

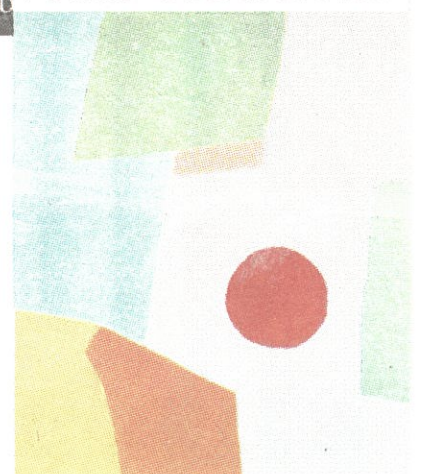
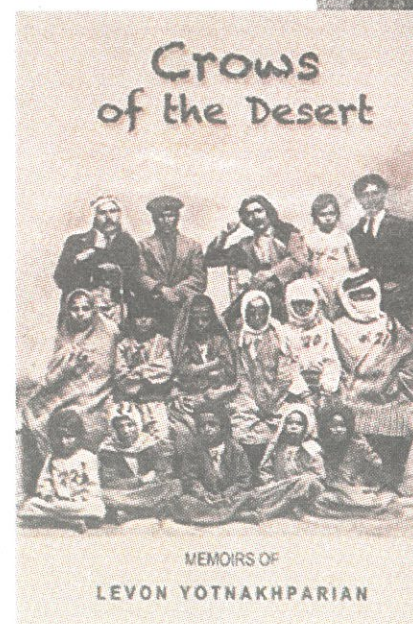
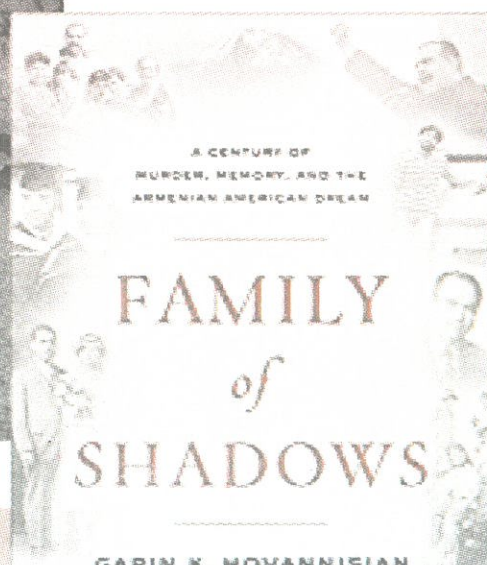
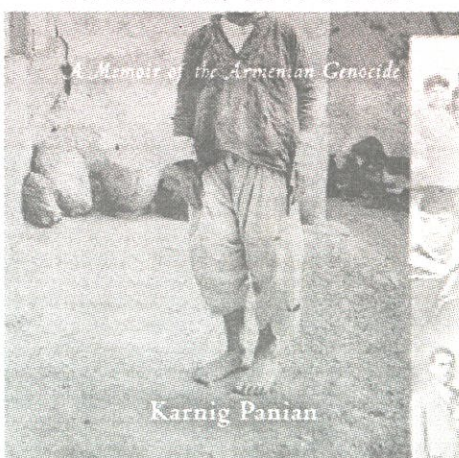
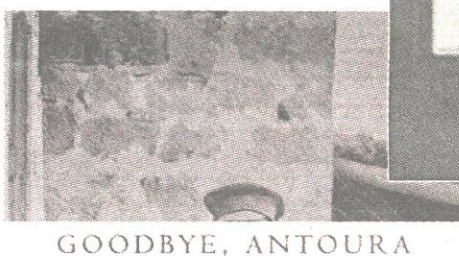
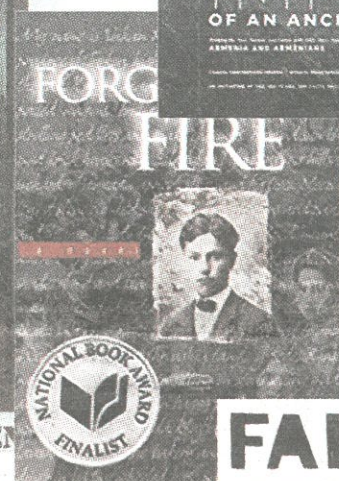
