her and threw into the tonir and burnt her*". Naturally, she is unable to describe that "Turk and Kurd", unlike her mother-in-law, before whose eyes this murder took place and who later told this story many times to her daughter-in-law. When retelling narratives of their parents or grandparents, generalized phrases usually dominate: "Turks attacked", "Turks entered the house", "Turks slaughtered", "Kurds took away". An example of generalized social memories is the use of references like "forty people", "forty days", etc. In some narrations, such as Eleonora Ghazaryan's story, the family consisted of "forty people", of which only one /two, three/ survived. Or, "*forty people gathered in the church, they burnt them all*", or "*forty man and a few women gathered in that house to discuss their possible getaway but couldn't - somebody betrayed their location and they were all slaughtered*" (from Aregnaz Poghosyan's story). Or "the family was so large that 40 cradles were cradled. All those 40 daughter-in-laws, 40 men and kids were slaughtered. Only one girl had survived in the Turkish neighbor's cow-house and she was a daughter-in-law in our village" (from the story of Elya Davtyan). The figure "forty" is frequently used in descriptions of their fleeing and roving. It could be assumed that the folkloric pat-

tern of the number 40<sup>1</sup> is a direct manifestation of linguistic thinking and is the way of social representation of the phenomena by our narrators. However one of our respondents directly linked this number to memories. Almast Haroutyunian's mother, who was six years old during the time of fleeing, later told her daughter how she, together with her mother and younger sister, were hiding at daytime in the fields and pastures for forty days, coming out at nights to gather some edible plants. *"My mother tells me, we stayed for forty days. I asked her – "Mom, how do you know it was forty"? She replied "they slaughtered us on the 14<sup>th</sup>; wheat was already ripe... I am telling it approximately."* If the number 40 is a linguistic pattern, then most probably it comes from the vocabulary of the initial narrators and it has passed to the next generations preserving its form.

We think that the tendency of linking personal stories of their families to major political events is also the result of the impact of subsequent social memories, and the actual participants of the "events" probably perceived this differently. For example, some people remember from their parents' stories, how representatives of foreign embassies were looking out of their office windows, watching the massacres and deportation of Armenians while "it was them who were encouraging the genocide." In particular, the alleged involvement of Germans in massacres of Armenians is perceived as a memory (*"At the age of 17 Turks took my father, who was from Afionkaraisar, to work at the construction of the Baghdad railway. Construction was managed by Germans and he was one of those few people who didn't die from starvation and later he fled to Baghdad. Germans just watched people die of starvation. My father always used to say that Germans are to blame, they were standing behind Turks,"*-from the interview with Hamestuhi Avagyan).

Sometimes, however, especially when remembering instances of assistance, characters are being personified more specifically. Avetis Keshishian remembers up to this day that the name of the Turkish policeman, who helped with his father's escape, was "Ismail Chaush"; although his father met this policeman only briefly. Vasak Toroyan talks about a Kurdish guy named Maleh, who helped their whole village; Almast Haroutyunian remembers up to this day the name of the young Kurdish woman, Taveh, who helped her mother when she was a kid; Arpik Shahinyan remembers the name of a Turkish servant Kneh who used to once serve at her grandfather's house, and rescued her uncle.

Through family memories our respondent were reviving their biography and the history of their ancestors. However, the biography of many respondents was not only based on the tragic past of their forbearers, which is quite natural. Even in the life of the third generation the past of their ancestors was to a certain extent "present." One of the most explicit manifestations of this phenomenon is telling the stories related to the past of their relatives using the present tense. The narrative structure of most of our respondents presupposes that they were personally witnessing those events: "My grandma comes and says..." ; "My aunt was the cook in that man's, that Turk's house and she took the kid to his place..." "They bring those people and cram them into the shed..." This type of wording creates an impression

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1 The number 40 appears in various styles of Armenian folklore, in the Armenian epos, fairy tales, songs, etc and is most probably rooted in biblical vocabulary.



The Gospel with Golden Binding of Suko's house was kept in this corner.

that the narrator was present at the actual event. “The present was past” not only in terms that what happened with the predecessors was continuously present in the structure of life and relations of some families but also as it was partially reproduced in their cultural and social life. These families are keeping the books that were brought from “Ergir” (homeland), averters that have become sacred, and their compatriots are coming to worship these (to pray and light candles). For example, the well-known “Gospel in golden binding”, which is also known as “Suko’s Gospel” (The Gospel of Suko’s house) was brought from the Ov village of the Moush district in 1915 by refugees. It was kept in the same family until 1935. In 1935 this family was accused of religious fanaticism for having a gospel. Their house was searched and security service officers took the gospel away. The inhabitants of the Norakert village, who are refugees

from the villages Ov of the Moush district, Segh of Bitlis, Mkhkner of Van, Sosrat, and Ziro of Alashkert, however, continued to believe the gospel that was brought from homeland was holy, and up to this day they visit the house of the present heir of Suko's house. They come to Artak Hovsepyan's house, where there is a special corner for the Gospel, where people can light candles and make offerings. It is believed that this Gospel, among other powers was blessed with the power to protect them from Turks. People leaving for a foreign country and young men joining the army used to come and pray at this Gospel, taking with them the silk handkerchiefs lying near the Gospel - it was believed that they would never become prisoners to Turks and would definitely come back safe (from Anahit Hovsepyan's story). Today, at the now emptied corner of the Gospel, they still keep these silk handkerchiefs and, before leaving for regular army service, young boys are still following this tradition of their ancestors.



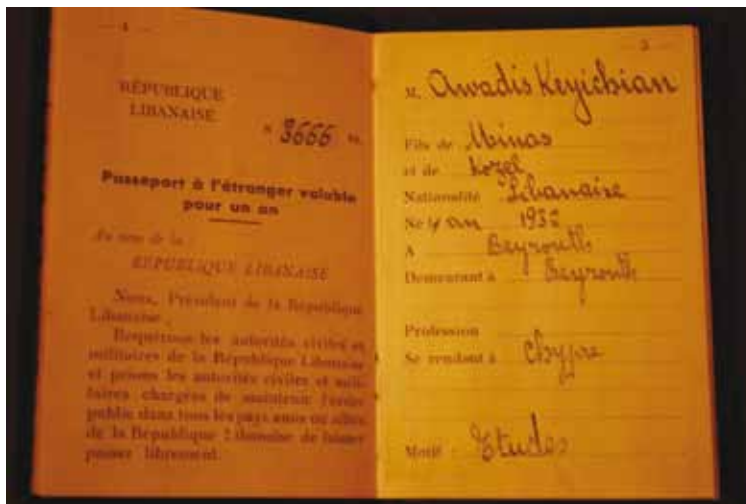
Samvel Mirzoyan is showing the family tree he has drawn, it starts from Hovhannes and Almast who got married in 1830 at the Sekh village of Bitlis region, and includes their five generations (Samvel Mirzoyan, from the Sekh village of Bitlis, Norakert).

In the Dzoragjugh village of Talin “there was a family, they came from Manazkert. They had a Gospel, we were calling it Narek,<sup>1</sup> it was a small book; every Saturday we used to go there to lit candles by that book. They brought it from “Ergir” (homeland); she was a tall, thin old lady, she dressed in black. My mom gave us candles every Saturday and told us “go, light them in front of grandma’s Gospel and come back”. So we went, silently entered, without talking, frightened to utter a word, and we lit those candles. The book - it was a beautifully wrapped Narek, I remember, it was in red fabric, always wrapped in red fabric, it was lying there, we lit candles and went out. Every time we went there, that old lady was telling us to clean our hands and remove our shoes, then we entered, it was a small tonir-house (Armenian room for making bread); it was made like a niche – one stone block was removed from the wall... That family now lives in Yerznka village of Ashtarak, they took the book with them” (from Vard Abajyan’s story).

Besides books, other objects that were brought from “Ergir” (homeland) are also preserved, they are used for performing sacred rituals and up to this day people are visiting them to get in contact with their powers (for example, one family from Alashkert, now living in the Dzoragyugh village of Martouni region,

1 Middle age Armenian cleryman, poet and philosopher Grigor Narekatsi (circa 951-1003), wrote the « Book of Lamentations». Grigor received name Narekatsi from the Narek village in Rshtuni region, where he spent his time as a monk. Armenian Apostolic Church pronounced Grigor a “Saint”, while people honored his philosophical-theological poem “Narek”, which they sometimes also called the Gospel. It was believed that “Narek” had medicinal features, the chapters of the book were read aloud to sick people, the book was put under the pillow etc.

keeps a copper chalice that was brought from “Ergir”. Water from the chalice, if poured on the body, allegedly heals all kinds of diseases. The flow of people wishing to get in contact with that chalice that was brought from “Ergir” never stops).



Avetis Keshishyan is proud of his Lebanese passport recounting the details of assistance provided by Arabs of Lebanon to Armenians deprived of their homeland.



People are restoring their family trees, and they are trying to include their past in Eastern Armenia. Similarly, they are preserving the history of their roving, preserving documents confirming their citizenship of Iraq, their Lebanese passports.

In some areas, if a deceased person was born in Western Armenia, they write the name of his birthplace on the tombstone, although in Armenia there is no such tradition.



Arshak Gevorg Saroyan was born in the Sekh village of Bitlis region in 1882...

Poghos. Siseh. Sargsyans P. (1861-1946), S. (1865-1948), born in Ov village of Bitlis region. From his sons David and Arshak.



In some families the passports of their dead parents or grandparents in which their birthplace is indicated (Turkey, this or that village/city) are preserved as holy relics.



Passport of Garnik Manukyan's father where it is written that Arsen Manukyan was born in the city of Van in Turkey, on May 10, 1903.

These are documents that come to verify the past of their ancestors through generations and partially transfer this past into the present day of the current generation.



## **“Thanks Great God, Thay my Baby Died Pure, She Died Innocent, No Turk Made Use of Her”**

*“My mother in law had a daughter, her name was Satik. When a Turk tried to take her away she was 14 years old, a small girl, the big guy was dragging her, mother was resisting, saying don't touch he, she is too small, have pity on her. This girl was trembling from fear, felt down, got up, she was so small that she felt down and couldn't move. She was so frightened that she died after a week. We always go to the cemetery to put some flowers, but the old woman would say: “Thanks great God that my baby died pure, died innocent, no Turk made use of her” (from the story of Arpik Shahinyan).*

It sounds cruel but this expression was often heard, and we can still hear that today. It was very painful for Armenians that their girls were “taken away.” And that as it seems happened quite often. Even among our respondents' families there is almost no case were a girl from the family was not taken or at least attempted to be taken away. The girls, probably, were taken for different reasons, but when parents or brothers or sisters speak about that they usually mention that the girl was very beautiful and taken for a marriage. The family always took it hard when Turks or Kurds took girls away. The girls were “taken away” not only during massacres, but also before that, and there were many occasions of conversion to Islam. Armenian women helped many of their compatriots. Anyway, many girls were taken during massacres, married young woman were taken too, and the attitude that for a girl it would be better to die rather than become a Turkish or Kurdish wife was dominant. This approach was so rooted that even the mothers preferred their daughters' death to their marriage with a Kurd or a Turk. It is hard to say how true it is, but, sometimes stories were told about fathers that killed their daughters. Less known is how “taken away” girls felt in their new families. Our respondents recall only few such stories, that they have learnt from Armenian women that had fled from their Turkish husband and returned to the Armenian community. Aida Topuzyan became aware of one of these stories only in 1975, when Ms. Aida's father found her lost aunt in the USA: Knarik Janikyan. Knarik was born in 1900 in Adabazar, and she was sixteen years old when they were fleeing and she disappeared. Survived relatives looked for Knarik long after she disappeared on the escape route. In 1975, Hovhannes Topuzyan, father of Ms. Aida, who was in Washington for some business, heard from the local priest that a woman, whose name is Knarik Janikyan assists the Armenian church greatly. Onik, of course, got very intrigued, met her and found out that she was the lost aunt.. Knarik Janikyan was married and had two sons, Poghos and Richi. Hovhannes Topuzyan invited her to Armenia where she told the story of her disappearance, it left an indelible impression on all listeners, including Aida Topuzyan. The very common and widespread thing happened on the escape road; one of the Turkish soldiers in the convoy accompanying Armenian refugees sold the sixteen year old girl to a rich Turk. She became his seventh wife. Despite the fact that her husband treated her with love and kindness she secretly decided to flee. She gave birth to two children

at that time, Mustafa and Jamal, whom she, in her mind, called Poghos and Artashes. She was able to convince her husband to hire a female Armenian cook as a baby-sitter for his children, and later, when her husband was on a ten day trip she fled with the help of that baby-sitter to Aleppo. She left her sons with the baby-sitter *"It happened so that the first door she knocked in Aleppo was door of her relatives from Adabazar. It was the house of Armine Kalents` uncle, you probably know her, painter Armine Kalentc. They were from Adabazar and Knarik`s relatives... see how destiny plays with us"*. Her hospitable relatives soon sent her to Washington where she got married with the other survivor and also had two children, one, as it was said, was named Poghos again. *"My aunt told me that when she fed the second Poghos, she always was talking with the first Poghos, but she never dared to look for her first sons. She was terribly afraid that that would harm her children. She was so afraid that she even did not tell us the name of the city where her Turkish husband lived. Knarik`s husband and children know her story, but even they never tried to find out what happened to their brothers"*. Aida Topuzyan says that her aunt didn`t like to talk about this period of her life, and she never talked about it after the first meeting.

We can draw some parallels between this story and Arpik Shahinyan`s story: *"...my aunt was a very beautiful woman, she was captured by a Turk, and she was his wife for 7 years. For a long time, she was with this Turk, she suffered a lot, and finally she got away. He was a very rich Khan, besides Maqruhi, he had 15 other wives. Maqruhi said that he loved her very much but beat her twice a day. For 7 years, my aunt strangled every child that she delivered; she did not want to have children from a Turk... oh, you should here that story... She said she asked God to release her from that prison, yes, she said, her husband would take Armenian prisoners and would burn them in front of her, he would say, - "I will do the same with you, if you try to run away from me, I will burn you with oil." One day Maqruhi`s husband told her that a group of Armenian girls and women were gathered in the church, that all Armenian girls and women could go, they would be exchanged with Turkish prisoners of war, and he asked her whether she wanted to go. Maqruhi thought that he was testing her and refused the offer." When he saw that I had no intention to go, he left for Beirut with no worries, he was trader at the time, and I dressed in yashmak and went to the church... I went there and said that I am Armenian, prisoner in that house, the Khan`s wife, but I can`t come on my own, you should come and force me out of there, I beg you and went back quickly." The next day, suddenly, someone knocked on the door. "Is there any Armenian girl?" The women said, "no, no, no, no, no, there is no Armenian girl here." Pushing them out... I saw them from the upstairs and came down saying "I am the Armenian..." This time women started pushing me, but inside. "oh Maqruhi, don`t do it, he will kill us, he will kill us all , he will thrust us, oh don`t let this happen." They were crying so much, sobbing. I told them that the guy who came and found me was my cousin and that I had to go. This is how she escaped." Maqruhi would later marry and live in Armenia in Margara village. "But, God did not give her children anymore, because she strangled her children... She is buried with her husband in Margara village."*

The story of Anahit Bardakchyan is both similar and different to the previous stories.. First of all, following their settlement in Aleppo after the massacres one of eight girls from Bardakchyan`s family, Anahit`s aunt, was forced away by a Turk, who converted her to Islam and married her. As long as they lived in Aleppo Anahit`s aunts and grandparents sometimes met with their sister and daughter and her first son, Abas. *"But then, my mother said, her sister`s husband moved to Turkey. This guy moved to Turkey and we*

lost this sister.” Later, another Turk wished to take another one of Anahit’s aunts, and her parents decided to quickly marry her. *“This aunt was very beautiful. My mother said dowry was laid down; they waited for the bride to be taken. The wedding was planned for Saturday night, they woke up in the morning and saw that my aunt was dead (Ms. Anahit stopped, trying not to cry). She died from fear, because they said “we would take you anyway” (according to Ms. Anahit, the girl was afraid that she would be kidnapped during the wedding. This is the explanation of the young girl’s cause of death given by the family)... My mother said that one day someone knocked on the door. Two horsemen and two armed men came; they tied her father’s hands and took him. She, as a kid, followed them. My grandmother, my mother’s mother was inside crying. They went there and saw that these men were demolishing the grave. They said “show us that she died.” Can you imagine that? My mother said she could not forget that scene, she said, “I wonder how come I was not scared, I was a kid, she said, I didn’t understand... Her third sister was also kidnapped and they never knew her destiny. At the end only two sisters out eight were left.” One of the most terrible memories of Anahit’s mother is the murder of one of her sisters. “After some time they slaughtered one of her sisters. They slaughtered her, she said, and lay down separately her head, her leg, - look this is Armenian honor < keeps silent, tiring not to burst into tears>... She said, ‘there is no way’; they didn’t allow her father to come close to his child. Her father, my grandfather went and asked the government; “it has ban for several days already that my child is in such a state, Turks did such a thing to her.” The government, she said, gave soldiers; they came with her father and helped him, took and gathered the dismembered parts of this child and buried her.*

The first wife of Garegin Chugaszyan’s grandfather was kidnapped on the run. All kin and kinsmen of Chugaszyan’s except two kids died during the escape this or that way, one of them was seven years old back then, he wrote later in great details about his memories: *“The whole story of the genocide was the story of escape, after we left Sebastia, halting, how many stops we had, what happened on every stop, and then, how this 7 years old boy lost all of his relatives one after another, how people in front of him either died or disappeared, or ... thanks to him we know the destiny of my grandfather’s first family. My grandfather’s wife was very beautiful and when they hit the road they were very anxious that she will be one of the first victims. That’s why they tried to make her look little bit ugly so that she would not be kidnapped on the road, but unfortunately this is exactly what happened. The destiny of my grandfather’s first wife remained unknown. The mother of my grandfather i.e. my great grandmother threw herself to the Euphrates”.* G. Chugaszyan’s grandfather was in America during that time. He tried to get back to Turkey to help his family. On his way home he learned about the disappearance of his family and the death of his parents, upon which he joined the resistance forces and later settled down in Iran.

One of our respondents, Nairi Tajiryan, tells the story about one of her relatives: *“Arsho was a relative from my mother side, daughter of one of my mom’s aunts, she was married. She was kidnapped on the escape road. Her husband survived. After years, he went by the same road to find his wife, but nothing was said about this, the husband never talked about this. He probably had found her, but he did not manage to bring her back. These talks always took place in our family: It happens, doesn’t it, she was made a Turk and kept. She might also have children, she did not come”.*

People were so frightened to lose girls, newly married girls that sometimes, despite the fact that men were in greater danger, girls were dressed as men, "... Only one uncle was able to survive. After that, when my grandpa was killed... now it started... stampede. My grandma was too beautiful. I have her pictures, if you need them, I will find them later, I will give you all of them. She was really a very beautiful young woman. (Later we made copies of the pictures. Indeed she was a very beautiful woman-H.KH) During the stampede... she was dressed in men's clothes... so that she would not fall in the hands of Turks, covered her face with soot, intendedly , in pants, this way... barely saved her until Batum..." (From the story of Albert Mamikonyan).

## **“Their Faces are not Bristled, the Sultan Ordered to Kill Boys with Bristled Faces” (from the story of Avetis Keshishyan)**

Stories of men being killed are among the most painful memories of our respondents. In addition, stories of younger or older men from the family that were drafted and disappeared exist virtually in all memories (storytellers often said “got killed”, even if there is no direct evidence of that) many tell the stories of measures taken to protect boys from imminent danger, memories of these are continuously passed from generation to generation. The story of Arpik Shahinyan is common in many ways: *“My grandma from the mother’s side often told that 24 men from their home were taken to be killed, they took them all; her son, her husband, her brother-in-law, cousins, altogether 24 men. Only my uncle was left, because they dressed him as a girl, so he wouldn’t be taken for slaughter. But, she said, they were checking, and doubted if the children were girls, they were to check, to see, if it is a boy, then he should be killed, to annihilate Armenians... They examined my uncle, saw that he is a boy and took him away. Suddenly among those who came to their house my grandma noticed a man, a boy who used to be a servant in her father’s house, his name was Kneh. “Kneh,- she said,- I hope my Khachatur’s salt and bread will make you blind, only this boy is left, only this one, just let him live...”. Then she tells that they took them and tied up, and put them in the middle, this Kneh managed to put him in the middle with another boy and man that were tied one next to the other, they placed one Turkish dog on one side and the second one on the other side and were killing them one by one. After they killed them one by one they would cut the rope and the killed would fall into gorge. When it was the children’s turn that Kneh came up and said: “Let these boys go and be servant to our Allah, let’s forgive them”; to save our boy he had to save the other boy too. They forced them on the ground and had them stay with the men they killed through the night. At night he came back and started calling his name “Bagra, Bagrat”. At the end he found him, took him and handed him over to my grandmother. But she said, for 3 days he kept a piece of bread and trembled. He felt that it was something to eat, but didn’t know how, he was so terrified. This is what my grandma told us, as well as many other stories like this one”.*

Aregnaz Pogosyan’s story is also about one of the incidents of slaughtering men, which she remembered from her mother’s biography: *“According to my mom, once men came and said that they have to flee to the forest because Turks were gathering to attack and take away all men...this was in 1915, yes in 15... All men fled: their father and uncles both from mother’s and father’s sides. The only ones left in the village were women and children. In their family, only my grandma was left with two girls; the oldest was my mother, six years old. Once, my mother said, that men came... they heard that Russians were coming to gather people, to take women and children to Armenia, and leave men to help Russian forces... She said they gathered for the meeting, there were forty in that house; forty men and few women. They lit the furnace and were making food. These guys came for the meeting and these women were making food so that they take it with them, the furnace was burning. They (Aregnaz’s mother- H. Kh.), the children were sitting at men’s feet. She said, “We came hungry, waiting near the furnace...” - Suddenly, they were surrounded by Turks. Turks ordered them to undress. They didn’t allow them to take clothes... They undressed them, got them*

naked, they were decapitating everyone. My mother said that she, her cousin, another cousin, several of them were left under things, under corpses, while her mother with her sister fled to the forest. They survived; she was left under the corpses. She said they killed, massacred these forty people and left. She said, she got out, bloody, but got out, from under these corpses. She saw that another child was also getting out from under these corpses and another one, too, as well as one woman from their village... Four-five people, four-five people... children and women. It was her cousin, herself and two children... Here is what happened next: After some time, she came back with that child, they saw that one of the corpses fell on the furnace, that... the father of her mom was slaughtered, too. Everyone...”.

Nairi Tajiryan remembers a group of her male relatives: “...My father left Amasia during the first massacres. He was 18 years old, during the first massacres, he was around, let’s see, he was born in 1892, ok... 18 years old, so, he left during the first massacres, he was 18 years old...during 15 –in the massacre my grandfather was taken first, my grandmother always says that he was axed. Very few of Amasia men were able to escape, overall, almost only women were left, and I remember my grandma, I had aunts and other relatives, but they all were women, I almost never saw a man from Amasia”.

Avetis Keshishyan remembers the story of his father. His father lived between Adana and Marash, in small village, Lapash, which was located in mountains of Amanos. In this place, including Lapash, the Armenian population was generally Turkish speaking and had good relationships with Turkish neighbors. Killings in Adana that started in 1895 and continued until the massacres of Genocide always targeted villages located there and Avetis Keshishyan’s grandfather and his two brothers became victims of these massacres. Avetis’ young father first time faced incidents of killings of Armenians in 1905, when, as he often told his sons later, including Avetis Keshishyan, “They would take them from the village and drive to Deortyol. Men, who survived, were fleeing to the mountains. They (Turks- H. Kh.) gathered them, he was an eleven-twelve year old boy, forced out to the large open space; there were some benches. Women sat on the benches, laid down their skirts; they were wearing dresses with wide hems, put the boys under the benches and covered them with their skirts in order to hide them. Time after time two armed soldiers came and asked: “Are there boys with bristled faces that are able to hold weapon and fire? It is the sultan’s order to kill them all.” They came, searched and finally found my father with the other boy next to him and dragged them to the door. My father said, they reached the door, both of them pushed the wall near the door and resisted, did not go. They beat them with the butt stocks... Yes, I forgot to say that before this, they took out some people and shots were heard, they were killing them. He said, women were crying, screaming... You know, sometimes divine miracles happen in life. He said, in that moment the third soldier came in and asked what were they doing? The other two said that they were taking them out to kill. The third soldier looked at their faces and said that their faces were not bristled, while sultan ordered to kill boys with bristled faces and said “leave these kids here, don’t kill them”. They started arguing with each other, but, he said, thanks God, the third one won and after they hit them in the back with butt stocks and kicked their butts, they let them go. Thankfully, the next day, the order came and they let people go... Again, he said, they returned to the village, after that, in 1915 they once and for all went in exile”.

The boundary of “before becoming bristled” and “already bristled”, which in the East is considered to be the initial stage of adulthood, went very deeply in the minds of Armenians; so deep that even reminis-



cences of the killings of teenagers or young boys is accompanied with the expression “he hadn’t even reached the age of bristling”.

Although family memories represent the events that took place in particular families, all the narrators use generalized expressions about “exterminating all men” while relating particular experiences of their families within this broader phenomenon. It is evident that these biographical memories maintain not only particular facts of their biographies, but also the link between these biographies and the general perception of what had happened; moreover, they also maintained a chronological perception of the events of that period rather than the opinions that were formed at a later stage, because personal behaviors were dictated by generalized perception. For example, when telling about his grandfather and uncles who were murdered at the Ardanuch urban settlement near Ardvin in 1915, Albert Mamikonyan presents the whole phenomenon “at that time they weren’t killing the children yet”: “When Turks entered their house, my grandfather... his name was Stepan Jamjyan, he took cover in the basement. His children and women were at home but, because they weren’t touching children at that time, he went hiding. He was hiding in the cellar, but then he heard some noise, some racket by the women. He said to himself: “Why shall I be hiding? I am not a coward. It would be better if I die, rather than being unable to protect my family”. He came out and attacked the Turks, but they were too many, they shot and killed him on the spot. This was in 1915, my father was two years old and my uncle was one year old” (from Albert Mamikonyan’s story). This can hardly be called a social memory, “men were getting away”, “men were hiding”, “they were hiding the boys” just during the “events”, and family memories delivering what had happened to their families in particular, delivered simultaneously with their knowledge of that period and the experiences concerning the course of the events - in the very same words and expressions as they were used then.

## Water, Fire, Desert

*“There was an order. When they finished the first massacres, they took the corpses to the river and threw them in the water. Later they received a complaint from the government that the water in the rivers is getting polluted from corpses. So they decided, rather than wasting ammunition, it would be better to incinerate the corpses. So after incinerating, again, they received complaints that foul smell was spreading over. This smell of burning human flesh is terrible, it was a terrible smell. So then they chased the victims to the Der Zor desert, the third genocide was in the Der Zor desert. They drove these people far away from inhabited areas and slaughtered them there. Grandpa used to tell this all the time: it was in three stages” (from the story told by Eleonora Ghazaryan).*

Stories about victims of fire, water and the desert are present in the memories of many respondents. Some people remember incineration of some members of their family or the whole population of some settlements, others remember drowning and throwing of corpses into the river, many others remember the horrors of wandering.

*“Those who come from the Moush region, they do not celebrate the Vardevar<sup>1</sup> festival. There was a global massacre on the Vardevar day; nobody was left alive in the village. My grandpa said, they gathered everyone and pushed them into some mow storage - my grandmother told the same story. By that time grandpa Aram was 14 years old, he was a student at the Araqelots Monastery. He said it was a very hot day and it was very hot at the mow. That Mako’s mother was holding a small child in her hands, and he cried, because he was thirsty. She was a courageous woman, so she asked a Turkish soldier many times, she asked him just to let her give some water to the kid. They allowed Mariam to give some water to the kid, so Mariam took Zorik and got out of there. Mariam said she would give a golden coin if somebody comes and brings her water. She got my granddad Aram’s hand, as a boy, to fetch some water; he was 14 then. He tells she was holding Zorik and Aram, they were in the field, went there to bring some water, when they put fire to the mow. He tells that he cried and wanted to run there – his whole family was there, but Mariam held him, she said to Aram “do not go there, they will incinerate you too.” He recounts, “This woman, holding her own child in her hands, took me with her”. “We went for quite some time until we met Tavriz – granddad’s cousin.” Granddad told her that they incinerated everyone. Tavriz said “So, you are the only one left alive from my uncle’s family – then, wherever I go, you will be with me, and I will save at least someone from my uncle’s family line.” That woman went by the road on her own, maybe she got away, hiding in the gorges. Tavriz had many children. One of her sons was with the cattle that day and she didn’t know whether he was alive or not. Only Khoren was on her lap, he was still a breastfeeding baby at that time. Tavriz ran away from home, hold-*

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1 Vardevar-vardavardar- an Armenian festival celebrated in June-July, which is celebrated with large pilgrimages and water games.



Grandpa Aram, who escaped incineration, was from the Baghlou village of Mush region and is the right in the bottom in the photo.

*ing the child, they went away with Mariam, and my granddad Aram went with them; they went to the neighboring villages at first. Grandpa told me, they went along, and all the villages were deserted – people left their homes and ran away. He said, they stayed in an abandoned house and first wanted to settle there, but then they understood that they couldn't, and then they came here... Almost no one was left alive from that village, only about one person from each of some six families” (from Mushegh Gevorgyan's story).*

*“My father was born in 1911 or 1912, so this story happened approximately in '18-'20. He told that his mother was holding his hand and Nazareth, his younger brother, was in her lap. They pushed everyone into the church and there was pandemonium in there. He says he was a child, he looked around, and it was a complete mess. It turned out they were going to incinerate them. His grandmother was a very dexterous woman. She turned her head and saw that there was a piece of cardboard stuck in the window. So, she took the child and jumped out of the window. Some ten to twelve people managed to survive from their family line. Yes, from the Church window. My dad says, he remembers that it was about dusk. They fled away and climbed the hills. He was not able to walk anymore and*

his mother dragged him behind her, while she was holding the younger child in her hands. When they climbed the hill he saw that the church was burning. He used to tell that, as a small kid, he was excited to see the fire, without understanding what it was. As an 8-9 year old child, what could he understand then? But he says, this scene is still vivid in his memory and he remembers how [Turks] were beating them and pushing them into the church. Turks, yes. This happened in Marash, this is story of Marash” (from Anahit Bardakchyan’s story).

The childhood of Badalyan Grish and his sister Nranhat was very difficult. Up until this day, they still burst into tears when remembering the story of their mother - “adeh”:

“My mother lived in Verin Sipan. On that side of the mount Masis... Nearby Masis. When the war started (she means the massacres) the men went into the caves. Someone would come at night and bring some food for them. My mother tells, her brother came to take some bread, my mom got up to dress, and then she heard some crashing sound. When she got out she saw that they killed her brother. Arshavir was his name. My mother cried, saying, “go, lao, they killed my Arsho” ... clothes, footwear spread apart... She only had that one brother. My mother tells, when her brother died, his wife was pregnant. They went over the village, looking to find some bread, brought it home, but my mother’s mom was missing. Her mother was lost. Her mother was very beautiful, they thought Turks came and took her. Her brother’s wife said “Shusho, there is some smell in the house”. My mother told her, “dear, we were together, where from should I know what it is?” They opened the tondir and found my mother’s mom in it. Turks came and forced her into the tondir... At that time Kurds came to their village, killed everyone, all the men went into the mountains. My “adeh” (mom) said: “Andranik sent his Fidayees, told them to go to the village, tell that Turks will slaughter [everyone] soon, because nemets<sup>1</sup> are giving force and weapons to Turks.” Understand? So two or three Fidayees came, gathered all the men in the village. It was in the spring. They said, “dearest people, Andranik sent us to tell you to go to Van – you would be safe in Van.” She said they didn’t believe them. It was spring. It was time to plow and saw the fields. A few days later they killed everyone who got out. The Kurds killed them. My adeh’s father was killed too. Ghazar was her father’s name, and her mother’s name was Maro. They gathered all the men from three or four villages – one of them was Armenian, one – Turkish, and the other one was Nemets. She said, they gathered everyone and said “Dearest people, do not flee, there is no war, no fight...” They gathered a meeting at the cowshed, telling that there was no war, to live in peace and do the plowing and sowing. By that time they brought fire, lit it on four sides, spilled some oil on it and burned it all. With all these people at the cowshed... My mother tells, for three or four days they were still seeing this green and red fire... These people were incinerated alive in the cowshed. Turks did the same thing to our fellow Armenians. And now they want to bring Turks and make them friends with us. They are Muslims... So, they killed the men and women were left alone. When they were seeing small beautiful girls, they were taking them; those who were a little crippled<sup>2</sup> like us - they said they were not killing those. They were saving bullets to spend on us. Her sister also died there. Nargiz was her name. They were two sisters and one brother. Only my mom Shusho was left alive. To say it short, only my mom was left alive from the whole family. Then she named her own son Arshavir, and her daughter – Maro. These were the names of her uncle and mother. So we took our grandma’s and her brother’s names”.

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1 Germans

2 Grish Badalyan’s mother was lame

Gyozal Hovhannisyan was born on the road, during the second deportation: “My mother in law used to tell me, “my dear ... let me think ... my mother-in-law’s mother-in-law came to see what they were doing. They caught this poor woman, tondir was just burning, so they put this woman in the burning tondir, she was incinerated. She says that there were large pieces of her skirt left lying over the tondir. This was in front of my mother-in-law’s eyes. They incinerated her mother in law. The same happened to her mother-in-law’s brother-in-law’s wife - Zimo’s mother. They put her too in tondir and incinerated her. In her own house”.

Elena Ardahanyan’s grandmother escaped incineration at the last moment, along with her three children, including Elena: “My mother told me her mother’s story. [By that time] my grandpa wasn’t with us anymore. They decapitated him. Turks had forced us with a group of other people into a church in Kars, poured some kerosene and were going to light it with a match. That very moment they received a message that these poor people could be exchanged with Turkish prisoners of war. My grandma was from a well-to-do family, she was raised delicately, and she was very young and very beautiful. So, they brought all these people from that church – among them was also my grandma with her three children – to Akhalkalak. They stayed at Akhalkalak for some time, my mother was a kid but she remembers this very well. The people of Akhalkalak received them well, helped them very much. Then they took them to Tbilisi. My mother tells, they were getting to the military posts on the way during deportation, asking for some food. My mother remembers it from her early childhood - never in her life she ate anything that tasted like that. She said “often they were giving us borsch with a lot of meat”. My mom does not remember it well, where their mother, that is our granny, disappeared. But she remembers that once she came to them in Tbilisi, brought some cherries, and promised to come again. Later they found out that their mother had died... (bursts in tears...), she is buried at the public graveyard... /bursts in tears/. She was so young, so beautiful... (bursts in tears)... 28 years old. She was from a well-to-do family, raised delicately. She couldn’t stand it”.

“I am not sure whether my mother-in-law or my father-in-law was from Erzurum. They were from Kars and Erzurum, but which one was from where I am not sure”. She tells that during the stampede her father took her, Nargiz, and her elder brother, and ran away. He sent his wife away a few days before – she was pregnant – they crossed the river, he took her to her mother – his mother-in-law. She tells: “When we came to the river, my father first took my elder brother, then came back and took me, wanted to go back after the third kid but then he saw that Turks are coming, so he couldn’t take his daughter – had to leave Nargiz there. The river was flowing this way, we were waiting, then my father said “Oh, my. They slaughtered the child; the current is red with blood”. My father went on his knees but he couldn’t do anything. Somehow we managed to stand on our feet and run. When we came, we reached that place where he left his wife, it turned out that both my mother and the child died during delivery. So we were left orphaned in the hands of our father, and later our father also died, we went to orphanage” (From Anahit Bardakchyan’s story).

“My maternal... My mother’s mother... when they fled, my mother’s mother – Rehan was her name, she always used to tell – when they came and crossed the river, Kurds had taken her 14-year old sister. I didn’t understand it, whether they had thrown her into the water or took her with them. But she always used to tell this” (Anahit Hovsepian).

Many of our narrators mention the River Murad. On one side, [Turks] have drowned people in the river, on the other; the waters consumed many people, particularly children, in its waves. (There are many details about this in Almast Harutyunyan's story).

In the narrations there are so many stories of people dying on the way during deportation, about children left on the road, stampede and robberies. A concise description [of the horrors of] wandering was presented by Anahit Bardakchyan. Her narration was very quiet, completely unaffectionate and almost indifferent: *"I heard this story from the lips of the wife of my father's uncle - Haykanush. She said "The situation was such that we were walking over dead corpses, in the darkness. We walked - don't get sick - the worms were climbing upon us, we had to do it this way /shows how carefully they had to look for a place to put their feet/ and we walked. We were shaking the worms off ourselves and walking"*.

The most dreadful memories of the deportation also include descriptions of mental suffering. Vasak Toroyan tells the story of a woman from Talvorik. Two boys were left on her – her son and her brother. *"She wasn't able to carry two children, so she had to leave one of them. One was her brother, the other – her son. Her brother was the only boy who was left alive in their family, if he did not survive, their family would have been exterminated. I don't know how much this woman suffered but, in the end, she decided to leave her own son... Her brother came, now he has sons, heirs... I am just telling the facts... This woman made this choice. Now they live in Shgharshik village, our village"*.



## Massacre, Slaughters, Stampede, Exodus, Deportation, Yeghern,<sup>1</sup> Genocide

When giving descriptive narratives of their parents or grandparents our respondents usually used the words “genocide”, “massacre”, “massacres”, “stampede”, “deportation”, “refugees”, and very rarely – words like “exile” during the interviews. When describing particular situations they used “slaughtered”, sometimes “killed”, “incinerated”, “stabbed”: *“Arshak’s family was slaughtered during the genocide, there were large-scale massacres in Baghlou”* (Mushegh Gevorgyan, Dashtadem); *“when the genocide started, Turks took his daughter and son, they were very beautiful - my grandma’s uncle’s wife was a very beautiful woman, and her one son and one daughter were slaughtered in front of her very eyes”* - from the story told by (Eleonora Ghazaryan, Ashnak); *“my grandma used to tell that forty people lived in one house in Mshgegh, of these forty she was the only one left alive, all in her father’s family were incinerated, slaughtered”* (Vazgren Goukasyan, Ashnak); *“My parents were Armenians who were deported from Turkey, so to say, my father was from Pontic Amasia, and my mother was from the very center of Caesarea – from the Caesarea city. ... My father left Caesarea during the first massacres... well, so he left during the first massacre...”* (Nairi Tajiryan, Yerevan); *“During the 1915 massacre they first took my grandpa, my grandma always used to say they stabbed him”* (Nairi Tajiryan, Yerevan); *“There was such stampede, slaughter, slaughter...”*, *“Aunt Elmast went to America during the stampede”*, *“Finally, when grandpa saw this, it was already too much of a massacre...”*, *“It was during the stampede, yes, on the road”* (Anahit Bardakchyan, Yerevan); *“... when they killed my grandpa ... then started the stampede ... during the stampede my grandma, she was too beautiful ...”* (from Albert Mamikonyan’s story, Yerevan); *“... after they did the first slaughter ... the third slaughter was in the Der Zor desert, they drove these people far away from inhabited areas and slaughtered them there”* (from the story of Eleonora Ghazaryan, Ashnak); *“Before these massacres, before the massacres of 1915... yes, during the stampede too he was with Aghavnik. Aghavnik was some sort of relative to us. When coming with Aghavnik during this stampede...”* (from Vardan Hakobyan’s story, Norakert); *“... then during the deportation he came to Armenia”* (from Artak Hovsepyan’s story, Norakert), etc.

Sometimes they also use the words “fight”, “war” – *“they died of war or what, the Turks fought, and they ran away during the fight, but died on the way”*. When asked what kind of war she means, surprised by this question, the narrator, said *“the Armenian-Turkish fight; there was a war between Armenians and Turks, you didn’t know this?”* (from Tamar Poghosyan’s story, Gyumri). The words “Genocide”, “massacre”, “massacres”, “stampede”, “deportation”, “refugees”, “slaughtered”, “killed”, “incinerated”, “and stabbed” are most probably the words that were used by survivors when telling these stories to their children or to each other.

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<sup>1</sup> “Yeghern” is the term used in Armenian language to define the Armenian Genocide.