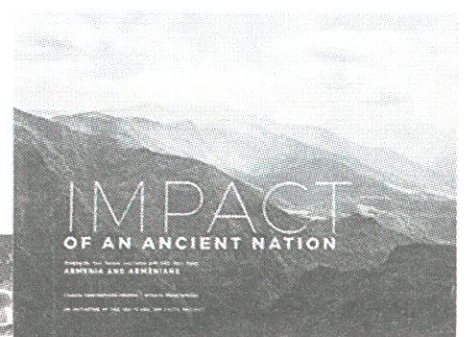
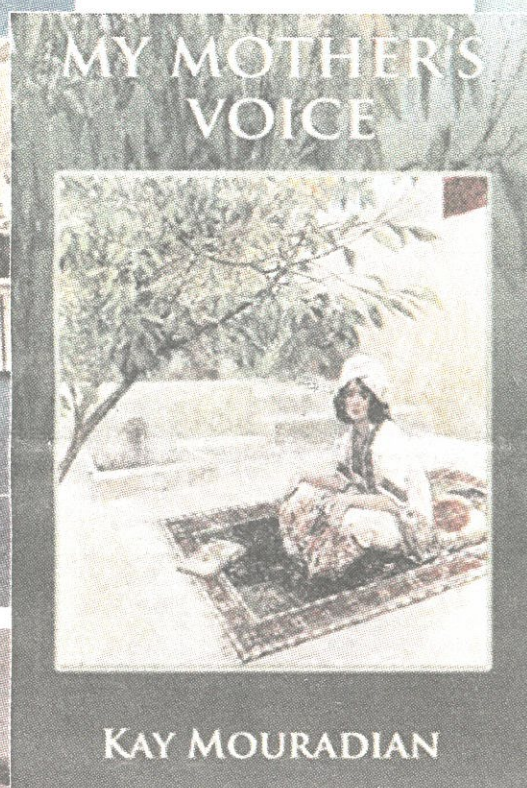
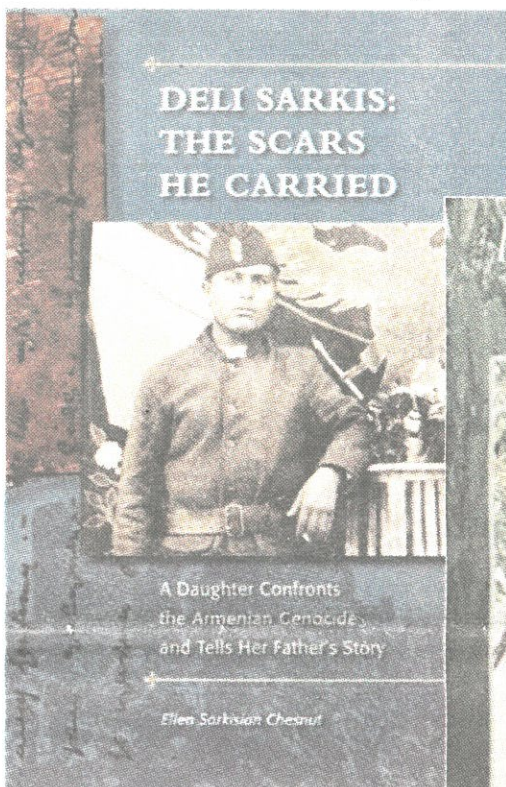
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Diasporan Armenian Literature Entering the Second Century of Continuing Effects of the Genocide