In the word-stock of the survivors the word “slaughter” is probably a translation of Turkish word “kesmek”. In the Armenian language the word “slaughter” is rarely used to indicate the killing of humans – this word is used exclusively in descriptions of the events of the genocide period. Notably, probably it is from here that this word entered the vocabulary of children. From her father’s memories Anahit Bardakchyan tells: *“my father said, “we were wandering through the pastures, there was a hill around there, we were going to climb it.” He tells, “I had a cousin named Helineh, and my aunt’s name was Elmast.” I have seen her picture. She was a young girl, her picture is still in front of my eyes – she had blue eyes , there are others with blue eyes in my father’s family line, with blond hair, up to here <shows the waist>. “My father was holding Helineh’s hand and we, children of two sisters, were climbing, she was wearing a white dress with beautiful volants.” Suddenly, he tells, this Helineh said “Oh my, Haroutyun, the Turks are coming.” He tells, “I held Helineh’s hand and dragged her, dragged her, but Helineh dropped my hand and tumbled, while I ran. I ran, hiding in the grass behind trees, watching”. Helineh having lost her tongue from fear, she said “Do not slaughter me, do not slaughter” but, he tells, “They already took out the knife and I ran away, I didn’t want to see what would happen next”. Same Anahit Bardakchyan says “we also fought against them... they slaughtered our [people] but ours didn’t slaughter anyone, we just fought them like an enemy – if you fight, I have to fight too, right?” It is clear from these sentences that in Anahit’s perception words “fight”, “enemy” are attached to different notions, in which the word “slaughter” doesn’t fit.*

From the way the words “yeghern”, “genocide” are used in the narrations it is clear that they were compiled at a later period. *“My father was born in 1917 and my mother in 1920; after the yeghern their families moved to Armenia...” (Aida Topuzyan).*

The words “massacres”, “stampede”, “genocide”, “deportation” and “yeghern” are sometimes used interchangeably, or even repeated in the same sentence: *“Turks were massacring Armenians, they didn’t want Armenians to live, it was a yeghern, whatever it was, Turks did it” (Tamara Poghosyan).* When telling about her relative Silva from Gymri, who was deported from Kars, she tells *“They were deported from Kars and came to Ghoukasyan... after 1915, after the yeghern”.*

Sometimes, in some stories, you can see the diversified perception of the words “exile” and “genocide”: *“...There was no much genocide in Dardanel, since this was a large city, the genocide was more in the villages”, “They were deporting people from Dardanel ... to waste lands, deserts...” (From Hayrapet Yazrjian’s story).* It is evident that here the narrator uses the word “genocide” as an equivalent to the words “massacre”, “murder”. It is noteworthy that among our narrators the word “aqsor” [Arm. deportation, expulsion, exile] was only used by Avetis Keshishyan and Hayrapet Yazirjyan, both coming from Turkish-speaking Armenian families. They both didn’t speak Armenian at a young age. They learned the language at a later stage and apparently, their childhood memories maintained the official Turkish term, “sürgün”. Therefore they are still using the Armenian literary equivalent - “aqsor”. None of our respondents used the term “deportation” in Armenian while referring to Yeghern.

## “They Lost No Less Than we Did, and That is True”

*“I watched lots of Turkish movies... Some 150-200 perhaps... Their Turkish movies are picturing their real life. They have also suffered a lot, do you know what they had to withstand? Famine, massacres, along with massacres they also lost [people], they lost no less than we did, and that is true” (from Anahit Bardakchyan’s story).*

Out of the 35 interviews that we conducted, this is the only generalized perception of Turks which is acquired from Turkish movies. Those respondents whose “Turkish impressions” were acquired from the “Turkish experience” of their family members have no specific or generalized impressions on Turkey or Turks on issues which are not related to the destiny of Armenians. At the same time these people either do not know, or do not tell, or, in their biographies there were no cases of any improper actions of Armenians (or members of their families) against a Turkish person or Turks in general. The only memory of improper actions of Armenian/Armenians was present in Almast Haroutyunian’s story, and this rather applies to Kurds. She remembers particularly a story by her father, when a group of Armenian survivors who reached Moush killed one of the two Kurds [who delivered them (?)] and the other one was rescued from being murdered by their village priest. *“Well, so there are bad [people] also among Armenians”,* concludes the narrator. The same Almast Haroutyunian tells that at a later point, when one Kurdish person who settled in Armenia with Armenians was ill, she went to her brother, who was a doctor, and asked him to come and examine the patient, but her brother refused saying that the Kurds murdered so many Armenians and that he is not going to treat a Kurd. *“So, this was my brother, but that is no reason for me to hold my tongue”.*

Memoirs about the resistance of Armenians or of them taking revenge are present in memoirs of our narrators, though rarely. Mainly these aren’t memories from particular biographies of their families, but rather recollections of names of the Armenian freedom fighter groups in Van, or just the mentioning of Andranik’s name alone. Those few stories that were present in the family stories of our respondents mainly refer, once again, to Andranik’s volunteer groups, like, for example, the case of Garegin Chugaszyan’s grandfather’s story, who, coming back from the USA and finding out about the loss of his family, joined Andranik’s troops. Aregnaz Poghosyan’s mother was a survivor, and later in Armenia she got married to another survivor. Without any particular details, she knows that her father was fighting together with Andranik. *“He was from Ishkhanadzor. He came here as Andranik’s soldier; his records show that he was a soldier... He had a horse, a white horse. He used to tell “we were young”, he was telling this, that they were fighting together with Andranik... They were military, together with Andranik they were gathering these people, bringing them”* (meaning that they were gathering Armenians who were hiding in the mountains or

in Kurdish villages, and helping them to relocate to Armenia). *“My uncles are among those 20-25 persons in Ujan who fled in 1915, fighting together with general Andranik; so they came and reached Ujan. My three uncles. They were from the Tsman village of Sasoun”* /Village head of Ujan, Arakel/. Almost Haroutyunian’s father, too, was a member of Andranik’s group.

Sometimes, however, they also remember particular cases. *“... my maternal grandfather and his friend - my mother used to remember his name - she said, his name was Hakob... with Hakob they decided to enroll in the Turkish army. So they enroll as Turkish soldiers, but they kill Turks as much as they can, they slaughtered Turks, she used to tell... Turkish commanders noticed this, they said, those two are killing Turks, they are Armenians, get them. My grandpa and that guy, Hakob - they ran to the [nearby] mountain, climbed it and then descended on the other side... they got away. And, my paternal grandfather – on their own, they formed a group, they went into the mountains and they got over many Turks... To such an extent that they were prosecuted under law, he was caught, and they beheaded him...”* (from Anahit Bardakchyan’s story).

*“French army entered Cilicia in 1918, and an Armenian legion was created within that French army; Armenian volunteers went to fight in Cilicia. My father was one of them; he left his shop in Cairo, everything ... and went to fight in Cilicia. He has photos, it is written Tarsus on them, now it is called Tarson... he went there, he was there until 1918; the French had to surrender Cilicia in the end of 1919 and these volunteers returned back”* (from Nairi Tajirian’s story).

In the memoirs of our narrators it is not only and not so much that their personal family losses are prominent, but rather the cruelty due to which many people have died. When these memoirs are crossed with responsive actions of the Armenians, usually a “cruelty ratio” of deeds is being compared. *“...in what they did the worst thing was their cruelty - they slaughtered our people, but ours didn’t slaughter, we just fought them back like with enemies. If you fight me, I have to fight back, right?”* (from Anahit Bardakchyan’s story). As a result, many respondents consider that Turks in general are very cruel and that they are capable of doing cruel things. Notably, further hardships of the life of survivors - famine, roving, spending their childhoods at orphanages, all the difficulties of refugee life, problems adjusting to living in a foreign country, problems with finding jobs and earning for their living, having to live a lonely life at an old age, lost prospects, spoiled careers, repressions of the Soviet period, etc., all of which the survivors went through – these are not directly linked to Turkish recollections in the memoirs of our respondents. “Turkish recollections” of the survivors are mainly focused on the genocide period and perception of Turks through [the stories of] these survivors is quite widespread in Armenia. When questioned “what kind of emotions do you relate to the word Turk”, the following answers were given: *“hatred”* (Vard Abajyan, Eleonora Ghazaryan); *“hatred, revenge”* (Mushegh Gevorgyan); *“they are cruel, cruel”* (Gyozal Hovhannisyan, Arpik Shahinyan); *“enmity”* (almost everyone). When questioned *“Have you ever seen a Turk in your life?”* the answers were mainly negative but sometimes they used to accompany the answers with their comments, like the following: *“No, heaven forbid, there is so much hostility against Turks in our souls”* (Eleonora Ghazaryan). During our research we came upon two women who had certain relations with Turkey and Turks. In general, their impressions were positive however, like one of them concluded, *“I go to Turkey and come*

*back right now - well, I didn't see any enmity there but, with every step, you always think that you are on your enemy's territory" (a woman from Gyumri). Accumulated social memories on Turkey and Turks are prevailing over present social experiences in Armenia.*

## “Well, They Are Human Too”

Even in those families who had worst memories, they always love to remember and pass over the stories of support<sup>1</sup>, even though such support wasn't received by members of their families and they know about these cases through a third party.

Such is, for example, the following story by Anahit Bardakchyan: “... I visited there as a tourist ... I got acquainted with some woman there, her name was Geghuhi, she spoke broken Armenian, and her man (husband) didn't speak Armenian at all, they arrived from Turkey, from Istanbul or from somewhere... She said, “during the deportation my father-in-law was a small kid, he was left in the fields during deportation. A Turkish person passing there said “Oh my, this is the child of our neighbor such and such, they got away and the child is left here, they didn't have a chance to take him...” So he takes the child, brings him home; this Turk keeps the boy, keeps him, raises him. The brother of this Turk told him “listen, we raised this boy, it doesn't matter that he is an Armenian child, *gyavur's* (Turk. unfaithful) child”, he tells, “let us wed him with my daughter, we know this boy very well.” And he had answered “no, I found this child in the fields and I said to myself - I will take him, raise him, raise him as an Armenian, and I will wed him with an Armenian girl” ... so, finally, he does so, he weds him to an Armenian girl, and then he sits and tells him the whole story, so and so. “When I found this child amidst the fields, half-asleep, in tears, miserable, hungry and thirsty, he was trembling. So, I felt pity for him, I said to myself – I shall keep this one and I shall wed him with an Armenian girl.” And, she said, he wedded him with an Armenian girl and this Geghuhi, she was married to the son of this boy's son, so this boy was her father-in-law”.

In the stories of our narrators the cases of support are usually linked to their memories of survival. As we already reported, the memories of support are significantly personalized, and very often, particular names are remembered. These memories usually end with a generalized conclusion, like: “Well, they are human too”.

Avetis Keshishian remembers from his father's memoirs, how their “dost” [Turk. friend] helped his father and his brothers. “My parents also told other things about civilians, Turkish ‘not soldiers’ – more humane, more benevolent, amicable and intimate [things]. There have been even cases of ours – they were four brothers – once they got away into the mountains; they didn't have food, and while the danger was still there, they couldn't come back to the village. Sometimes they used to come in the night, one-by-one, to take some water or food. So once, the house of their “dost” – dost means “friend” in Turkish – in one end of our Lapash village there lived some Turk,

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1 In this research any cases of support provided by Russians, Europeans or Americans are completely omitted since first, these have been schematized in the biographies of individuals and whole families and naturally, they are present in memoirs mainly concerning life in orphanages, and secondly, they are not related or at least, narrators do not relate them to “Turkish memoirs” of Armenians.



who was “dost” to us... what I am telling, this was in 1895, according to what my father said... So, he told that, when our guys were in the house of this Turk, the soldiers came - three persons- they came and entered this man’s house. They knew it ... So, our guys were immediately offered to get into the barn, they hid there... So they hid there, [the soldiers] came to this men’s house, saying “you are hiding gyavurs here.” He tells “no, I am not hiding gyavurs”. One or two of my grandpas were smokers, so they smoked when they were there. So, the soldiers said, “you are not telling the truth, you are not a smoker, but there is cigarette smell in your house.” He said “yes, my brother visited me from the neighboring village, he is a heavy smoker, he smokes all the time”. This way this person rescues them but then he tells them “my friends, please do not come here for the second time,” because he started to fear – but then, in that case, he rescued my grandpas once.

In family biographies of our respondents there are more memories about the support that was provided by Kurds - especially in Sasoun, Moush, and Bitlis regions. Aregnaz Poghosyan, for example, recounts “my mother and her sister went to the house of that Kurd kirva ... at first, he did not agree to help them, he said “they would come and kill you, and me too”, but later he said “OK, stay here, I will hide you among the sheep... They dressed in Kurdish dress...They were sitting among the sheep at night, and they went to herd the sheep during the daytime... I don’t know how much time they had to spend there... That Kurd was such a nice person...” Many parts in Almast Harutyunyan’s story, too, are related to cases of support provided by Kurds. Besides cases of personal support, according to the memoirs of our narrators, Kurds have also helped out whole settlements of the Armenian population. “My father always used to tell – no one has been massacred in Manazkert; their city administrator was Kurdish, he was the commander of four hundred soldiers; when these massacres spread all over Sasoun, the deportation started, this Kurd had gathered all Armenians at night - the Armenians of Manazkert... He gathered everyone, with their possessions [points this out], packed them up on wagons, brought them to the Khoy bridge, so that they crossed the river.” (from Vard Abajyan’s story); “My grandma is from the Dashtadem village of Khut; it wasn’t a large village, some 30-40 households and they were in good relations with Kurds. So someone came to them secretly, he let them know. He said, Mkro, save your family if you can, Turks decided to massacre Armenians... and he told him not to tell this to anyone else. So, Jojo says that his family suffered no human losses, no damage was caused to anyone, everyone survived, but they had to leave their home, they did not risk to come back to bring [their stuff]. So they didn’t take anything with them to avoid any suspicion, they ran away, hiding all the time. Then they arranged it with his uncle and with the Kurds. Kurds helped them, and they came.” (from Mushegh Gevorgyan’s story); “from the Sekh village <of Bitlis>, I would like to tell one more thing, this was real, indeed. My father was married, he had a wife and two daughters. During the deportation, in 1915, my father’s mother was ill, so my father stayed with his mother, he did not flee with his village. But at that time, when they fled, well, how to tell you... The Kurdish ashirat, finally, he brought all the people of that family, he delivered them to the border. He did not go beyond the border, he said, the Russian army is there, go, you will not be in danger there. So they came, up to Echmiadzin”(from Samvel Mirzoyan’s story); “You know, the village Avaraq, there were only six households there - three households were Kurds, three- Armenians. I remember this well, they told it, they say Kurds ... entered their village and started to kill ... they massacred. Finally, they said, a Kurd, the elderly person of Shigos, took care of them. Shigo is a Kurdish clan<sup>1</sup>, they never massacred any Armenians. I re-

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1 We frequently encountered memories about help that was provided by the Kurdish tribe “Shigo” or “sheko” in the stories of

*member this well, they said, the elder one's name was Mradi; they say their ancestors were Armenians, they took care of these families so nothing happened to them, they went to Mush. On the way his father – the father of my father – my grandpa, he was ill, they call it “shorba” – that is, typhoid... So my uncle (Vazgen Ghoukasyan's father's brother- H.Kh.) died, they buried him and they also buried their father. He said Drnobabe – I don't know where this village or town is. So there he buried his father and then they went, they got away...” (from Vazgen Ghoukasyan's story).*

Besides this kind of stories, family also memoirs contain abundant recollections of the participation of Kurds in the massacres (Grish Badalyan, Anahit Hovsepyan, Almast Harutyunyan). Summarizing family stories and social memories of our respondents we found the following pattern: Kurds participated in massacres “but it was Turks who hounded them” (Grish Badalyan); “... that territory, those villages where they lived, these were Kurdish villages, so naturally, the first strike was from the Kurds but, as they told it, in many cases Kurds even helped [Armenians]. That is, Kurds provided support to those who were directly acquainted with them” (Artak Hovsepyan). There was even a dispute around this issue during a conversation between our two narrators – Hrach Hovhannisyan and his nephew. We are providing this conversation below, in unedited form and without any comments:

Hrach Hovhannisyan – One is no better than the other, they are Muslims, both are Muslim nations and I would like to repeat this once again, few Turks massacred us, they were mainly Kurds, those who did this. They took us, threw us out, being fooled by what Turks told them - as the history says – “dear Kurds, you go, massacre Armenians, and we will give you self-determination, identity”-, but they lied to them, they didn't give them self-determination...

Nephew – No, I do not agree to my uncle on this issue, because this was nothing else but the success of Turkish policy. Even though realizing everything, they didn't want to do the job with their own hands, so they forced Kurds to do this. Kurds, also by grandpa's telling - there were many people among Kurds who hid Armenians in their homes. My granny, sure, my granny will tell [the same] now, because grandpa used to tell this a lot - that among Kurds there were many-many people who hid Armenians in their houses, so that Turks would not slaughter them... I don't know, no matter how much they would like to convince me... well, indeed, there was a Kurdish army, they cooperated with Turks, yes, but Kurds helped us a lot, that's 100% the truth.

Evidently, this dispute has been influenced by extended discussion around Yeghern, issues covered in the literature and the resulting socialized memories and personal experiences. In essence, this is very characteristic of the perception of the genocide by the Armenian society.

## To Speak or to Stay Silent, to Tell or Not to Tell ("My parents were avoiding speaking about this")

It has been already discussed that those survivors who settled in Eastern Armenia were facing difficulties talking in public about their tragedy; memories related to that period of their life story were either limited to small social micro networks or their own families. The problem of telling or not telling, however, was, and still is, related to personal decisions of an individual - his mindset, the commitment of surrounding individuals to listen to him, and a number of other factors. Not everyone is able, or willing, to talk about this most difficult period of their lives. They are not able or willing to speak about everything. The ways of telling or not telling, talking or keeping silent, were also different, and they remain different.

Judging from the stories of our narrators, women were the main source of delivering stories about the massacres or the escape. Some were speaking readily about what had happened to them, what they had seen, talking all the time about hardships that they had suffered, telling this to everyone. Others were weeping all the time. Mother of Grish Badalyan and Nranhat was dedicating every day of her difficult life to stories about her parents and her greater family, forcing her children to become nolens volens witnesses of her sufferings. Being elderly people now, up to this day, they are not able to speak about this with dry eyes. Up to the end of her days Almast Harutyunyan's mother, who survived at the age of 13, was weeping daily while repeating the extreme sufferings of her own mother. Thereat, the word "Turk" is almost never mentioned in the stories of Almast's mother Haykanush; her stories are mainly comprised of descriptions of their suffering. When telling her story, Haykanush never referred to the cause of their sufferings, she never looked to find who was guilty... She was just talking about these - about the killing of her father and her mother, about the deaths of her underage sister and brother from cold and starvation, along with [giving descriptions of] the overwhelming sights that she had witnessed. It is amazing to see how small the theme of personal hardship was in the story of Haykanush. It was her day-to-day tragedy that forced Almast to deliver her mother's stories to paper, publishing them as a book. This partially relieved Haykanush. It seemed to Haykanush that, if many people would find out about what had happened to her mother, then her mother would feel relieved in the other world.

Men were less talkative, and their narrations were partially different from stories told by women. First of all, since men were killed in excess, there are fewer men among survivors. Second, it seems to us that the feeling of guilt has also played a role among men: they should have helped out their family members but weren't able to do so. Their pride was hurt more, therefore they were talking and telling with greater difficulty. If male survivors have not lost their spirits and their human face as a result of new hardships -having to look after orphans, having to find a job and earn their living, etc.-, then they were mainly keeping silent or, like their children - our present narrators - have indicated, they mainly preferred to

speak to each other. Questioned by their children, they either replied very laconically, or mainly spoke about their participation in the Armenian freedom movement.

Both subject and methods of delivering the memories by men and women were different also at a later stage, when children-survivors had grown up. Having grown up, boys used to deliver in writing, rather than narrating. They used to write it “just for themselves.” On the one hand this can be explained by the fact that, while the subject was a forbidden issue, there were difficulties with distributing these written materials, with making them public; on the other hand, perhaps, by their motivation to write. Writing things down is perhaps a way of partially getting rid of inwardly accumulated hardships.

Girls, after growing up, were telling details about even the most inhumane events, while men preferred avoiding details. This phenomenon exists up to this day.

In Ashnak village of Talin, Elya Davtyan recounted in detail the brutal story that happened to her aunt. The story was about how the young woman (Elya’s aunt) had run away with two kids after the massacre of all her other family members in Hosnut village of Talvorik. “Her name was Doureh. First her daughter died from hunger on the exodus. Then she met askyars (soldiers), who hit her face with the butt of the rifle and her teeth were broken in her mouth. Then the askyars cut her abdomen making a cross and pulling out her intestines. They thought she was dead and left her. But she had just fainted. Then she recovered and saw that her son was pushing her. She found the strength in herself and put her intestines back in her tummy, sewed her skin with the needle, tied up her son with her shirt and continued to move forward, scrambling and pulling the son. Her son also died in a couple of days. She brought back the corpse of her son and buried it next to her daughter, And then found strength in herself to keep moving. Then she found her relatives. Her uncle was Hamze Ptshuk and she lived in his house. When I came to this house as a bride, she was already very old and I was the one to take care of her. Every time when I was bathing her I carefully washed the wounds on her tummy.” Mrs. Elya was very excited while telling this unbelievable story, which as we found out was known by everybody in the village. However her husband Derenik Kirakosyan, who was present at the time, was listening to what his wife was telling with a little frustration and left in the middle of the story.

Among our narrators, women were inclined to tell the details, whereas men generalized. Women were talking about those who extended a helping hand and in what situations, telling what words did they use, what clothes did they give them, what food did they provide, where and how did they conceal them, etc., whereas men were generalizing, in a few words, using expressions like “Turks from the neighboring village”, “women making a racket”, “governmental orders”, etc. Based on the stories of their relatives women were remembering and telling about the cases of brutality, giving the details of sufferings, whereas men spoke of the general phenomenon and carefully avoided references to cruelty. Among our narrators Vasak Toroyan, for example, several times remembered certain particular events, started to tell them, but then interrupted himself, saying “No, no, it is not appropriate to talk about this in the presence of young people”, referring to the students who participated in the interview (A.Qeshishyan and S. Haroutunyan).