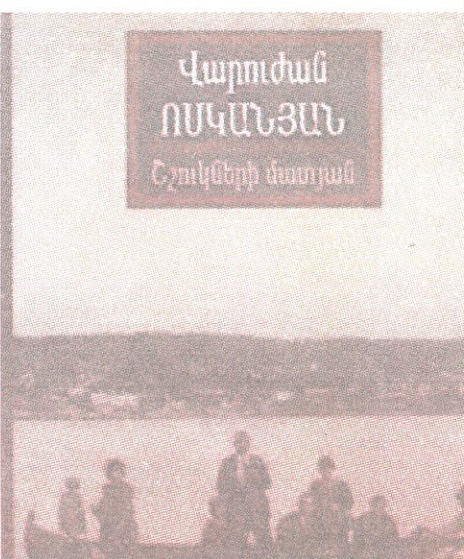
BY DR. RUBINA PEROOMIAN



Last Month, Dr. Rubina Perroomian presented a paper entitled, "Diasporan Armenian Literature Entering the Second Century of Continuing Effects of the Genocide" at the International Association for Armenian Studies conference in Oxford, England. Since October is observed as Armenian Culture Month, Asbarez, in collaboration with Dr. Perroomian is devoting this week's issue to her paper, which she hopes will become a stand-alone volume.

Rubina Perroomian was born in Tabriz, Iran. She received a BS in Civil Engineering, 1960, Tehran University, an MA in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, specializing in Armenian Studies, 1983, University of California, Los Angeles and a Ph.D in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, specializing in Armenian Studies, 1989, University of California, Los Angeles.

Her publications include: "Literary Responses to Catastrophe: A Comparison of the Armenian and the Jewish Experience (1993)"; "Armenia in the Web of the ARF-Bolshevik Relationship, 1917-1921" (1997), in the Armenian language, also translated and published in Russian; "And those who Continued Living in Turkey after 1915, The Metamorphoses of the Post-Genocide Armenian Identity as Reflected in Artistic Literature" (2008 and 2012); "The Armenian Genocide in Literature, Perceptions of Those who Lived through the Years of Calamity" (2012, 2014); and "The Armenian Genocide in Literature, The Second Generation Responds" (2015).



Diasporan Armenian Literature Entering the Second Century of Continuing Effects of the Genocide

BY DR. RUBINA PEROOMIAN

*Burdened, but able to yield
"new ways of understanding
what it means to be Armenian
and transnational,
with one foot in the past,
but leaning toward the future."*

It was fifteen years ago, in 2002, the AIEA was holding its biennial conference in Würzburg Germany, and I was invited to speak about new directions and trends in Diasporan Armenian literature in the context of responses to Genocide. My talk today will begin from where I had left off. I am asked to speak about recent developments and trends beyond the fanfare, the ignited excitement, the passion, and the emotions of the Centennial in 2015. I will try to show the attempts of the young generation of poets and writers to transcend the torrent of "We Remember, We Demand" onto the exigencies of the second century of still continuing effects of the Genocide.

Parenthetically, let me be clear without getting into the polemics, the language of literary expression is not, has never been a factor in my discussion.

So in order to continue, let me bring here the concluding passage of my presentation of thirteen years ago as a point of departure of my discussion today.

"The new responses have emerged from the attempts to confront the Genocide in order to grasp its historical and psychological impact, and to uphold memory with which to relate and identify. The literary representations of the Armenian Genocide will continue to shape the understanding of this unresolved injustice for generations to come. They will function as the most effective transmitters of memory, shoring up commitment to the national struggle. It is the artist's creative power that can capture the unthinkable horrors of the genocide and bring them down to the level of human imagination to shape that understanding, albeit a 'metaphysical comprehension,' as Yehuda Bauer argues. There is an undeniable truth in the power and intensity of the impact that a literary representation of genocide can make and the crucial role it can play, standing as a monument to the memory of the Armenian tragic past, renewing the past for present life, bolstering the Armenian aspiration to become a nation again, and finding a way to resolve the tragedy in order to make national survival and perpetuation possible."

To trace the history or the roots of Armenian literature in response to genocide we need to backtrack more than a century, because the *Mets Yeghern*, the Turkish cataclysmic massacres did not start just a century ago. Read Siaamanto, Daniel Varuzhan, Zabel Yesayan, Suren Partevian, Hagop Oshagan, read the memoirs of the survivors, listen to the stories of traumatic experiences and miraculous survivals alive in every Armenian family, and you will hear the cries of the nation, the lament, the protest, the urge to record, and the search to render a meaning to the disastrous past since 1890s. An oral and written tradition was thus created in that framework, which was also instrumental in shaping the Armenian philosophy of life and world outlook. This tradition became the backbone of the timeless responses to the disaster-laden history of Armenia and the distant and not so distant footing of Diasporan Armenian literature of generations of survivors.