A 1958 photo. The frail woman second from the left is Doureh.

Later, with the technological advancements, grandchildren of the already ageing grandpas and grandmas have started asking them questions and recording their responses. Some have even managed to make video recordings. During our meetings with our 35 narrators they provided us with copies of video and audio recordings, published books and handwritten manuscripts. A copy of a voluminous manuscript, dedicated to the bygones of Mihran Hovhannisyan from Khastur and his family, has been donated to us by his son; it starts with descriptions of the first massacres at the Khastur village in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, including references to the Genocide, at which time Mihran was 14 years old, and continuing with the details of his life at the orphanage, the story of finding his mother, and reaching as far as the 1950s.

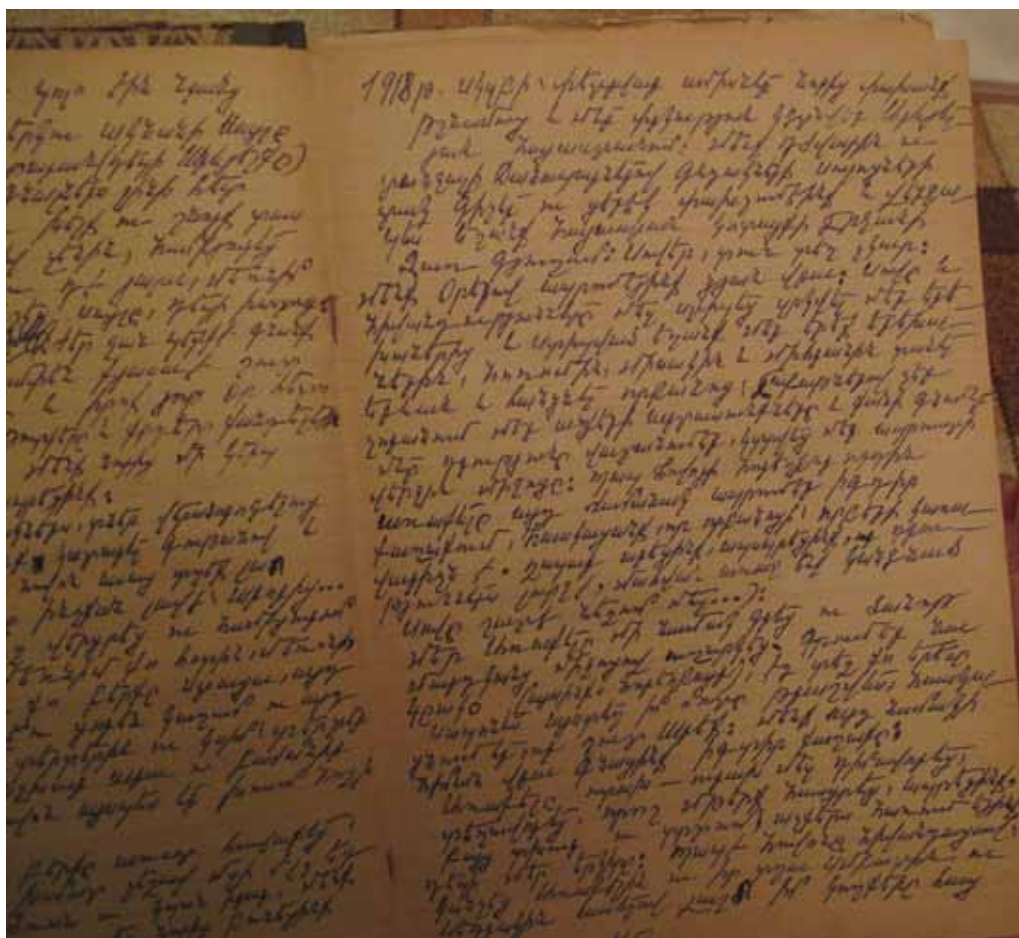


Hamze Ptshuk, survived from Hosnut Village of Talvorik, where Doure had lived and helped other survivors as well.

The sons of the cousins of Garegin Chugaszyan's grandfather, who were respectively 13 and 8 years old at the time of the Genocide, recorded their memories at a later point. "One of them, Vahan Ghazaryan, was a renowned intellectual, he was the Chief Editor of a newspaper in the United States; he has numerous written memoirs, part of which has been published. The other one is Pargev Chugaszyan. He doesn't have any written memoirs but we have made many audio recordings of him... My very self, when I was preparing a CD dedicated to the genocide four years ago, in 2005, I have collected all that material..."

Some people just kept silent in general. Parents of Aida Topuzyan – her father, whose origins were in Atabazar, appeared in Greece after the massacres; her mother, who was from Mersin, went to Syria. Lat-





A page from Mihran Hovhannisyán's manuscript "The story of our house".

er they met each other in Lebanon and got married. Aida was born in Beirut; there were many survivors there and she, of course, was well aware of the Genocide from first hand witnesses. However, her parents avoided talking about this. Aida has only seen one of her grandmothers and she does not know any details about this period of her family history. After finding her relative Knarik Janikyan in 1975 and finding out her life story, all the emotions and feelings of the narrators and listeners of such stories were a revelation for her. "Only once she spoke about this, only once; she told and... kept silent forever. It was a great agony for her to talk about this. Although it was clear that she was suffering all the time".

## “I don’t Know...”

Why did this great tragedy happen to us? How is it possible to resolve it? In fact our 35 respondents do not answer this question. I believe, we can assert that their answer can be summed up as one indefinite statement: “I don’t know.” Many people replied just like that – “I don’t know.” Of course, there are also simplistic answers, like “Turks did not like Armenians”, “Turks and Armenians do not like each other” (Gyozal Hovhannisyan); “Turks always massacred to get into possession of our wealth, our land” (Almast Harutyunyan); “Because Turks are cruel” (Eleonora Ghazaryan); “Because we are Christians - Turks said, you should change your religion, adopt Turkish religion, but we didn’t want to change our beliefs”, “Turks didn’t want Armenians to live” (Tamar Poghosyan); “Because Turks are enemies to Armenians” (many respondents), etc. This uncertainty and these answers are very noteworthy. They are at least evidence of one thing – that, despite discussion of various hypotheses of the causes of Genocide, mainly of geopolitical nature, in Armenia’s present socioeconomic life, in essence, these do not affect the thinking of common citizens. Simple, sensual reasons are more understandable to survivors of massacres, at least to most of our respondents. And, along with this, there is perhaps the desire to refuse comprehending the incomprehensible. How to explain, how to understand, why something, which cannot be explained by any logic, happened?

These questions require answers. In the quest of our respondents around these questions Garegin Chugaszyan’s pursuits come to the lack of common sense concerning the notion of “Genocide”: “To say it frankly, I spoke to numerous people, trying to understand that tragedy... But this is even not a tragedy. A tragedy must make sense; when something makes no sense, this is not a tragedy already, it is something else... I tried to find the sense of the Genocide in literature, in the stories told by people... Me myself, I made an electronic disk, I looked through an enormous amount of material... Among Chukaszians, the son of my grandfather’s brother has written a book in America, numerous articles... He described their way of escape through the Der Zor desert, which he went along with our relatives; when only he survived... Only he was left alive among our relatives, along with another child... Two kids... For a long period of time my father was inviting survivors to our home, he was talking to them, he was recording hours of their conversations. You name it - what these people haven’t told. But I can factually tell it today that I did not understand the essence of this notion... What I was able to understand, is that it wasn’t a simple tragedy... This is a much more complicated problem, it simply... trying to find some sense in it, to see some sense in it all... I don’t know what sense could be there... what sense can be in it... What for? For the sake of what this sacrifice was made? The bright idea of fraternity between Armenians and Turks was on the table, just a few years before this, and it has been sacrificed... To what? ... Who had won? ... What has he won? ... I don’t think that it is only us who lost. It is not only us, who lost... I do not know how they would evaluate their losses but their... basic grounds were lost... They lost their basic grounds... Turks, Turks have lost their basic grounds... If you look back at the murder of

Hrant Dink... Reading the Turkish press, one can feel that Turks too, they do not understand, they do not understand... because even the person who loved them so much, right? The one who wanted to do something, that... that person too is destroyed... I have read the best Turkish speeches, that simply was deep... deep... no, it wasn't astonishment but, you know, a shock... Of course, I have also met many other Turks who very easily said "Well, you know, it was a tragedy, but so many journalists have been killed in Turkey; he was just one of them", and they tell this so easily. At that moment you start to think. Or, you rather feel it; that, say, these journalists - for them, equally unworthy as Hrant Dink was for them? ... So I am thinking all the time; this means, they have lost... many things... Turks have lost their footing".

Avetis Keshishyan is able to see some logic in the problem of Genocide: "... because this could not have been avoided, because Ottoman Turkey understood perhaps that if Armenians stayed, that would mean, at least... at least establishing of their statehood there. If there was no Genocide, these series of massacres... Turkey would have had to reconcile with the Armenian statehood, or would have to exterminate... Turkey is facing this very problem with Kurds today. I think this example shows that, if by exterminating Armenians they created a precedent for frightening others - to shut them up, then... this objective has not been accomplished".

Summarizing the answers that were present in our discussions concerning possible ways of resolving the problem, we can see that similar points are repeated to a certain extent: "... if the doors [borders] would open, gradually, in about twenty or thirty, or even fifty years, Turks will do the same things to us" (Garnik Manukyan); "I believe that if Turkey does not want to recognize the Genocide today, it cannot be ruled out that they can do the same again today; that is, they are not sure about themselves, whether they are civilized or not" (Hamlet Hovsepyan). Let us quote Avetis Keshishyan's generalization here: "Turkey is unable to be conscientious and loyal even to its own citizens... They do not have those moral principles which are required for this... As long as those who rule and have all the levers in their hands, as long as they have not become humane, the problem will not be resolved. Nations, I believe, you know - they can become friends very easily. All the nations have this sober potential in them, instinctively, but the elite, they are taking advantage of the low consciousness of the people and their inability, doing whatever they like. For example, they were 'loading' Turkish people against us for seventy years, and the Turkish nation received a certain 'injection', so the number of people who were full of hatred to us has increased even further... This was done deliberately; this was a deliberate policy of the elite. If they would not have done this, even if they still would not recognize the Genocide, it would have been much easier to establish friendship then. Look - to err is human. This is an axiom. Therefore, we need to be forgiving in our lives. This is very important, very difficult but very essential, very necessary - if we want to live like humans. However, forgiveness starts from demeanor of the one who acted wrongly. The one who acted wrongly should be prepared to avoid repeating the wrong action again; to avoid repeating the wrong action he should understand, should acknowledge that he did wrong. Then, forgiveness would make sense. Forgiveness makes no sense without repentance. To forgive who? To forgive what? Do they indeed need our forgiveness? Both repentance and forgiveness bear evidence of being highly civilized. Do Turks, indeed, possess this higher level of civilization? Do we possess this civilization? I don't know."

## “My Dear Almast, Write it Down, Write it Down”

On November 4, 2009, in her house in the Ujan village, Almast Harutyunyan told the story of her parents and partially, her own life story.

Her narrative has been written down by Avetis Keshishian. H.Kharatyan and N.Erznkyan participated in the interview as well. Below are extracts from the story:

When we requested Mrs. Almast to tell her story and the story of her parents, she got very excited and instantly replied: “I have written a book, it is titled “My inglorious childhood”, it is about my parents, about my mother. I wrote yet another book, I just sent it to the print house; my other book is about Stalin’s atrocities. My husband has been repressed hmmm... to Southern Kazakhstan. He was alone there; he didn’t speak their language, nothing. When I went there, I saw 80.000 young men were being kept there in custody ... that was terrible... I wrote everything [that I saw there] in this book; it will be published in the end of this month.

We asked Mrs. Almast to come back to that section of her family biography which was related to Turks.

– I was born on December 24, 1920. Thus I will turn 90 in a few days. I was born on the route of escape, in a barn. So, our people were new refugees here. I am now writing the memoirs of my life. For 36 years I worked as a teacher; I was awarded with five Medals of Honor. I worked among people from Sasoun, these people still have respect and honor, and they still honor our good old rules...

Well, let me start with my mother. All the children who were born from my grandpa and grandma, they all died. My grandpa spoke seven languages, he studied in Tigranakert. First they used to live in Sasoun, in Talvorik They saw that Turks were coming all the time, collecting tribute; they were robbing us, taking everything. One night with their whole family – four brothers - they went down to what was called “Bsheriq field”, on the banks of Batmana River. They came down, there, at one village, there was a deserted place, so they started to work there... this was long before the massacres. Kurdish ‘bek’ from the neighboring village sees that these people are hard workers, he tells them “Come to my village, I will give you land and water, just come and live in my village.” So he takes them, brings to Grasira. My grandpa, the one that was educated, they assigned him as ‘res’ [village head] there. My grandpa got married with the daughter of the Tigranakert priest. So their children were born but all of them were dying. Only three were left alive – my mother, her brother, and her younger sister. My grandpa thought that he must build a school there. So he built one building for a school and my mother went there as a first year

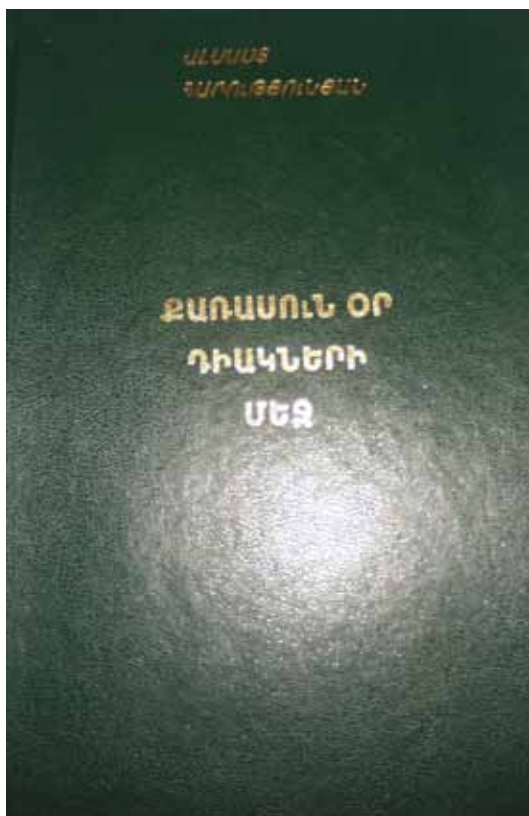
schoolgirl; she used to tell “We were writing with charred wood”. They used to burn a chip of wood and then were writing on the board with this charred wood. So they did, until she was in fourth year of study. There were almost no Turks in the village. There were Kurds, but the majority were Armenians. There were some fifteen or twenty Armenian households there. They caught my grandpa before the massacres, all the men ran away out of fear, and they caught my grandpa. With lots of difficulty, my mother’s uncle went there, gave some gold coins to the prison ward, said that their whole family wanted to come and see their father just one time. My mother cried day and night when recounting this story. My mother used to tell that when they went – she was thirteen then – she says “my father was unable to walk”. She said they made a special device, they laid him down, raising his feet, beating the lower part of his feet with cane so long until blood came out... This was in 1914. My grandpa told his wife: “when you go, forget about wealth, take the children and go to Basork; Basork’s ‘agha’ is a good person, he likes Armenians and he will rescue you”... Basork was a village, they were hoping [on the benevolence] of Basork’s ‘agha’ because, earlier, in 1896, there was a one-day massacre. So, all the man in our family went to Basork, there was a Greek bank there, they fought Turks from the bank [building (?)]. When they ceased fighting Turks came to the Batmana River, they settled near this Grasira village. The brother of this Grasira’s ‘agha’, Mirza, came to my mother’s grandmother – she was a very beautiful woman, he has stolen her, took her away. Their grandpa came, he saw that his wife wasn’t home, he thought that Turks have taken her; he went to the bank of Batmana river and cursed them heavily ... So they caught him, tied him to a tree, cut off his nose, cut off his tongue, they dismembered and killed him on that tree. When they left him and went away, our people came and saw him, the poor one. His name was Emish. So, with this memory in mind, my grandpa told his wife to go to Basorq. My grandma was pregnant, near delivery. By that time my mother was already present, her brother, and her little sister – they were three kids. So she took them all and they went to Basorq together with my grandpa’s brother Karapet. When they went to Basorq, they took their whole flock [of sheep] to Basorq and they handed it to that ‘agha’ as a gift. But this ‘agha’ did a lot of harm to them in the end. First, he cheated them; he told that he would give them full support. My mother told “When we reached there, my mother gave birth on that very night, but these Kurdish women did not even let us find out whether it was a boy or a girl. They wrapped [the child] in my mother’s cloth, he was still alive, they took him out and buried alive under a stone in Gargar”. My mom was weeping day and night. I wrote this book just because of my mother. She used to tell me “My dear Almast, write it down, please write it down”. Her own grandma had asked her to write. She used to reply “Grandma, how can I write, I have had only four years [of education]”. So then, my mother used to ask me... One day, in Basorq, my grandma told my mother “Haykanush, I will take Paytsar on my shoulders; we are leaving at the dawn”. The massacres were over. She heard that one of my uncles was there – in the village Tapi, so she wanted to go there too.

So, at dawn, she took Paytsar in her arms, and went with my mom and my brother. They lived in that house for one month, and the dog of the house got used to them and went with them when they left. Whatever they did, it did not go back. They went quite far away, it was light already. There was some wrecked church on the way, so my grandma said “Haykanush, sit here with Paytsar, I will go and pray there, and then we can go.” At that time the Kurd woke up and saw that they were missing. So he got up,

took his rifle and ran. The dog felt that someone was coming and barked. So he went towards that barking, shot and killed my poor grandma at the place of praying. He killed her (in weeping voice) my mother saw this all with her own eyes... She said "I took Paytsar on my shoulders and went forward". This Kurd brought them home. He had a daughter-in-law, her name was Taveh, she was a very kind daughter-in-law, she called her, telling "do not cry, my dear Nusheh" – her name was Haykanush but they called her Nusheh. "Dear Nusheh, do not cry, tomorrow I will take you where your mother is, maybe she is still alive". My mother said she couldn't sleep until dawn. She said, in the morning Taveh said to her father-in-law – "let Paytsar stay here, Nusheh and I will go, bring some banjar [an edible plant]". So they went there and they saw that dogs from the neighborhood have torn my granny apart – her intestines were on one side, lungs on the other. So my mother lost her consciousness (Mrs Almast continues in weeping voice). Poor Taveh brought her back to consciousness somehow; they dug [a hole] and buried her. My mother told "On a small stone I made a cross with stones, took it and placed it above my mother's head. Then Taveh gathered some banjar, she gave me half of it and kept the other half for herself, and we came back home". She says, "We came home, I was crying, crying a lot, and Taveh told me – do not cry, if my father-in-law hears, he will beat you up." In the morning she took my mother and Paytsar, she took them to the river bank to wash some clothes. She took them to the river bank... There was a Turkish commander, he had finished with the massacres and was looking for survivors, about two hundred Armenians. He saw my mother and her sister and took them too. Taveh begged him much, she said, "this is my sister-in-law", but he took them. They took these two hundred Armenians to the gorge and killed them all. My mother said "Paytsar was on my shoulders, I was afraid [to see this] so much that I trembled and fell, Paytsar jumped from my shoulders and fell into those who were already killed." So, after the massacre, they killed all the survivors and left. She said it was dark already. My mother was wounded in her leg but she didn't know that Paytsar was also alive. She said, at dawn Paytsar stood up, asking "Sister, sister, where are you?" She said, I called her, then I saw that there was a severely wounded woman near me; she said "Dear, call your sister to come here. I will tell her, I will show her some healing herb; let her bring it and we will put it on our wounds". She said Paytsar was five years old; she went, gathered this herb and brought it, chewed it and placed it on the wounds. My mother tells they stayed there for forty days. I asked her "Mom, how do you know it was forty?" She said "Well, they massacred us on 14<sup>th</sup> - the wheat was already ripe. I am telling this approximately. It was in June". She said, the corpses swelled under the sun, they were exploding like cannon balls. There was some small stream, I told Paytsar "let us go to the other side and hide in the shrubs there..." She said this woman had some 'pokhind' [flour from roasted wheat] in her bag; she was an old woman... We were gathering banjar, sindz [edible plants] and eating them. She told a terrible thing. She said "We went, crossed the stream, in the morning we saw that some Kurdish women came, they were reaping wheat with a sickle". She said "By mid-day they came, had their lunch, there was some leftover food after them - some bread crumbs, pieces of curds and cheese... Paytsar ran there and gathered these."

She said, "The next day another Turk came, he saw from afar that there was a child on the river bank. He said "There are Armenians here". He told his group to go along the river bank. When Paytsar heard the sounds of the hoofs she came, embraced my mother, saying "Sister, they are coming and they will kill





The book written by Almast Harutyunyan.

us too.” She said, “This commander sent two Turks, they came and found us”. She said “We were like ghosts, dirty; fleas were falling from us...” She said “They took us to this Turkish commander. He looked at us, and said “God was kind to these. Do not touch them.” Then they spoke Turkish, I did not understand. I spoke Kurdish to him; I said “we were among those who are killed...” She said, “He put myself on his horse and Paytsar – in front of him; my brother was walking behind us, on foot. He brought us to this Kurdish agha’s house... To the house of the same Kurd [we used to live with]. She said, when this Kurdish ‘agha’ saw us, he didn’t recognize us. We were like ghosts – hungry, dirty. He said “you shall raise these two like the light of your eyes. If a hair be missing on them, I will come back and burn your house”. He said that their family is at the Tapi village, “If these get well a little we will take them to their relatives”. And so they left. Now about my uncle Karapet – this Kurdish ‘agha’, along with two hundred Armenian young men, he told them “go to the pastures, it is safe there, until Turks leave”. But then he went and told their place [to Turks], so they went and killed everyone.

My mother said, in the morning Taveh washed us and cleaned the fleas, then she brought her clothes for us. She was a very kind woman. For one week she was secretly feeding us well. One day she said to her father-in-law “shall I take these to Tapi? I am tired of keeping them.” And he replied “You would do very well if you do this, take them away from us”... In the morning Taveh woke up, we took Paytsar on our shoulders and went. My mother said, “When I saw my uncle’s wife, and uncle’s son, they were in one family, [Turks] murdered everyone [in their family], only those two survived. She said, “When I saw ‘mamy’, I embraced her, and was crying loudly...

There was also another story. One of their nephews and a niece fell in love with each other and were meeting in the stable every day. One day someone went there, saw something, he came and said “There is devil in our stable.” They went and saw it was Murad and Maro in there. They called a priest, but the priest refused to wed them. He said “these two are cousins” and refused. This was before the massacres, they went to Tapi, mixed with Kurds, they got married there, but they didn’t have children. So, now my mother and her sister went to these. Murad was still an Armenian in his heart, but his wife was Turkish. My mother said they were staying in the stable. One day, she was holding Paytsar in her arms, Paytsar was cold like ice. I said “Mamy, Paytsar is very, very cold”. ‘Mamy’ understood that she died, but

she didn't tell it to me. In the morning they came, took Paytsar and buried her. Her brother was younger than my mother, he was ten years old; [one day] he said "Haykanush, please go, beg for this much honey, bring it for me to eat" /showed the measure of honey on his little finger/. My mother said she knew that Kurdish children used to hound dogs on us. She said "I didn't go, I stayed outside for quite some time, then I came back and said "I couldn't get it, my dear Serob". Her brother died from hunger on that very day. They took and buried him next to Paytsar.

My mother said there was a small Kurdish village uphill. She said, "One Kurd came, that Saro, Christless Saro came, pointed at me, wanted to take me as his wife." She tells, they put me on his horse, he took me to his house. He had five wives. So they laid her in bed with this Kurd on that very day. That Kurd felt pity for my mother. My mother got away at night, she ran away but then she came back to this Kurd's house. Kurd's wives had well beaten her up, but the Kurd felt pity about her, so he put my mother on his horse and he brought her back to her relatives in Tapi.

Then our people decided to go to Moush; the Russian army was there, so they wanted to get close to the Russian army. They got up at night to move to Armenia. There in Tapi there was a woman, she had an eight year old son, and his name was Murad. My mother used to tell "Almast, it was such a beautiful child." His mother died, so ours decided to take him with them. On the way my mother and this Murad weren't able to walk anymore. My mother said to them "Please leave us at this gate." They didn't know whether this was an Armenian or Turkish village, but she said "You go your way." My mother said "The fingers [on my feet] were wounded from pebbles, I couldn't walk." The same happened to this poor Murad. So, they sat at that gate.

At dawn a huge Turkish woman opened the gate. "So, you are Armenians? You survived? Where did you come from?" She took us in, we didn't speak Turkish, I said to her in Kurdish "They killed everyone, we walked and reached here, and this is my brother." This woman said "I have no children, if I take you to the minaret, change your names would you like it if I make you my boy and my girl?" I told her "Yes." For one month she was keeping us well, she was bathing us. I too, was waking up early, I was doing all the house work, washing the dishes, sweeping the rooms. One day, at dawn, she took a large stick in her hand and started to beat us severely while we were still asleep... She heard that Andranik pasha was coming with his volunteers... The whole village fled, got away, they didn't tell her, she just found it out... She brought us to the bank of Murad River. Everyone whom they had stolen – beautiful young girls, they brought and threw them in this river. I told her "dear ana [Turk. mother], we do not know Andranik, we have never seen him, we didn't betray you, please, don't through us into the river." She first threw Murad; shouting, Murad was drafting down this Batmana River... I fell on my knees, kissing her feet, I said to her "My dear ana, do not kill me, I was a good daughter to you." My mother tells, "She pushed me down into the water, too. I could swim a little, but as soon as I was putting my foot on the ground, I was falling again." Finally, my mother somehow managed to get to the shore and lost her consciousness. [At that time] Andranik pasha sent some people to check the shores of the river... They went there and found my mother. That part was told to me by my uncle – my mother's cousin. He doesn't know the name of

the village but it was a Turkish village on the banks of the Batmana Murad River. My mother said “They brought me to Mush, and then handed me to an American orphanage there.” Well, my mother suffered so much; she tells “I was weeping day and night.” Housemother was asking her “Dear Haykanush, why do you cry? We will go to Armenia, we will take you with us.” So, my mother stayed there. [In the meanwhile] our people came, they also reached Moush. They also brought my two younger uncles, my mother’s cousins, to this same orphanage. They brought them to this asylum and they saw that my mother was there too. My mother was the elder, she was 13, and these were younger. She said, after one month they came, took these children, so that they were going to Armenia, on foot. Whatever way my mother asked them, her uncles did not take her. They didn’t take her, because they took her once on foot and she couldn’t walk, so they had to leave her at a foreign village, near some gate. That is why they didn’t take her. She said, “I cried so much, housemother came, she said do not cry, we will go there on a cart, while they had to go on foot. We will take you right to Armenia.” So, my mother stayed at the asylum, and then they brought them in carts. They first came to Leninakan, then from Leninakan to Yerevan, and from Yerevan they brought her to the Ashtarak asylum.

Now about my father. They were five sisters and three brothers. His sisters were already married. They all have been murdered along with their families, none survived. None of the sisters survived. Neither his sisters, nor their children. My father was married in Ergir<sup>1</sup>, he had a daughter. During the massacres they killed his wife, his daughter, his parents – everyone. If not for one kind Turkmy father would have been killed in the watermill too.

My father worked as miller, at the water mill ... Ashe-Alodina - there is a Turkish village near Tigranakert. ‘Ashe’ means water mill, Alodina was the name of the owner of the mill. So, a few Turks worked there. His father – my father’s father – had placed all their golden coins in a pitcher. He gave fifty golden coins to each of his children, then he buried the pitcher under the fireplace slab; he said “Whoever survives, he may come and take the pitcher.” One of the brothers, too, was a miller at a Turkish water mill, he had three sons. My father’s younger brother also survived, but my father didn’t know this, up to the end.

So my father was at the mill, then a kind Turkish man came and told him “run away if you can. They are coming now, they will kill you”. My father immediately [went away], there were some small trees and [he hid] there. He said, “I hadn’t gone even hundred meters, some horsemen came, stopped at the mill door. So, my father got away, he came to the village Asi. This was a Kurdish village. There were good Kurds in the Sheko house, they rescued many Armenians. He came to their house, he saw there were quite many Armenians there...This Kurd’s wife was a large woman; she was baking ggili bread on saj [Arab. iron dome-shaped pan]. So, she was baking it, giving it to our Armenians, the same. She was such a good woman. They were good people. There was a [boy] named Poghos, he was from the Hazo town... He was such a brave boy, Turks were not able to take him over. Turks had put a price that his head was worth 100 gold coins. Those who would kill Poghos, bring over his head, would get 100 gold coins. So, the

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1 In this context the word Ergir denotes homeland.

elder guy in this house died and his widow fell in love with this Poghos. She made him a proposal but this guy from Hazo refused. He said, our rule does not allow me to betray these kind people. But later this daughter-in-law killed him and took off his head... At that time they didn't have skewers for stirring tondir, they had some wood chips like paddle handle. So she wrapped that thing in red Baghdad cloth, my father was telling... they lived together at that house. He said, she pinned Poghos' head on a fire iron, wrapped the red Baghdad cloth around the neck of her horse, got on the horse, heading to Moush to get the hundred gold coins. That woman...

My father said, "After that, there were two Kurds, their names were Chaush and Hoto, they took a golden coin from each Armenian to bring them to Moush. So they brought them to Moush, and my father was with them but there was such a heavy snowfall that night that they couldn't manage to come back to Asi. My father said these Armenian survivors killed Hoto. They wanted to kill Chaush too, but our village priest Ter-Manuk came over, he said "Pest upon you, they gave you bread, kept you for months, they brought you here..." They answered him "These people took gold from us, only then they brought us..." Well, there are bad things about Armenians, too... That Kurds from Sheko's house rescued as many as two hundred Armenians, brought them to Moush. There was an epidemic in Moush. Some people died, those who managed to survive, they reached Ujan. Andranik brought them from Moush. My father joined Andranik's volunteer army. So they came from Moush, and they brought this Chaush along. Thus Chaush also lived here. When he helped them get away, brought them here, he planned to go back. But it happened so that the rule was changed, the borders were closed, and he didn't go back. The people of Ujan looked after him well, kept him well, and in the end, they arranged for his funeral, the ceremony. It was due to him that about 60% of the population of Ujan [reached there], he helped them get away, brought them here. He died in 1985, I think.

My father went around with Andranik's army, with everyone, all these refugees along with them, and Chaush went with them too. Wherever Andranik went, he took them with him. My father was in the army, his wife and children were coming behind the army, as refugees. It was Andranik who brought these people to the Ujan village. Here, in Ujan, there lived some Turks. When they heard that Andranik pasha was coming, out of fear, they all went to Meymandar. When my father came, he found out that the daughter of 'res' [village head] Harutyun was in an orphan asylum... Well, he knew my granddad from Tigranakert. He came, he found out that it was the Ashtarak asylum. He went there and found my mother, then he asked the housemother to give her to him. The housemother said "Shame on you, you could be her father, we won't give her to you". My father was twenty years older than my mother. The next day my father came again, he said "Give her to me, or if you don't, I will come back again, I will steal the girl and will plunder the asylum, too." So, my father brought my mother from the asylum to the house of an Ashtarak inhabitant. In that house stayed the family of Harut, the family of Minas, and my father and mother – they stayed there for ten months. And there my mother got pregnant with me. So she was almost due... Then my father, with ten-fifteen elderly people came to Ujan, they "caught"<sup>1</sup> a house. No-

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1 That is, they took a house.

body lived there, Turks were already gone, and Armenians hadn't come yet. My father took an old rug on his shoulders and together with my mother they came from Ashtarak to Ujan, on foot. On the way, near Agarak, my mother's labor pains started. My father took her to a derelict stable, it was cold – this was in December – and there I was born. Two hours later my mother took some of her clothes, wrapped me in them, and in two more hours they came to this village. I was the first kid who came to this village. I was born on December 24, 1920.

In Ergir, my father with his mother went to Jerusalem on foot, it took them one month. The priests there aspersed him, called him Mukhsi, his name was Simon. I was born on December 24, but my father saw that there were six days left until 1921; in that time there were no birth certificates, nothing, he wrote the names of all the children on the back cover of the gospel. So he wrote January 6 there.

I graduated the seventh year<sup>1</sup> with honors, then I entered the normal school of Echmiadzin and studied there. On the day that I was going to get my diploma, we were eating with the girls at the dining room, [suddenly] they left their food and ran...I mean all of them... When we returned to the dormitory the radio announced that Germany attacked us. On that very day I received my diploma. They forced me to go to the Talin district. They took all young men to the army. If you could have seen that 'sborny punkt'<sup>2</sup> ... I wish I had never seen that place... When I went out, I saw that Tiko's father Mushegh from our village, and Azat, booted in charekhs<sup>3</sup> on bare foot, they came to Echmiadzin, to go to the army. Their feet were all in wounds, they lay down, like this, along the dormitory wall... The country was in woe.

Now, when I was working, every time I came home, my mother was telling me over and over again: "Dear Almast, write about us, please write how they massacred us". I thought, I need to go to my uncle.. He mentioned dozens of names of Kurds and Turks, relating a story to each one. So, when I wrote this book – when I had written four notebooks, I thought I should take it to my uncle, so that he would read it. I took it, my uncle read it, and then he said "You bloody bloater, you have only written about one part of Turks and Kurds I have told about". I said, "look, uncle, do you know in what conditions I have to write? I have to work." I was writing during the breaks, and I also used to write during the lessons, when I gave a writing assignment to the students. I felt terrible. But when I brought it, my mother read it, she sobbed her heart out, and she wrote with pencil, with her own hand "Dearest Almast, I have suffered from all the things you have written down ", and that's all she wrote. . So I took this to the print house, with my mother's photo on the book [cover]. My mother was weeping day and night. You know, they killed her mother like that, and her father ... the whole family. They were very rich, they had so much, these Turks and Kurds took everything away from us ...

HKh – Well, I will ask one more thing, Mrs. Almast, why do you think, these massacres happened?

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1 Seventh year of school education at that time was considered the first complete stage of education.

2 Army recruitment agency.

3 Homemade leather shoes, bast shoes.

AH – Turks always killed to get into possession. They possessed all the Armenian wealth.

HKh – So they massacred, to get the possession of Armenian wealth?

AH – They took possession of land and of wealth. One of my father's brothers... he was 18 years old... his name was Parman... He also got away, survived, my father didn't know about this. There was our neighbor Zaven here ... together with his father. His father came to our house, he told us. I was a seventh year schoolgirl then. He told this to my father, he said "Parman and I, we [worked] for a Turkish 'agha'. I was weaving canvas, and Parman was tailoring packsaddles for the mules". He said, one day he told me "uncle Karapet, I know where our gold is hidden. If we tell this to our 'agha', we can go and get it, we will give half of it to him and will take the other half for me and for you". He said "I will tell him tomorrow". He said, when he told this, he did not let Parman work anymore, he took Parman and they went. He took out the gold but only gave two gold coins to my uncle. Then he told another Turk "go kill him, then you can take that two gold coins for yourself". So then they killed him for this gold.



Almast's mother Haykanush from Grasira village of Batmana field.

Turks got into possession of our land, of our wealth. Listen, I will tell you another story. Where I worked as a school teacher, there was one woman; her name was Satik, she was very smart. One day she told me, the massacres had started already, and she said, her mother took their ghee, it was in leather bags, she took it on her shoulders, going to through it into the river. She thought, when the massacres are over, they would go and take it out. She said "So, my mother went with my brothers, my father and his brother were ill, lying on the ground, I was standing and the hearth was burning high. I saw how a group of Turks came in and said "get up, give us your gold". My father said "We have no gold. We have many sheep and cows, take them all". "No, get up and bring the gold, or I will kill your brother in your pres-



ence.” So, they killed his brother, she said, “my father got even more angry with them, he said, I have no gold, kill me too, with my brother...” She said, “they were both lying on the same bed, they were ill. So they killed my father too. The blood came, spilled, filled the hearth, the hearth was sputtering blood. My mother came, when she saw this, she took us – my brothers and me, to take us away... One of my brothers was too young, he was eight years old. His name was Ishkhan. Our Kurdish neighbor came, he said, Mariam, dear, don’t take this little boy, Ishkhan, leave him, he won’t be able to flee with you, when the massacres are over, you will come and take him”. She said, they left this Ishkhan with this Kurd. Later they killed one of the brothers of this woman Satik, when he was studying at the university. The other one – they wanted to catch him, but he got away to Iran. This was already in Stalin’s period. He escaped to Iran, he was very thirsty, and then he approached some gate and knocked. A young woman came up to him... and he said “Dear sister, I am very thirsty, could you bring me a glass of water”. So this woman said to her husband – “there is a man at our gate asking for water... look, she said, you both are as like as two peas in a pod.” Her husband got up in a hurry, he went to see – it was his brother. So, finally, he and his brother, they stayed there in Iran. He had sent the photographs of himself and his wife, but Satik did not show these to her mother. She said “She is an old woman, she may go somewhere and it may slip out of her tongue.” Her (Satik’s) husband was repressed, and his brothers too, so she thought they might repress her too along with her children. You see, this Stalin...he also did very cruel things.

HKh – Did Stalin do any harm to your village?

AH – My child was one month old when they caught my husband. He was taken prisoner<sup>1</sup>, they sentenced him to 25 years of expulsion but there was an amnesty, so he came back after spending eight years there. I had lived with him for some ten months only, my child was one month old. My boy went to school, he was a first year schoolboy when he came back.

I have published yet another book, it is titled “Woe of barbed wires”; it is about Stalin’s atrocities. I went there, I reached Jiskaskan – eighty thousand young men were being kept there in custody. Cruel, very cruel was the life of our people.

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1 During World War II any Soviet soldiers who were caught as prisoners of war were repressed when they returned from the enemy.

## “My Father used to Tell us at Home”

Albert Mamikonyan told his family story on November 2, 2009, in the city of Yerevan in his apartment. His story has been written down by L.Kharatyan. S.Harutyunyan and H. Sahakyan attended the interview.

(Below are some extracts from the interview. )

Albert Mamikonyan started his story with a display of photographs. The first photograph had the picture of his grandfather, grandmother, his father at a young age, and his cousin:

My father’s name – his real name – was Marcos; he changed it at a later point. My grandmother’s name was Srbuhi, and the name of my father’s cousin was Khachik. All these people ... they are Jamjyans. These photos were taken back in Ardivin; they lived near Ardivin, in the town of Ardanouch. This wasn’t even a town in effect, but it wasn’t a village, either. It was an urban-type settlement perhaps. My father’s cousin changed their surname from Jamjyan into Chamchyan, for easier distinction perhaps. Jamjyan is from the word “jam” – glass; perhaps they did some glasswork, therefore they were Jamjyans. We have become Mamikonyans in Iran. When they were deported from Turkey, my father came to Batum, then from Batum to Kharkov; they had a factory in Kharkov, they were among the richest people in Kharkov. After NEP<sup>1</sup> those who were rich were either expelled, or shot dead. This was approximately in 1933... They had two large houses in Kharkov and one large confectionery. ... In order ... to avoid Stalin’s repressions, it was very easy - they adopted Iranian citizenship and moved to Iran...

They all moved to Iran, and my father went ... My father, as a son of a rich person ... they go to study abroad nowadays... just like that... they sent my father, he graduated from the Mkhitarian College. After the Mkhitarian College he went to Italy and studied at the University of Rome. Later, upon graduation, he came – well, his parents were in Iran, so he came to Iran. But Iran was involved in a war then, and they wanted to take him ... to the army. His friends said, “Let us get away”. And, to be able to get away, they [changed] his surname ... they made a new passport for him with a new surname - they changed it completely. My father was Mark Jamjyan, and then he became Ara Mamikonyan.

They were in a good position in Ardanouch, they lived well. When the massacres started, some armed Turks came to the town – some [Armenians] got away, others went into hiding because, he said, initially they did not touch women and children. They were only killing men. They were gathering them, al-

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1 In Russia, in the beginning of 1920s they implemented the so-called New Economic Policy, or NEP.

legedly for relocation... When Turks entered their house, my grandfather ... his name was Stepan Jamjyan, he took cover in the basement. His children and women were at home but, since they weren't touching children at that time, he went into hiding in the cellar. He went into hiding, but then he heard some noise, some racket by his women. He said to himself "Why shall I be hiding? I am not a coward. It would be better if I die, rather than being unable to protect my [family]". He came out and attacked the Turks, but they were too many, they shot and killed him on the spot. This was in 1915, my father was two years old and my uncle was one year old. My father had ... uncles. They were sons of three brothers, his uncles. They caught the other two ... took them – they gathered all the men, I don't know why they didn't shoot them on the spot. They gathered them all, took them to the gorge, put them on a rock, and then they shot them, dropping them into the gorge.