The contemporary Armenian literature in response to Genocide—narrative in prose or in verse, memoirs, fiction, poetry—is crafted from a distance of time and space, without direct experience of the Catastrophe, bearing the influence of different cultural, social, political, and religious environments, and with different levels of skill in the understanding of the poetics of genocide. It displays a variety of thrust and motivations. It may seek catharsis, a therapeutic effect, in order to relieve the transgenerational pain. It may strive to provide further evidence to challenge the denialists with a family story or a less-discussed fact or phenomenon. It may display unabated rage and frustration vis-à-vis the continuing injustice and the conspiracy of Turkey's allies to silence the struggle. The literary work may not even treat the Genocide as a theme but still be permeated with the psychology of the survivor of a colossal catastrophe.

For all intents and purposes, these responses encompass the echoes of the nation's collective psyche shaped by the violence, the pain of dispersion, self-accusation, the effects of the past and present roles of the perpetrators, the search for identity or the struggle to cope with a dual identity.

This general outline underscores my vantage point in discussing the functionality of genocide literature reflecting the interconnection of the Armenian Genocide and the Diasporan Armenian self-image or identity. This vantage point implies certain questions, as to how strong is this interconnection and what is its role in the formation of national or ethnic identity—if we consider the Diasporan Armenian communities as minorities within mainstream societies; how effectively is the memory of the Armenian Genocide transmitted; how have the sufferings of the survivors affected their children to extend over the next generation as well; and finally, if the literary piece is intended to encapsulate the Genocide, how intimately can the author, generations passed the Event relive the world of genocide to be able to reproduce it in art?

The memory is transmitted no doubt, and the Centennial commemorations if nothing else worked as a booster, and the continuing Turkish denial is an added fuel to the fire. How to cope with that memory, depends on the effects of that memory on individual psyche, and the urge and motivation it can arouse. Let me expound on this to show different ways the transmitted memory is treated.

The family story inspiring a memoir, a biography, or a novel

The strongest trend that I see gaining momentum since a decade ago with no sign of waning is bringing to life and launching forth the family story, a portrayal of the great-grandparents', grandparents' or even belated undertaking of the parent's traumatic past. It is mostly the third and fourth generations who have become more interested in their ancestors' past than their parents were. Marcus Lee Hansen's thesis comes to mind: "What the son wishes to forget, the grandson wishes to remember." Or, in more contemporary, gender-sensitive terms: what the children wish to forget, the grandchildren and great-grandchildren, I might add, wish to remember.

My explanation is that children born into the family of survivors have generally tried to distance themselves from their parents who belonged to another world, who did not try to leave their Old Country traditions and outlook behind, who were embarrassingly different from the parents of their children's classmates, and finally, who were the keepers of horrible stories, sometimes persisting to share them with their children. The relationship was tarnished with spells of resentment, rebellion and alienation, as I have exposed through the prism of literature in my book (*The Armenian Genocide in Literature, The Second Generation Responds*). The grandchildren and great-grandchildren, on the other hand, are immune from these negative vibes and curious to explore the past.

In some instances, the transmitted or discovered family story finds its way into a literary work with the story either fictionalized or true to the actual memory. Sometimes the author takes the story as the raw material and embellishes it with his/her poetic or fictional imagination and more importantly gives it a historical context, verifying every bit of the story and going to great

lengths to provide a well-informed socio-political and historical setting and background. The degree of fictionalization and distancing from the family story determines the genre: novel in prose or poetry, biography, biographical or historical novel. Peter Balakian, Carol Yedgarin, Vickie Smith Foston, Micheline Aharonian Marcom and others, examples I discussed last time, had set the tone. More recent works in this category, to mention just a few, are:

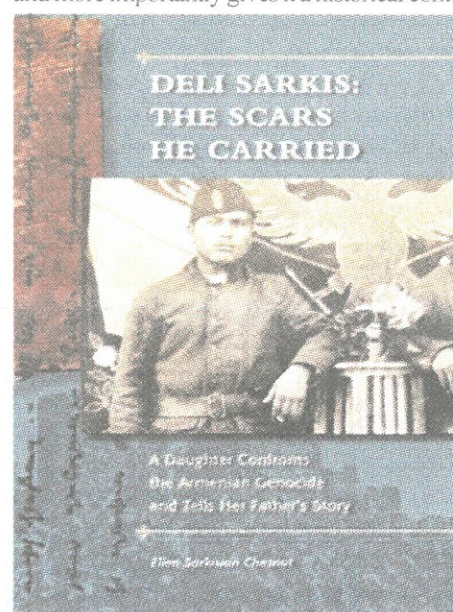
Ellen Sarkissian Chesnut's *Deli Sarkis: The Scars he Carried, A Daughter Confronts the Armenian Genocide* (2014). A disinterested and to some degree bitterly alienated daughter, who lived deeply conscious of the shadow cast over the family by unresolved trauma, eternalizes her father's morbid experience and pays homage to the memory of the victims of the Genocide. The book is also a testimony of the effects of the parents' traumatic past on their family atmosphere and their children.

Margaret Ahnert Ajemian's *A Knock at the Door, A Journey through the Darkness of the Armenian Genocide* (2007) tells the story of the incredible survival of her mother, the horrors she went through during four years of captivity in Turkish and Kurdish homes. Margaret reacts to her mother's stories, becomes one with her, lives her mother's life with her. Together with her mother's horrifying memories she had also inherited a fear from Turks. She wrote her mother's story "not for revenge, but for the record: of my mother and me" (p. xix). She also hoped that the act of writing will bring her face to face with her fears, instead of blocking them as she tried to do all her life. She wrote to lay bare the truth. "But maybe the terrible images persist for a reason: to tell the truth" (p. 185).

In the last years of her life Kay Mouradian's mother urged Kay to write and publish her horrifying account of the death march and the unthinkable suffering she had endured for the world to know. That was the mission she finally accepted, *A Gift in the Sunlight* (2005) is a historical novel, a true story embedded in a fairly accurate historical framework, which in Kay's words, was "the story of every Armenian who survived that tragic historical event that continues to be glossed over by the modern world." The second edition appeared in 2013, titled *My Mother's Voice*, followed by a documentary film in 2015 by the same title. The film is widely used in public schools in California as an educational tool to teach high school children about the Armenian Genocide.



Dr. Rubina Peroomian



Ellen Sarkissian Chesnut's *Deli Sarkis: The Scars he Carried, A Daughter Confronts the Armenian Genocide*

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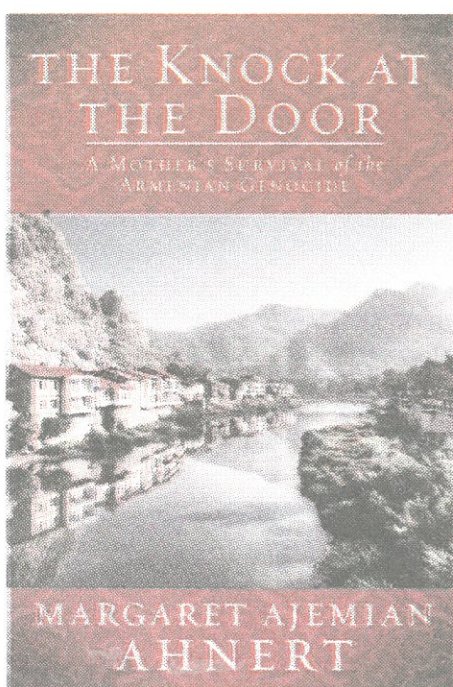
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Proceeds from this gala will benefit the youth in Lebanon

Houri Panian Boyamian published *Goodbye Antoura* (2015), the English version of her father, Karnig Panian's memoir, the story of suffering and survival of a 5-year old orphaned boy from Gurun, who survived the hardship of the deportation route, lost his entire family and ended up in the Antoura orphanage to suffer the horrors of this infamous center of Turkification. A reviewer considered *Goodbye Antoura* to be *The Diary of Anne Frank* of the Armenian Genocide. Vartan Grigorian, a former student of Karnig Panian in Jemaran, who wrote the foreword to the book, had this to say, "A remarkable and unforgettable book. It is an indispensable tool for awakening our consciences and restoring our collective sense of decency and our solidarity with all those who have suffered the horrors of genocide."