Only one of his uncles managed to survive. Then, after they killed my grandfather ... by that time... the deportation had started. During the deportation – my grandmother, she was very beautiful. I have her photos, maybe you would need them, I will find them later; I will give them all to you. She was very beautiful, too beautiful... To avoid her getting into the hands of the Turks, they dressed her in man's clothes, *covered her face with soot, intendedly, in pants, this way... barely saved her until Batum* ... Well, they somehow managed to take her to Batum... Of course, on foot – at that time it was only on foot. With those refugees... So my father stayed there, with his brother, my father's mother, my father's grandmother, and the wife of my father's uncle, because his uncle too ... they also shot his uncle there... And his uncle's wife was pregnant... Where should she have gone? So she had to stay with our people, until ... until the escape. Then they escaped, they reached Batum. They reached Batum... Hmm, my uncle's ... the name of my father's uncle was Mkr, Mkrtych... That was destiny... Before this child was born ... they killed his father. He was born here; she gave him this name, her husband's name. This boy ... in the army, in the Soviet army, he got pneumonia, then he came home ... and he died. That woman got married for the second time, with another refugee. She got married; she has born children... from him. So her child too, one of them, she named him Mkr, and they also gave her husband's name to her grandson... he also died some five years ago.

There were too many refugees in Batum... And they were ... so to say ... well-off to some extent; they moved to Kharkov. My grandmother went to Kharkov, for some time this uncle's wife was looking after my father. They stayed in Batum for one year perhaps. Then in Kharkov, they ... they were gifted people, my grandmother there ... they did some business ... then they were able ... somehow they were able to get back [their wealth], by hard work... My grandmother got married for the second time in Kharkov... /shows the photographs/. This is my grandmother's mother... my father... my uncle... This is Hripsime, the wife of my father's uncle, and her husband – my grandmother's brother, who died - they killed him there. This is the one who was killed. .

My grandmother was very young. She ... [was born in] 97 ... that is, she was seventeen ... She got married for the second time, with another refugee... Again, this was a very successful [marriage] ... He was a great

person... I have never seen him, but both my father and my uncle told this... about him – that he was a great person and he never cared that they weren't his own flesh and blood. Because he too had a family, they had killed them all. He... by some chance, he survived. Kerob Madoyan... He gave his surname to my uncle, like he was his father, his second father... He was Madoyan. My father was Jamjyan, and my uncle was Madoyan, but after [going] to Iran this Jamjyan also changed, we have become Mamikonyans.

Among those who went to Kharkov... the majority... they got scattered. Very few relatives were left there, most of them were scattered around the world... Moscow, Novorossiysk, Anapa, America, France... various places. We have relatives all around the world, they are all scattered like this, they are very scattered... My father's aunt and her son... They came to Tiflis.

My father, after he graduated from the Mkhitarian... then [he graduated from the] Philosophy Department of the University of Rome... He was a philosopher. He spoke thirteen languages... he had very good command of seven of languages - standard language, written and spoken /laughs/ - Russian, Armenian, Turkish, Farsi, French, Italian, Latin... When he got away from Iran ... In Europe... He did some work, he worked in Switzerland... they saw many people... Then, there was the war; so, getting away, they went to different places. Then, I don't know how it happened, perhaps his friends decided so, he went to Beirut. They reached Beirut... He worked in Beirut, there was someone who said "I know a good woman, a girl, let me introduce you to each other, you'll get married". Then de Gaulle - well, Lebanon was a French colony then, he came to Beirut, and they were looking to find a person who would speak perfect French so that he could interpret for them... So they took my father. During the banquet... my father was interpreting.

My mother... On my maternal side... they too were refugees. My maternal grandfather was from Kars; her mother – that is, my grandmother, was from Ardahan. They also escaped during the deportation. My grandmother... what relatives did she have? She didn't have anyone. No, no, she had a brother. She used to tell, they were two kids who escaped, without parents; they went, got into an orphanage. Well, my grandfather was an orphan too, and then they got married to each other, two orphans from the asylum, yes. In Beirut. They got married, they had children... my grandfather... he was building houses... Accidentally, he fell down the roof, so he died at a young age. Well, by saying young, he wasn't so young, he was 50. My grandmother had to look after her family... four boys and two girls... It was very difficult... When my grandfather died, my uncle... There was a tobacco factory in Lebanon, he went to this factory and worked there; thus he managed to look after the family. Later, when they grew up, there was immigration to Armenia; during the immigration ... in 1946 they applied to come to Armenia. My uncles and my mother insisted, but my father didn't want to. They were giving some... cards... of two different colors... Yellow one was to start getting prepared; red one was to come. My uncles received red cards, whereas ours – my parents - got a yellow one. My mother came to my father and cried, telling that she didn't want to stay there, that all her relatives were leaving, that she would be left alone, and what will she do then. So my father went to the Russian Embassy - he spoke Russian fluently; he went and asked them... They gave him the red card, telling "OK, you can go". My uncle was a cab driver in that period.

At that time some two people had stolen something, they had killed the householder, had cut him into pieces and packed him in the suitcase; and they came out and stopped a cab. Incidentally, this was my uncle's cab; so they placed the suitcase in the boot. When passing over a bridge they asked him to stop for a minute and dropped this suitcase down, into the river... When they threw this suitcase into the river, there was a passer-by who saw it and wrote down the license number of my uncle's car. That suitcase had opened and pieces [of human body] had fallen out. So they arrested my uncle – [some time passed] until they were able to arrest those who were really guilty, then they released my uncle... but thus they stayed there and weren't able to come to Armenia.

Well, they came here and they brought their ... let's say gold – they brought their gold, their clothes and food with them. When they reached Batum, they were told that there was a quarantine, and that whatever they had, they have to throw into the sea before they reached the shore. They were told, they couldn't bring any food with them. Well, this was the Soviet policy; they wouldn't allow these people to come with lots of food when local people had nothing to eat... So they demanded that they throw their food away. [They said], "There is a quarantine, throw your food away". Well, they threw away part of it, but kept the other part... Thus they came ... they reached... they came down in Kirovakan. They were sent to one of the villages near Ijevan, but they came down in Kirovakan on their own. In Ijevan they would probably have provided them a house but, since they came down in Kirovakan on their own will, they didn't get a house and they had to rent it. So they had to pay the rent. My father... He studied all his life long; he wasn't able to do any labor. It made little difference, whether he was working or not... So they started to sell their possessions. They were selling it little by little – they sold watches, suits, shoes... like this... by selling this stuff they managed to subsist. Well, they needed firewood to heat the house, so they all went to the forest. The landlord gave the axe to him, told him to go and bring some firewood. So he... well, he didn't know how to handle an axe, he never hammered a nail at the house. We had to do everything. My mother was doing more than him... /laughs/... Well, then... he went to a print house. No, before going to the print house ... someone told him "I go to the north and bring some goods from there to sell. Come along with me, you would be able to make your living". He went; he told that his nephew helped him out there. He brought nuts, fruits, various [stuff]... fish... He was selling it here in Kirovakan, and their life improved. One day... a militia man came to him; he told him: "Aram", he said, "you are a modest person, and I do respect you. Don't tell this to anyone else, I am only telling this to you. Starting on Monday they are going to arrest all those who are doing trade." So he went to the print house then... He worked at the print house until his retirement, then his eyes... He suffered from glaucoma. He was unable to use any of his knowledge... at all. ... When they were deported here, one of his friends... he also spoke foreign languages, they took him – either KGB<sup>1</sup> or CheKah<sup>2</sup>, they took him to make translations for them, somewhere. Then, this person never came back, he didn't come back for quite some time, and then his wife found out somehow that they had got rid of him. He disappeared. So she came and told my father: "If someone comes to ask, tell him that you don't speak any foreign languages and you have for-

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1 KGB - Russian abbreviation: Committee for State Security

2 CheKah – Russian abbreviation: Extraordinary Commission

gotten what you knew". So, out of this fear, my father said that he absolutely doesn't speak any foreign languages. And he went to work at the print house... As an educated person, he worked as a proof-reader. First, he was a proof-reader. There was the "Kayts" [Arm. spark] newspaper, he was the proof-reader of the "Kayts" newspaper, and there were some columns in Armenian and in Azeri language there. He was proof-reading the preprints of both, and then it was being published at the print house. His wages were low, so he also had to work as a typesetter ... So his vision became worse after this. Later, after Khrushchev, there was some freedom; only then he was able to use his knowledge - foreign languages. But he was old already... They called him to the medical [institute], as a person who knew Latin, so that he would teach there, but his eyes weren't well already, so he didn't go.

So, when they were fleeing to Iran, they received [Iranian] citizenship beforehand. Well, my father was in Italy, and his brother was in Kharkov. When they were planning to move to Iran, they prepared a passport in my uncle's name. At that time he was studying at the Polytechnic Institute of Kharkov, at the Department of Architecture... He was the architect of quite many constructions in the Soviet Union. So, he said "I am not coming". He said, "I am not coming, I am a member of the Komsomol party, and I am still studying, I don't want to leave [my education] incomplete, what will I do when I come to Iran?" His parents left, but he stayed. One of the neighbors knew that there was a passport prepared on his name, he went and sold him out to KGB. They arrested my uncle, expelled him from the institute and from the Komsomol party, then they put him in the jail. So he was put in custody ... who was with him there? ... Someone from our relatives was there too; I am not able to remember who it was. So, he was in prison with him. Later... after quite some time, they set him free. Set him free... He came, completed his education, graduated [from the institute]. When he graduated and started to work, the war started in 1941. Germans, when they came, they reached Kharkov and went over; so when they were going back, I think it was in 1944, or it was 1945 when they went back. Perhaps it was in 1945. When they went back, they said "Whoever wants to, they may come with us... to Europe". So, my uncle... he was married - he himself, along with his wife and the child... They thought, they suffered from Stalin's atrocity and being honest did not save them, so they thought it would be better to leave, because they could not see any future there. So they went, reached Poland. My grandmother's sister was with them; from there they went to America. But [before], they were telling that it was good here, and they wanted to stay here. His wife's mother and brother too went with them. Yes, he was with his father-in-law; he got away with his father-in-law, I just remembered this. When he was in that prison, he was there with his father-in-law. So from there - when Soviet Union reached Poland, Poland became a Communist [country]. All refugees who were in Poland were expelled as enemies of the state. To Siberia. So, first, he was put in prison while he was a Komsomol member, and for the second time [they put him in prison] for anti-Soviet views. They sent him to Kazakhstan, to the city of Kustanay. He... because he was educated, they provided him with a job. At a later time, when these Stalin things lessened to some extent... the pressure... he became Chief Architect of the city. My grandma's mother... she came with them to Kharkov, and then they went with my uncle everywhere, up to his expulsion. She died there, in Kustanay city, she is buried there. Well, in fact... yes, during the expulsion. In fact, she went with my uncle to Poland and from Poland... to Kustanay. So, they expelled my uncle on his own. It was possible to register his wife some-



how, so that they wouldn't send her to expulsion... But his wife said "I will go wherever my husband is". His daughter, my uncle's daughter... She came to Armenia several times ; she was saying "I will come to Armenia". She came and graduated from the Polytechnic Institute here, then... She was teaching at the same university [after graduation]. Her parents were calling her back, but she said "No, it would be better if you come". So, they came too... After so many years they came; then, two years later, their daughter died. She had a tumor in her head and she died. Two years later she died, my uncle and his wife were left on their own. So later they also died. It was me, who was looking after them in the end...

My grandmother, as I told you, she went to Iran. In Iran... her second husband died, she was left alone. In 1968... No, I am sorry, in 1970 – yes, in 1970 there was immigration from Iran... She came from there to Armenia; my father and I, we went to Julfa to meet her, and then we brought her from Julfa to Kirovakan. They provided a separate apartment for her... Yes, they provided a few rooms, later; I was staying with my elder uncle. She died here.

From Batum everyone got scattered, they went in different directions, they lost track of that uncle's wife. They lost track of her, couldn't find her. It was that wife, whose husband was killed, Hripsimeh. Later... after quite some time... This was about, probably 60s, my father applied to many places and finally he was able to find them in one of the small villages near Anapa, in Khutrpabeda... They went to Anapa. In Anapa... they suffered many hardships there, their life was very difficult. They didn't live well, food wasn't good; then... perhaps their worst period was during the war. When Germans came, they assigned someone in their village as a "Polizei"<sup>1</sup>. So one of the Russians there was "Polizei". He oppressed them alot. They oppressed her much; Hripsimeh was tailoring for the Germans, she was sewing for them, she was a good tailor... Hripsimeh got married there. She... had three boys and one girl... They are all alive; they are in Novorossiysk and in Anapa... all of them. We were in contact with them. We used to come and go, we were very close, and they were like, say, our relatives. In fact, they are not direct kin to us; there is no blood relation between us. But her husband always used to tell that I... my... I brought up my sister-in-law's son, I brought him up. Well, it was her, who kept my father for some time after escaping from Ardvin.

My grandmother's sister went to America, I already told this, from Poland /shows her photograph/. To Los Angeles. She... her husband was... he was one of the co-owners of an... oil company. But let me recall which one. I don't know. Her husband died, this woman loved him so much. Later, because of some trouble or something, she got mental illness. Later she got well; when they were to take her to the mental clinic, when she was mentally disabled, she... told the local priest, the Father there... She asked him "Please keep this great wealth, when I come back from the clinic, when I get well, then you would give this to me. You are the most trusted person for me". When she came back, that person said "you didn't give me anything". The priest... The priest didn't give her anything. But there was some interest money or something from that company. So, thanks to this money ... she... when she got old... she went to

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<sup>1</sup> Polizei – An inspector assigned by Germans

a paid Adult Residential Facility, and they kept her well because of her money. She went there... from Kharkov. She also came to Batum from Ardivin, and from there to Kharkov... She went from Kharkov to Poland, and from Poland... she went directly to America... So everyone got scattered like that, all got scattered... all were dispersed.

We too... when we came to Armenia, I mean, my parents - I was born here already; my elder brother was born in Beirut; we suffered many hardships. My mother... She was a very good tailor; she was a very good cook, a good housewife. We lived at the outskirts of the city, near the forest. Then ... Someone told the director of the kindergarten about my mother, that she is very capable woman. He said, well, let her come, she will be the cook at the kindergarten. And we will provide her a room from the kindergarten. It was a huge kindergarten, very large, one-story, with shutters, glassed-in. We... lived there. There was just one room [for us], no toilet, no kitchen, nothing. We lived there... All together... When we were playing very often we used to play under the table. There was no other place. My father was like watchman there, and my mother was the cook. After everyone left, it was, like the whole kindergarten was ours. So, my mother had a friend, she also came from Beirut. She was in touch with them, they were very close, we used to visit them and they visited us while I was a kid. So, with the low wages my parents were getting, it was very difficult... it was not sufficient for our living. My mother was a good tailor; she was sewing... at home. I remember this... She was paid one ruble for tailoring a skirt... But, according to the law, there was a "finance department"; she should have registered with this "finance department" to pay them taxes. But if she paid those taxes, this tailoring would make no sense. Because, if you subtract these [taxes] from this one ruble, the remaining amount - there would have been nothing left from it. In the evening, as soon as the kindergarten folks left, my mother was tailoring. Whenever someone knocked our door, my mother was very afraid. [She feared] that people from the 'finance department' would come. She was quickly hiding all those clothes, putting in the dirty clothes pile, in the laundry... She lived in fear all the time. So later... she suffered from bilious headache; this all... was a result of this. That was all because of her fear.

At a later point... my mother found... her uncle. Her uncle's family also came to Armenia, but they didn't know... They came from Beirut... There was a person in Kirovakan... his mother was Arab. The wife of my mother's uncle, too, was Arab. They were Christian Arabs. Well, this woman... when, by some chance, they got acquainted in Kirovakan, they talked; during the conversation she said "my mother is Arab". My mother told her "my uncle's wife is also Arab". So, this is how they found each other. We were visiting their village near Leninakan. How are these villages near Leninakan? They settled there, immigrated there. We were frequently visiting them... And they were also coming.

My father was extremely patriotic... It was not by chance that his chosen name was Ara Mamikonyan. He... has chosen Mamikonyan [as his surname] ... after Vardan [Vardan Mamikonyan - Armenian national hero of the middle ages]. And his name - Ara, after Ara Geghetskik [Ara Geghetskik or Ara the Handsome - a legendary Armenian hero]. Well, he was Ara, Ara Mamikonyan. He was very patriotic, overly patriotic. In our family we were raised in that patriotic spirit. Some family friends were visiting us and

we used to visit them, there were regular contacts between our families; we were just friends, but we were quite close. When we were visiting them, they used to speak Turkish at home. We didn't speak Turkish. Their children... up to this day, they speak Turkish well, because they spoke Turkish at home. Well... there was a reason for this... In their village, where they came from, there were Turks, they didn't let them speak Armenian... They came to Armenia, but they didn't speak Armenian well. They learnt Armenian while they were in Armenia. Therefore they used to speak Turkish at home. My father was prohibiting my mother - by no chance - well, my mother spoke [Turkish], because her parents used to speak Turkish. He said "Not a single word spoken in Turkish in our house, only Armenian..." My father always [told] us about the Genocide, we... knew about that before since our early years. . At home, well... [he] was telling about the deportation... how terrible it was, the children were thirsty, hungry, suffering from the fear that they may come, may attack them... My father... us... I remember this... Yes, he was telling... well, there was too much fear then, during the Stalin period. I know this well, there was too much fear. Therefore they weren't [talking] in the presence of strangers... There was a family in our neighborhood, their son... he was a musician in Kirovakan... He was teaching at the Pedagogical Institute and at the Conservatory. I had also taken his lessons. Look, how just a simple thing can... Well, the man was in a bread line at night and the whole day, the whole night he stood in the line. [His name was] Kaplanyan Danel...you see, he was also a good tailor this guy... so, in the morning he came from taht line saying "what is this like, I stood in the line the whole night, I've got a single loaf of bread in the morning, I brought it over, it was all water in there, the dough wasn't baked well, useless stuff inside, we had to cut the crust to eat it". By that time there were many traitors, they informed on him, on the same day they came after him ... they exiled him. On the very same day. Just exiled him... Well, there was someone named Yesayi Momjyan... he... was a scientist... He was from France; when he came, he was teaching French at school. The school director ... I don't remember his surname - he didn't pay his salary for six months. He was taking the money and keeping to himself, never giving it to him. Just spending money on himself. So, the man went there and told "I cannot stand this anymore. I do not have sufficient money even for my daily bread. I will have to go and complain. I want to get my salary, just to live". Well, this person made it so that the poor guy be exiled as a spy. ...when he came back... well, his wife could have stayed, only he was exiled, but his wife said she would go wherever her husband goes. They didn't have children. They came back... his wife was very ill. Her... what do they call it...her trigeminal nerve ... it was frostbitten...there, inflamed, she had severe pain, she was always in pain.

Once I happened to find a picture in the street. It was Stalin's picture, it was made very beautifully, in color. Stalin was ugly, but he was very beautiful on that picture. I was a kid, so I took it, and I brought it home... If I had thought about it a little... that our family was afraid... I knew ... of course, that talking was dangerous, but, well... I brought it home. By some chance, that Momjyan man was there. He jumped like a tiger... Hurting me, he was holding my arms like this; he took this picture away from me, forgetting everything... It was a piece of cardboard, it was a picture, a picture made on a cardboard, and he tore it into tiny pieces, like this. Then he approached me, hit me, telling "I shall never again see things like that in your hands". Well, there were so many people who suffered from Stalin's [deeds].

It was probably after 60s... My father always remembered that day, the Genocide day. Until then we were afraid to speak about it. But he was telling us about it...at home. He told us a lot, even some feelings have awakened in me... At that time it was forbidden at school, but in 1965, I made a poster about the Genocide in our school... Most of my friends didn't know anything... When I came home, my mother said "Oh my, they may come, today, and take you over..." But in 1965 it wasn't that dreadful anymore; in Yerevan too, they marked the anniversary... Well, so... in 1965 it was the first time when my elderly uncle came... to Armenia. By the way, he was the first tourist that came to Armenia by car, through Turkey. My elderly uncle, Karapet Ter-Karapetyan. I saw him for the first time then. After that there were some contact, visiting each other. Then my mother went [to see him]. My father died in 1971, he was only 56 years old.

## “Our House was Demolished...”

The below conversation with Vasak Toronyan took place on November 13, 2009, in the city of Yerevan in his apartment.

His story has been written down by H.Kharatyan. A.Keshishyan and S.Haroutiunyan also participated in the conversation.

Below is presented the reduced version of his story. we are publishing a segment of his story.

Vasak Toroyan's father, with his mother (Vasak's grandmother), were survivors from the Arpi Village of Bitlis district. They moved to Armenia in 1916, and later on settled in Shgharshik village of Talin district. Vasak Toroyan, Doctor of Science (Economics), currently lives in Yerevan and works at the Yerevan State University.

My parents, that is, my father, was born in the Arpi Village of the Motkan Province of Bitlis district. Looking back at the tree of my ancestors, I can trace it back to the father of my grandfather's grandfather. I know them by their names; they all lived in Arpi. As far as I know, only Armenians lived in that village up to beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; they had to leave the village in 1916... by that time, it was already a matter of getting away, staying wasn't possible anymore and everyone had to flee. It is interesting to know that, in this process of fleeing, one Turkish person very much helped the inhabitants of the village... so that fewer people were killed... Malo... Malo was his name. I will tell you about him later.

Those people who fled from Arpi mainly settled in the Shgharshik Village of Talin District, that is, in the very place I was born. Up to this day, the people in Shgharshik speak the same dialect as they used to speak in Arpi. Now I am sure about this since I visited Arpi recently... I went there, they told me they either speak Armenian or understand it. So naturally, I spoke to them in our dialect, as I have good command of it... I have always wanted to visit there, but this visit was sort of a surprise for me. There was an international scientific conference in Ankara in 2000, they invited me. I went there, made a report, and then immediately moved to Arpi. For so many days I knew that I was going to visit “Ergir” see our house... So I got prepared to this while I was still here. I tried to calm my nerves before going there... so that... I could collect more information... There, in our village, there is a church – “Angen Astvatsatsin”... Up to this very day our family reveres to this church... Every year we make an offering on the day of Angen Astvatsatsin. My grandma, who came from there, she used to do this, then, my mother was doing it, and now my brother's wife is in the village, she is doing this, every year... They do this sometime around

the Vardevar<sup>1</sup> day . Even if we make a separate offering on the Vardevar day, we always make the offering for Angen Astvatsatsin too. Every year we do this in our house... I got prepared before going there, that I would visit the Angen Astvatsatsin church. I've got some incense to burn there, and some candles to light... I would like to mention it here that father used to tell me all the time – particularly, the position of our house, so that I could find it when I visit the village. Since my father was dead already by the time I went there, naturally, I tried to remember ways to find it. Someone of our distant relatives have some drawings, like a map. My father left it. I took it before going there... Then I asked my people, what they want me to bring them from “Ergir”... My son, Hovhannes, he was an eighth year student at school by that time, he wrote me “Daddy, please bring for me...” (Vasak becomes silent, full of emotion, drinks some water, then speaks in a different voice) - what did an eighth year schoolboy ask from his father, who was going to visit “Ergir”, to see their house there... He said, “Daddy, please bring me some water from our spring, a little bit of soil from our garden, and a stone, a small piece of stone from the wall of our house, and also bring some fruit from the trees in our garden...” (Pauses, keeps silent). Yes, I took a photo camera and a video camera with me. I was going to film it.

When I made my report at the conference, I said to one of the participants – there was a Russian academician, he knew our history a little bit already... I said to him “I am going to visit ‘Ergir’”... I said, “I won't be there at the banquet, I am going back”. Then I said to him “If, somehow, I don't write to you in some ten days... it would mean that I have not come back, then you will have to look, try to find me... (pauses... drinks some water). In those years the situation with Kurds in Turkey was quite aggravated and that region where I was going to visit, it was considered a Kurdish territory. At that time there were some rumors that Armenians, jointly with the Kurds, are preparing something against the Turks... I was a most convenient target for a spy, as I was going there from Armenia... It was in August, there was a draught. Yes. So, my son told me “to bring some fruit”, whatever it is, and he told one more thing – “please bring a branch of Mndrveni”.

VT – A branch of what?

HKh – Mndrveni.

VT – What is this, Mndrveni?

VT - Well, I will tell you a l bit later, what it is. To tell you frankly, just after that I forgot everything, only this... only this is left... I forgot absolutely everything... In Ankara I went, took a bus, they were all Turks in there, and went to “Ergir”... This bus went up to Van... It went to Van or Bitlis... (looks a little bit lost, thinks, tries to remember)... I will tell you right away... No, it went to Bitlis, Bitlis. The bus went to Bitlis, but before going there I made the arrangements already that they were going to meet me in Mush and take over to our village. They gave me some boy's phone number, from Mush, it was a Turkish name

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1 Vardavar – a loved by Armenians religious festival in July

but he was of Armenian ancestry... (pauses for three seconds). ... I won't tell his name, let him be, say, Ahmed. He had an Armenian name for local use, say, Mhair. So, I had to get off in Mush. So I went, took my bus. It was dark already, I took the bus, sat there... so naturally, they asked, "who are you"? I said, "I am Armenian"; - "where do you go?" "I go to our home"...

HKh – You said, "to our house?"

VT – They... easily understand and grasp this. They asked, "what for?"

HKh – What language did you speak?

VT – Well, I, a little... my English is very poor, but we spoke English... There was someone...helping us understand each other., That (silence)... yes, later I understood this... they thought that I came for my gold, it was their first reaction. Now, they wanted to ask me whether I came to take gold, or not... So they were showing me the stone hammer, showing that you are going to dig, to dig... Someone showed me some gold hanging on her neck... So I asked this English-speaking one "what are they asking", he wouldn't tell me. He wouldn't tell me that they were asking about gold. One of the boys was from Bitlis, when he learned that I was getting out in Mush to go to Motki from there, he said: "Do not get out in Mush, let us go to Bitlis, I will... you will certainly have no problems, I will provide everything for you". As far as I could understand it, he was Kurdish, a young boy... "No, I said, I need to get out in Mush". I... It was already morning, the day was breaking – it was in August – almost at four. By five it was light, we passed through the entire West Armenia, and we went through it in light, that is... We went through Arabkir... and everywhere, the whole chain, we went the chain – Bingyol, lakes, rivers, we went over them... I had a photo camera and a video camera with myself... I was feeling very depressed, very stressed, so that... (pause for two seconds) I couldn't shoot... I was feeling much stressed, very stressed... I knew that I was going to come here, to come back, and everyone was going to ask, they would like to see it. But I didn't take out the video camera, nor the photo camera... that is a terribly beautiful place... very beautiful. We entered the Moush valley. Entered the Moush valley, I took out the photo camera to make some shots, but I couldn't. I was feeling very bad... I was very depressed... Maybe it was the burden of our losses, or whatever, why... I don't know. I couldn't make pictures. At last, for about one hour, the car – it was a German Mercedes bus – it was going? at the speed of 100-120km/h, with that speed. For about one hour we were going through the Moush valley (pauses)... finally, we came to Mush, I got out, and the bus went. The bus went away, so I am on my own at the center of the street, there was some package in my hands – my suitcase and... there is no one around. My feelings... what happens to a person who, probably... I heard a lot what the elders told when I was a kid. They used to gather in our house, in our neighbor's house, telling their stories, what happened to them... that probably... this was somehow pressing on me and I couldn't understand what was going on. At one moment I felt how... I am putting my hand on the ground, asking – Am I really in the city of Mush, or this is a dream? ... I was touching the walls... And then I thought, maybe I am getting crazy... but I was alone. That Mhair was to be there, but he wasn't. He hadn't come yet. I remember that, it seems, I sat somewhere but I wanted... wanted to convince myself



that this wasn't a dream... and... perhaps indeed (pauses for 3 seconds)... I was suppressed... I couldn't think... Perhaps I calmed down a little bit, since I thought how to find this Mhair. But I had his phone. Where I stood, I saw that someone was working in a room, I saw there was a phone there, and I asked him "would you please let me make a phone call?" That person spoke only Turkish, but he understood and he let me call. Mhair said, "give the phone to that person where you are calling from, I will tell him everything". Then I remember that this person went out, hired a cab, I took it and we went. When I met Mhair he said, he didn't want them to see him with Armenians in the city. He... feared that they could see him with Armenians, when we were getting out he even said that ... we shouldn't speak Armenian. He spoke Armenian a little bit, and he spoke English a little, so we were managing... somehow... to understand each other. Then we went to their house. His wife was a woman with blue eyes. I don't know her nationality, she didn't speak Armenian... she was very attractive... yes, they were Muslims... Muslims. His wife... she was very obliging, she was trying to render her service as much as possible... So we spent the night at that house and left in the morning... He was going to get a cab so we could go. In the morning he said that there was no cab but he managed to find some car, so we could go. He was driving it. From Moush valley we went to Bitlis. I verified it there that... there... there was one Kurdish person in Mush, that person told that he knows how we shall go to Arpi. He called it "Harpi". I said to him "no, this is not Harpi, this is Arpi. Because they think... that from Mush we need to go directly south, to the Sasoun mountains... But I knew it wasn't that way. We went to Bitlis first. We went to Bitlis, now... on the way, like all real Muslims, like Muslim believers, this Mhair was doing namaz on the way, all the time. He wasn't pretending to... He did this several times, at different hours. Several times... He did this five times. He stopped the car several times, told me "you wait, until I come back". He went to do namaz.

So, we reached Bitlis. We were already quite late. We went there, reached Bitlis and suddenly (pauses for 3 seconds) ... It seems, entry and exit from Bitlis were closed, there were check points. They let us in, we drove in. Now... Bitlis... The fortress was there, on the top of the gorge, we drove through the gorge, drove out of Bitlis. So we were now driving to Motki. At that time Motki was considered to be in-between a town or a village, it resembled a large village... By this time I was already wishing to take pictures, but this Mhair... he was afraid, he asked me not to take pictures... he said they were following everyone there, they keep their eyes on everybody hear . If you take pictures, the soldier is there. They are terribly afraid of soldiers. Now, we went west from Bitlis. On the way, there are cannons placed, one every three to four kilometers... These were large cannons. As far as I understood, these areas were inhabited by Kurds, so these were probably to suppress Kurds. Finally we went... and then we entered a very beautiful gorge. Asphalt road ended, we entered dirt road. We went by it, we entered another gorge. It was very beautiful, terribly beautiful. I tried to take a couple of photos, but he said "no, no", so I had to comply... There was a river alongside... We went there, reached one village; Mhair said it was called Meydan. He said, Meydan... We went, stopped there, there was another river, and it was coming from the other side. That was the Arpi river; it was coming from the Arpi Village already. I stood there for some time... It is interesting to note, they seem to recognize the name Arpi as the Arpi Village, although it seems that the name of the village has changed. But when you say Arpi, everyone knows what you mean, they know Arpi. Now... At some place I was waiting in that car, Mhair left me again (pauses for four seconds), so I

thought he probably went to do namaz,.. But, before going, he said there was no way further, we couldn't reach Arpi, so we were turning back... So he went, and I was sitting in the car, with no mood. Suddenly someone came, opened the door, showing me with his hand to come out. when he saw that I was not responding, he tried to pull me out of the car by his hand. And I told him, for God's sake, please leave me, I am in a bad mood... At that very moment Mhair came... he was very frustrated, saying "damn it, too bad, the soldiers caught us"... When Mhair came, this boy, this person, took a commanding position, pushed Mhair into the car, then he also entered the car ordering him to drive... I asked Mhair, what was happening; he was only responding "damn it all. Too bad." I asked him, " what's the problem? [the soldiers?]", he said "yes", and I said "don't be afraid of soldiers". We went up the hill, there were soldiers... there was something like a military camp or whatever... I don't know. They took us to some room... four or five young men were sitting there, in military uniform. They asked: "Who are you? What are you doing? Why did you come?" I said, I came... to see our village... They talked to each other, they talked little to me. Suddenly, don't know why, I said to them: "Listen, since there is no road there, you are the military, and you should have a vehicle to go there. Give us a car so that we could go." Suddenly... he translated this to their language... and caught ... I heard a familiar word from their side, I know the meaning of that word – 'para' (money). When I heard the word 'para' I thought it was all about money. So I thought, well, if they are talking about money, I will probably get there. So before they told me anything, I instantly replied that I would pay. He turned to me, said 200 dollars. He quoted an exact figure – 200 dollars. I don't know why, but I started bargaining with them. I asked, how many kilometers to there, they said 20-25 kilometers... At one point, he said "OK, 20 dollars per person". I agreed. It seemed to me that they would provide us with a car, but they placed us into our own car. therein

So it started from there, a serpentine road... Some other person sat in our car, but he was dressed... in civil dress, perhaps he wasn't military. The road was a serpentine, we were climbing up... on both side of the road there were terrible gorges, deep abysses, and we were driving in-between... The road wasn't so bad, but it was unpaved. We were climbing, and suddenly the third person saw my camera and video, and he said something. Mhair translated: "He is asking, why don't you take pictures?" I asked "May I?"... OK, so I took it out to start taking photos, and he started explaining... I asked " Is the village over there...Is it the Meydan village?" He said "That is the Pugnot village" – so, he already used an Armenian name. So, that village Meydan was the Armenian Pugnot village. In our village – that is, in our present village – Shgharshik, there are people from Pugnot. Adamyans, for example, academician, cardiologist Adamyan... He is from Pugnot, as of today, of Meydan. That is, their family came from Pugnot. There are some three families in our village that came from Pugnot... (pauses, drinks water). When we were already in the lower gorge, he also named some other village. I took a few photos there, but I was too excited ... So I did some strange things, even, I took some pictures without removing the lens cover... I don't remember. So, we were climbing, there was a village on the left, he told the name, I didn't understand it, repeated what he told: that name is on the video, but it was a very small village. I tried hard, before I could film it. You are trying to point the camera, and the car is moving... He even told the driver to stop so that I could film. Yes, he told this. He said: "Stop, so he could film"... Well, so finally, I took some pictures. We climbed up, moved forward quite a bit, and Nich was there on the right, in the gorge. Nich

was our historical village. Nich, I was just above Nich now... In Nich, there were some houses, but only a few in all. It was a tiny thing in the gorge. Then, some car came and outdrove us. Then a bus came. It turned out there was a bus that used to climb there... I don't know why Mhair told me that the road was closed. So we went on the road... then there was an interesting, very interesting episode which I am unable to explain, up to this day... A dog appeared in front of our car; it was a large dog, a really large one, so it blocked the way... I don't know where did that dog come from, I didn't see it, but anyway, the dog blocked the way, so that even the car had to stop. When it stopped, the dog turned, it came – I was sitting on the right, next to the driver, it climbed on the car and started to strike it with its legs and naturally, it was also barking. When the car moved, it went forward, again blocking our way. When we stopped, it came close to my window and started beating with its legs. I am not able to explain this, indeed. But probably, this can be explained somehow – maybe my adrenaline was high, or what, I don't know. There are certain things which dogs feel very quickly... But this truly happened, indeed. ...I went through a lot of stress ...there was a big drought that year, that August. I was getting closer and closer to the village wondering if I was going to see the paradise my father used to tell me about, but I do not see the trees of this paradise. So I am getting closer and closer and to be frank, , I asked to stop the car. Now there were two things: what is more important,t? The memory or the loss of memory... What if the loss is better... I was hesitating whether to go back or go and see the truth. At the end I decided to go I was close to the village; I saw the first spring.... We stopped there to drink some water, and also... suddenly, a woman came from there... there was a house there, nearby... she came running, fell on her knees near my feet, and started crying. Suddenly... she was speaking Armenian, in our dialect. She said some things. I raised her up... we embraced, and we were both crying now. I have already lost it... so to say, the feeling of reality. There, I noticed something... strange... Well, this is a small thing... Anyway, I suddenly said, “my dear sister, are there people in our village?” She said “Yes”. I asked “Is Mndrveni still there?” She said “Yes”. I asked “What does it mean, Mndrveni?” She said, “ A nut tree, but with small fruit and therefore, they call it mndrveni...” Probably this name comes from the word ‘mandr, mandr’ (‘small’ in Armenian dialect), so they call it mndrveni. “So, where is this mndrveni?” “Near the spring”. Well. Finally, we left each other with difficulty. This was really very... we both... We movedt, and our village came in sight.

HKh – Why did this woman come, drop on her knees at your feet? How did she know who you were?

VT – Yes, perhaps the car, that came and passed us, perhaps they told that some Armenian was coming, from Armenia.

HKh – And what about the driver? How did he know that an Armenian was coming from Armenia?

VT – Because it came from the same place, it was coming from Meydan... That was already spreading very, very fast... Well, our village is at the foot of mount Maruta... that is, there is a road that climbs from our village to the mountain. It is under the mount Maruta, our village. That is, if you come from Sasoun – if you climb up from Moush to Sasoun, to the south... you will reach Maruta. Then, from its other side you may come down to our village... Now, we were coming close to the village, I saw, that our village

was, indeed, covered with trees, forests. Our village was beautifully covered... but... now, from far, that Kurd or the person that was accompanying us, the one they attached to us, he said that ... perhaps I mentioned the Angen Astvatsatsin church during conversation, he said – “There, there”. When we were entering the village, from far, he said “here is Angen Astvatsatsin church...” It was on the other bank of the gorge, about two kilometers away, it was a building... a typical Armenian church... It was far, so I wasn’t able to take... pictures. About one kilometer from the village, the graveyard is also there, and I was going to visit it... Anyway, I took some photos from far, as much as I could... I tried to use the video camera from far. Zoomed in as much as possible, to make it visible... We reached the village... when we got out of the car I saw that there were two rivers. One, as I make it now, was coming from the direction of mount Maruta; the other was coming from the south, a small one. There was a drought that time, and both rivers were small, yes. There was very little water in them... When they stopped, I went out of the car... I left them there and ran, climbed there; I told them I was going to the village...I was hardly able to control myself... but the village... it seemed, there was no vehicle road there. I found some bridge, ran over it, and then climbed a higher place... What I can remember of my later actions – I tried to film something, told some things into the camera... Then I went up, now I was trying to remember where our house should be... I... could not see these roads... I did not see any streets as such. I didn’t see what my granddad told me... Yes (coughs from overwhelming emotions. 40 minutes have passed since the beginning of our conversation. He asks his wife to fetch some warm water, drinks it slowly, like he wants to gain time)... Very... (pauses for four seconds)... Every time... I told this story thousand times, certainly, and even the thousandth time... (pauses)... Then, I was looking from the high place, didn’t know where I should go... Suddenly I saw – below, some people were working, building a house. I shouted to them, asking, where is the spring? ... Well, I needed the spring as my landmark... I asked them “where is the spring?” They stopped working, down there, one woman turned to me, inquiring “what are you saying?” ... already in our dialect ... I said “I am saying, where is the spring here? tell me quickly...” It was quite late already, because that person did namaz many times on the way, so it was already evening , it was seven, or eight in the evening... I was standing near a small stream, their response was in our dialect; it sounded like this: “ed arun pirni kini, khasnis”, which means, “go along the stream, you will get to the spring”... So I went along this stream, to get to the spring. Indeed, it took me there. It was an interesting spring; it was coming out of a rock, like from a cave, sort of... (pauses for six seconds, drinks water)... Then, at the spring, they had made something like a small barrage there... a small lake... and they put lots of stuff there – milk, yogurt – in bottles... they were using it instead of a refrigerator. Later I understood what was happening. There, naturally... I was looking at this water, I was thinking the following: for a single drop of this water, what they would give ... those who aren’t with us anymore... our people. But now you came, the spring is in front of you, drink as much as you want, you can wash for everyone, if you want, do whatever you want... That is it... Either you drink it, or you wash... You do not understand what are you doing (pauses for three seconds). Then, at some point, I saw it... when I climbed there, it happened so that my video camera was left hanging on my shoulder, just the camera, nothing else. So, I saw this just because the camera was going to fall into the water. I took the camera, I felt as it I had already calmed down a little, and now I was looking for this mndrveni tree. There were lots of huge nut trees; the village was covered with nut trees; you couldn’t see the village behind them. So I was filming,

just filming around myself with no purpose, thinking, maybe this is the mndrveni tree, this is it, perhaps, so I was filming like that... suddenly... I recall this from what I saw on the camera. Later, after I got back home, when I watched it, I saw that I had filmed certain things... Because, I was overemotional, I do not remember anything... (a small pause)... Well, so I remembered at one point that I needed to get some water. It was all erased from my memory, except for the four points written by my son, everything else was erased from my memory. Absolutely. So, I remembered about “mndrveni” when I was just filming with no purpose, and now, the water. I had no vessel to fill with water. What shall I do? I thought, maybe I shall empty this milk, pour some water in one of the bottles; what shall they do? There was no one around. No one... Suddenly I saw that someone was coming. When he came, I told him “please bring some container”. This one did not speak Armenian. I told him “bring a container so that I can fill it with water”. He did not understand. How to say a “vessel” in their language? I could not remember a single word. I don’t know how it happened; I remembered one word – “ghazan” [Turk. large cooking pot]. I told him, “I want a ghazan”. He understood the word “ghazan”... this person turned and went, I saw that he was lame; he was limping when he walked... I thought, it will take too long before he goes and comes back... it’s a no go, this one is no go. Suddenly I remembered – that woman, she was Armenian, or spoke Armenian. I shall go there, get it from them. So I ran down, along the stream. I told them “sister, give me some vessel, I am taking some water”. She went, found some vessel, brought it, there was some water in it; she washed it and gave it to me... I asked “is this the same water?” ... I don’t know why I asked this... “Is this water from our large spring?” She said “No, this is water from some other spring”. I said, “No, I will go, fill it there”. I took this vessel, and ran there, filled it with water. I still keep it. It was a 2-3 liter plastic bottle, I am still keeping it at home... No, I need to go to our house... then, the chance helped me... I don’t know, I am not that sentimental yet, nevertheless, the chance... it couldn’t be... in that village, so that I decided that I need to go this way from the spring. There was even no road that way. There are walls, some stone walls, so I went there, jumping over them... There was a person working somewhere. Everything else that I am telling, I am recalling this after watching what I filmed on the camera, because I was terribly overemotional then... I asked this person “which one is Toro’s house? Where is Toro’s house?” This person turns to look at me ... “I am working”, he tells, “this is Toro’s house”... So, I turned... I am recalling everything else from the camera, because, indeed... only there I found out that tears may not only flow, they may also splash and sprinkle. It is like that, indeed... that way (pauses for three seconds). Suddenly I said “well”, I said, “this demolished one?” He said “yes.” (pauses, long silence)... Our house was demolished... there was a wall, about one meter high, only that was left. My father used to tell that it was a double-story house. He was a young kid, when they left the village, I understood that probably this was a very steep place; they made it even with the first floor, then built the second floor over it. My father called it double-story. I was looking there, suddenly... I saw this in the film... He said “who are you? Where are you from?” I said ... well ... “I am the son of Hovhannes”, he tells “what is the son of Hovhannes doing here?” I said “well, my father died, I came here, and I need to take some water and soil”. I told this calmly, like that. He said “Hovhannes has died?”, I said “yes”. We were talking in Armenian, in our dialect. But then someone else came from there, he said, this person wasn’t Armenian, he was Kurd. That is, he was working in our garden; he was working in our garden with the shovel in his hands, and he spoke Armenian... So, I needed to do the next step now, to take some soil. All these ves-



On November 13, 2009 Vasak Toroyan told the story of visiting his home village Arpi.

sels, everything was left in the car. What shall I do? Well, I thought, I shall take off one of my clothes, I will tear it into pieces – either my shirt or my undershirt, I will fill it with soil and take it with myself – what else could I do? But I had a large handkerchief, it turned out to be quite large, so I took it out, filled with some soil. I filled it with this soil, from our garden, the next order was – the stone.

I took a stone this size from that one-meter wall, and from the soil too, they were the same stone... It is interesting that this soil, which I took... there was a piece of something in it – a piece of a jug, or a pitcher... a clay piece, I don't know, this could have been the jug of my grandma... Which one?...which grandma... I don't know. I didn't see it, it came by chance... It is also here, naturally, we are keeping it. I asked

that person whether I could take a few nuts I said, “is this Toro’s tree?” He first said “yes” without hesitation, then I asked him again, I said “Is this certainly Toro’s tree?” He said “it seems to me, I don’t know, indeed”... That tree, it has some history attached to it... Simply, they killed Toro on that tree... that tree... Toro was ninety something years old, it was near their house, and the tree was near our house. Is this tree still there? ... I don’t know, was it that very tree on which they killed him? It was a large nut tree... We approached the tree, two of us; we picked a few nuts from that tree... but it wasn’t ripe then... Finally, I got this too... So, I already did everything as ordered, seems, I didn’t have any problems, because I had only this in my memory, everything else I did not remember. That I had to go to the church; that I took incense and candles – everything was erased completely. I only remembered at some point that, when I come back, everyone else would be asking “what about our house?”... I only remembered this. So I was asking randomly about this one’s house, and that one’s. For example, suppose “Iricok’s house, the house of the chaplain, their house”, or Avushokn’s... house – where is it? ... So I asked this all, and there was no response. But it seems that someone said, this is Avushokn’s house, perhaps. I went to go there, I saw, at the door... there were two women standing there. When I came close, they simply ran away. They ran away into the house, there was no one left around, so I didn’t enter... Then one of them came to me, asking “are you hungry?” ... in Armenian. I said, yes... by that time, it was already one week... I had lost probably some 10 kilograms at least... because I wasn’t able to eat anything, I was only drinking tea. The tension was huge; it was terrible, very tense. I said “yes”, and went. I went back to the car, then I saw that they all gathered there, they brought something, some food – gatah, a bread loaf, yogurt, sugar, tea, there was something else – “chechil” cheese (a sort of cheese). That was it, perhaps... I came close, there was some conversation; this is all on the film, these conversations. It is interesting that I... I was talking calmly already; I was really very calm... I was talking, telling that the river is coming from that side, telling things like that. I managed to film this; this is all on film. And then I thought – do these people speak Armenian, or not? I asked “who speaks Armenian here?” No one responded. That person, who came to me, they pushed him to me, telling “talk in Armenian”. I asked “do you speak Armenian?” He didn’t. Then, I don’t know where from, there came a soldier, with automatic gun on his shoulder. He was in military dress. Just out of fun, or what, I don’t know why, I asked him “Do you speak Armenian? You speak Armenian?” This has been filmed. He stood straight, that thing... weapon – he took it and stood still, didn’t say anything (pauses four seconds) Well, leave this... So, we come back...

HKh – So, these people, weren’t they interested to know who you were, where you came from?

VT – I am telling you, there was so much material for discussion, but I already did what I told, what I wanted. Because everything else was erased, only this was left [in my memory]... I did this, everything else was erased completely. So, we were coming back... we came back... We were to come to Meydan, so I could pick up my documents. We came, reached Meydan, it was dark already. So I see that they changed – the soldiers changed. These were a little older and, as far as I could tell it, they were higher in rank. They took us there, asking “who are you, what are you doing?” ... Yes, always, by the way, I would like to point out the following: whenever we entered anywhere, it was hot, they always offered us some water, tea, both of them, they were offering... Finally he spoke, asked questions, and I was trying to explain



him, as much as I could... now I see that the others, whom I was to pay the money, they do not come over anymore. Now I am asking them, how I shall give them their money, these people keep silent. As far as I understood later, they made a lot of fuss there, on why they allowed us to go there. Then an old military person brought me to the car, gave me my documents and said: "it is late, you should be careful", so this is how I came back, I didn't even pay them. We came, entered the gorge. It was a huge gorge, steep, it was dark already and wild animals were running in front of us – a hare, a fox, these kinds of things, their eyes were glistening in the dark... Sometime later I see that the road is blocked, searchlights, floodlights were set, pointing at us, and so they stopped us in the middle of the gorge. Again, Mhair started telling at my side "Damn it! Too bad, too bad". I asked him "what is happening?" ... then suddenly they opened both our rear doors, two soldiers sat in the car, with automatic guns in their hands and, as far as I understood, they ordered him to drive. They brought us, brought us, we reached Motki. We came, reached Motki, and climbed some high place... But I was absolutely calm, absolutely no tension... as if everything was normal... I remember having told Mhair not to fear, if these were soldiers, if they ask questions, he should give them all true answers. If they were the crowd, they could push us to a wall somewhere, tell "look, these are Armenian spies, they came here, we caught them, they refused to obey, so we were forced to put it across." (pauses for five seconds). So, they hoisted us, took us upstairs, it was night there already; they were playing backgammon, drinking tea, doing that kind of thing. They accompanied us, took us somewhere. Two people were sitting there. They put me next to one of them, him – next to the other one. That other one was speaking Turkish, and mine was speaking English to me. He spoke English very well; my English could never be compared to his. He asked me "who are you? What are you doing here, in this area? What kind of scientific conference was it? What did you talk about at the conference?" I said, the conference was very specialized, and he said "never mind, tell it". So, I told him. Then he asked "what were your people doing here?" I said, "They were living here, their home was here, they lived here". He asked "who left?" I said, "my father with his mother only, the rest did not leave." He asked, "what were they doing here?" I answered, "my father was a kid". "Then, what was his mother doing?" I said, "what did the peasants do in the villages in the beginning of the century?" Then, finally, he said "Do you know that in the beginning of the century Armenians joined Russians here, they were fighting against Turks together". ... I said, "I know everything". He said, "do you also know about the events in Bitlis?" I said "yes, of course, I know about all the events". "OK, he said, you can go". They accompanied us, we sat in the car, and we went... So, we arrived in Moush. Before coming I planned that at least, I would visit the Sultan St. Karapet in Moush, so that I would stand on that land too... Yes, later, when we came, it was around morning already, Mhair's wife was waiting for us. So we came, then, (pauses) – "OK, I said, well, I am leaving, I'll be leaving in the morning... I am not going to visit any more places". I was packing up ... there were many presents in my suitcase. I remembered that, before coming here, when I was walking near the Vernisage in Yerevan, one of my friends brought a whole stack of beads, necklaces, rosaries and that kind of things, he brought them to me and said "listen, when you go to your village, give these to the people, one-by-one, when you go there, do not ask anything, just give everyone a present and go". I forgot these all, they were in my suitcase. I took them out, gave them to Mhair's wife, and cognacs, I gave them to Mhair. Then Mhair's wife went, brought a sweater and a shawl, she said, take this... her husband was translating... she said "this is for your Khanum, take it, give it to your Khanum

[Turk. wife]”. In the morning I took a bus and left. I was going to come from the Ani side. I was going to enter Ani, Erzurum... The bus was going to Erzurum. We came, reached that bridge; it was to turn there, so I stopped the bus and got out. I told [to myself], “let him go to Erzurum, I will get a cab here, will go to Kars. Will go to Kars, and then to Ardahan”. So I took a cab, reached Kars. I had many plans in Kars – [to visit] Berd, Arakelots, there are lots of things in Kars. I did absolutely nothing, I found a car, a cab, told him “take me to Ardahan”... I wasn’t able to do anything... at all...I wanted to go home; I only wanted to go home. I don’t know why, I only wanted to get to my house... I spent the night in Ardahan, in the morning I came to ... Akhalckha, Akhalkalak, and from there I came to Yerevan (a long pause...).

I came here; I did not go to the village – Shgharshik – yet. But I had to go. I knew that everyone was waiting for me. I had to go and tell them. Show them. I didn’t go, I don’t know why, I didn’t go. In a couple of days my elder brother came, asking “where are you, why didn’t you come?” So, we gathered our families and went to the village. Our procurements with us, all that we had, we went to the village. That water – naturally, I gave everyone this much (shows) – little-by-little, so that everyone gets a share). One thing impressed me very much in the village – in our village here, in Shgharshik. Well, they came, immediately they filled our house. I was telling them the story, when I showed them the soil – “this is our soil, a stone that I brought from our village” – there was a guy, by that time he was probably forty –some forty or fifty, he is already dead now... but, as soon as he saw the soil, immediately he took a pinch and put it in his mouth. I will never forget this, he took a pinch like this, and put it in his mouth... that soil, I distributed it among everyone...almost everyone, as much as I could, so that they could take it to their graves; the water, everybody who came drank it, then... Something interesting happened. ... There, before coming back, as soon as I went to bed or dozed somewhere, my father was appearing in my dream immediately, always, always, all the time. In all my night dreams my father was there. But, as soon as we took this soil, scattered it on his grave, when we performed that ceremony there, burned the incense that was brought from there on my father’s grave and my brother’s grave... After this, I stopped seeing my father in my dream. There was also another thing... again, from this sentimental domain. On our way from Ankara to “Ergir”, to our home, I used to take a nap during the night. So once, I had a dream, like I was descending somewhere, then suddenly a large red bull attacked me. This was a huge red bull, it attacked me, and it simply raised me from the ground... The only thing I was thinking about ... I said well, I will hold its horns so that he doesn’t push me, doesn’t break my chest, everything else doesn’t matter. So I was resisting, holding its horns like this and trying to resist. This lasted a pretty while ... So the bull seemed getting tired. It couldn’t gain the upper hand over me, so I said ... well, this thing, this bull, it is unable to... so it is my turn now... So I applied some force, turned the bull upside down, it fell. Yes, it fell, and I stood up on my feet, then I saw that my father was standing nearby, watching, with his hands behind his back, he was watching, standing over there. I told him “father, the bull was about to kill me, and you did nothing to help me. My father didn’t reply, he turned away, his hands still behind his back; slowly... slowly he went away. Then I woke up... it was a dream.



## Tables of the Respondents

Respondent' names, birth dates, birth places, the place where the interview was held	Respondents' photos (instead of Garnik Manukyan the photo of his book "The call of pain" dedicated to the victims of Genocide is placed)	Birthplaces of the relatives of those who were saved, the way of their wanderings before settling down in the Republic of Armenia	Photo of one of relatives of those who were saved (instead of Garnik Manukyan's relative, the photo of his book "The Flowers of Sipan mountain" as an expression of nostalgia for his homeland and his relatives).
1 Aida Topuzyan, 1948, in Lebanon (Beirut), Yerevan		Father from Adabazar, mother from Mersin-Greece-Lebanon(Beirut)-Eastern Armenia	
2 Avetis Keshishyan, 1930, in Lebanon (Beirut), Yerevan		Parents are from Lapash village situated between Adana and Marash-Aleksandria-Palestine - Lebanon (Beirut)-RA	
3 Anahit Hovhannisyan, 1979, Ashnak village of Talin region		In the photo you can see Anahit Hovhannisyan's husband's parents-Mkrtich and Anahit from Mjgegh of Sasoun-Eastern Armenia	

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4 Albert Mamikonyan,  
1953, in Kirovakan,  
Yerevan



Albert Mamikonyan's father was from Ardvin, one of grandmothers was from Ardahan-Russia-Persia-Lebanon-Republic of Armenia. Saved at the age of 1



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5 Anahit Bardakchyan,  
1940, in Lebanon  
(Beirut), Yerevan



Parents were from Marash-Lebanon (Beirut)- RA. In the photo you can see Anahit Bardakchyan's mother Mari and her aunt in Beirut



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6 Arpik Shahinyan,  
1923, Parakar village  
of Armavir region



Parents were from Teghut village of Bitlis-Eastern Armenia

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7 Anahit Hovsepyan,  
1952, Norakert village  
of Gegharkunik  
region



Parents were from Sekh village of Bitlis-Eastern Armenia

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- 8 Artak Hovsepyan,  
Norakert village of  
Gegharkunik region



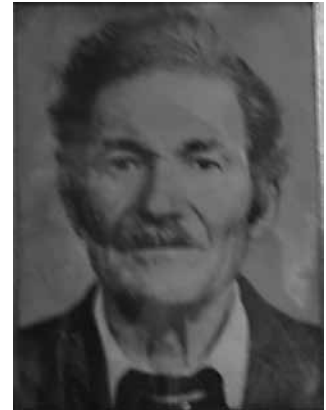
Parents were from  
Ov village of Bitlis-  
Eastern Armenia. In  
the photo you can see  
Artak's father. The  
photo is taken from the  
newspaper "Yerkir"



- 9 Arakel Haroyan, local  
community chief,  
born in 1953, Ujan  
village of Aragatsotn  
region



Arakel Haroyan's  
father –Serob Haroyan.  
Serob Haroyan was  
from Tshman village  
of Sasoun-Syria –  
Ghamshlu-RA.



- 10 Aregnaz Poghosyan,  
1940, Yerevan



Parents are from  
Artkunq village of  
Sasoun-Russia-Eastern  
Armenia. Aregnaz's  
mother Khanum was  
rescued at the age of 6.



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11 Almast Harutyunyan,  
1920, Ujan village of  
Aragatsotn region

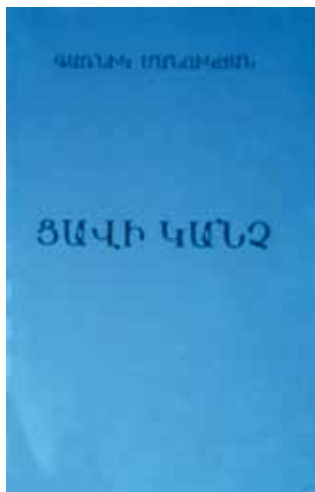


Almast's mother  
Haykanush, from  
Grasira village of  
Batmana field, was  
saved at the age of 13,  
on her way she buried  
her mother who was  
killed, her brother and  
sister died of starvation



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12 Garnik Manukyan,  
Norakert village of  
Gegharkunik region



From Sosrat village of  
Timar province of Van-  
Eastern Armenia



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13 Garegin Chugaszyan,  
Yerevan



Garegin Chugaszyan's  
Grandfather, Sebastia-  
USA, Iran (Tavriz)-RA





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14 Gyozal  
Hovhannisyan, 1919,  
born on the way,  
during the second  
deportation, village  
Dalarik of Armavir  
region



From Khastur village  
of Alashkert-Eastern  
Armenia

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15 Grish Badalyan, 1935,  
Geghashen village of  
Kotayk region



From Verin Sipan  
village-Eastern Armenia

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16 Yelena Ardahanyan,  
Yerevan



Father from Ardvin,  
mother from Shavshet  
village not far from  
Ardahan-Georgia-RA



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17 Elya Davtyan, 1938,  
Ashnak village of  
Talin region



Parents are from Gomer  
village of Sasoun-  
Eastern Armenia

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18 Eleonora Ghazaryan.  
1949, Ashnak village  
of Talin region



Parents are from  
Mshgegh of Sasoun-  
Eastern Armenia



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19 Tamara Poghosyan,  
1924, Gyumri



Parents are from  
Ekkabat village of Basen  
province- Georgia-  
Eastern Armenia

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20 Hayrapet Yazirjyan,  
1920, Greece  
(Salonika), Yerevan



Parents are from  
Dardanel-Greece  
(Salonika)-RA

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21 Hamlet Hovsepyan,  
1951, Ashnak village  
of Talin region



Parents are from  
Mshgegh of Sasoun-  
Eastern Armenia; In  
the photo you can see  
the wife of Hamlet's  
grandfather's brother-  
Varder from Djok  
village. Varder's two  
sons were killed before  
her eyes, other two sons  
were taken away in an  
unknown direction, later  
her husband and the  
last son were also killed.



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22 Hrach Hovhannisyan,  
1941, Dalarik village  
of Armavir region



Hrach Hovhannisyan's  
parents-Mihran and  
Gyoza reached Eastern  
Armenia from Khastur  
village of Alashkert



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23 Hamestuhi Avagyan,  
1945, Iraq (Baghdad),  
Yerevan

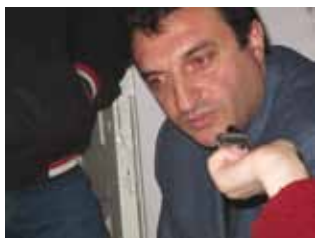


Mother Taguhi was from  
Van, she was rescued  
at the age of 3-4, she  
was taken among those  
sick with plague by  
American missionaries  
gathering orphans. She  
was the only one to be  
saved from the whole  
family. She lived in Iraq.



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24 Hovhannes  
Mkrtchyan, Chqnagh  
village of Aparan



Grandmother  
Haykanush was from  
Bulanekh of Moush.  
In 1915 during the  
deportation her 10-year-  
old daughter was taken  
out from the corpses by  
Russian soldiers. She  
was the only one who  
survived.



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25 Mushegh Gevorgyan,  
1952, Dashtadem  
village of Talin



Grandfather was from  
Baghlu village of Mush,  
grandmother from  
Archesh of Van -Eastern  
Armenia.  
Grandmother-Khumar  
Hovhannisyan found her  
lost sister only in 1987,  
when she was already  
77 years old.



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26 Nairi Tajiryan,  
1936, Egypt (Cairo ),  
Yerevan



Mother from Kesaria  
and father from Amasia;  
got acquainted and  
married in Egypt (Cairo)  
-RA.  
Grandfather was a  
volunteered for the  
French army; he also  
fought in Cilicia



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27 Nvard Manasyan,  
1969, Yerevan



Adana-Greece-RA



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28 Saribek Tovmasyan,  
1954, Ujan village of  
Aragatsotn region



Saribek's father Kirakos  
Tovmasyan was from  
Batman (Sasoun)-  
Ghamshli (Syria)-RA



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29 Samvel Mirzoyan,  
1929, Norakert Village  
of Gegharkunik  
region



Parents were from Ov  
village of Bitlis region -  
RA



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30 Varduhi Martirosyan,  
1932, in Iskanderun  
town of Turkey,  
Yerevan



Iskanderun-Syria- RA

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31 Vard Abadjyan, 1954,  
Ashnak village of  
Talin region



Father was from  
Manazkert-Eastern  
Armenia.  
Mother Zozan was from  
Gvars village. In the  
photo the one standing  
in the left is Vard's  
mother Zozan



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32 Vasak Torosyan,  
1949, Shgharshik  
village of Tallin,  
Yerevan



Vasak's father and  
grandmother were from  
Arpi village of Motkan  
province of Bitlis region-  
Eastern Armenia



Vasak Torosyan's father

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33 Vazgen Ghukasyan,  
1933, Ashnak village  
of Tallin region



Parents were from  
Avark village of Khut-  
Eastern Armenia. In the  
photo you can see his  
father-Khacho of Khut,  
“Sovetakan Hayastan”,  
in the newspaper  
publication of January 1,  
1988



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34 Vardan Hakobyan,  
1960, Norakert village  
of Gegharkunik  
region



Grandfathers were from  
Mkhkner village of Van-  
Eastern Armenia

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35 Tatevik  
Hovhannisyan, 1983,  
Yerevan



Grandfathers are  
from Khastur village  
of Alashkert-Eastern  
Armenia

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