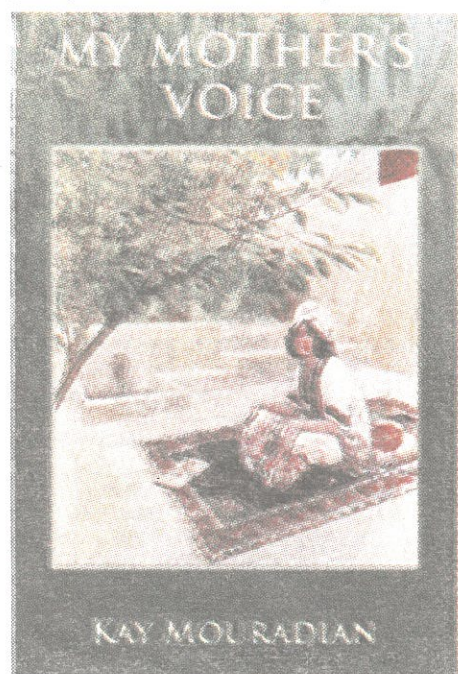
The rising awareness among Armenian youth around the Centennial added extra impetus for new works based on family stories to appear. It will take a complete university course to discuss various aspects of this genre and individual writers. I will just name a few works of art that promise to last and make a difference, just to give you an idea of the set pattern and the



Margaret Ahnert Ajemian's *A Knock at the Door, A Journey through the Darkness of the Armenian Genocide*

ongoing trend.

As a typical case of the third generation, let us discuss Nancy Kricorian. Her grandmother was from Mersin, and she had horrible stories to tell. Her grandfather, a young man who left Turkey two years after the massacres of 1909, was from Adana. He died when Nancy was very young, so she has few memories of him. But Nancy Kricorian, whose mother's side was French-Canadian, was not interested in any of them or anything to do with Armenians when she was growing up in Watertown Massachusetts. Her interest in learning Armenian and about Armenians came late in her mid-twenties. This is when she began writing her first novel *Zabelle* (1999), the life of a survivor of the Genocide. She wrote *Zabelle* as a homage to her grandmother and the heritage she proudly adopted from her father's side. The novel begins with a prologue depicting Zabelle in her last days of life, when she almost lost her mind, when "At night, long shadows and disembodied voices, speaking Armenian and Turkish, circled Zabelle's bed. She heard



Kay Mouradian's *My Mother's Voice*

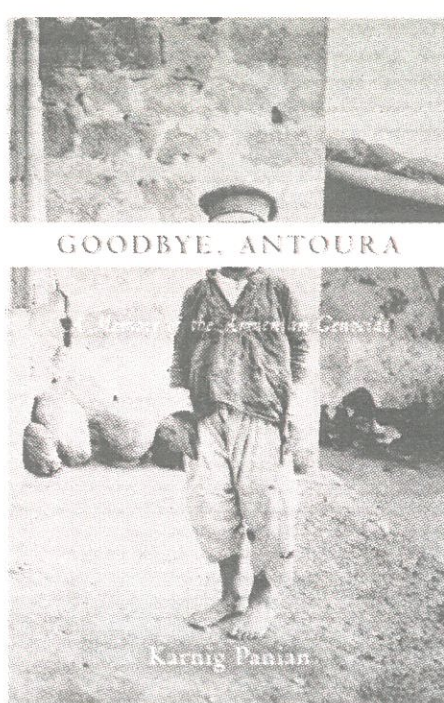
fragments of long forgotten songs. The faces of her mother, father, brother, grandparents, aunts, and uncles came swimming up at her like fish surfacing from the bottom of the pond." (6) The prologue ends with Zabelle's funeral, and the novel begins unfolding in Zabelle's own voice narrating her life. Nancy Kricorian does not try to deliver history lessons. There are no historical facts, no attempts to prove that the Genocide happened. But the Genocide is there ominously hanging over the entire text, dictating mentalities and behaviors, readily providing metaphors for situations with no relevance to the past, a past that resurfaces now and then as a painful memory. "We never spoke about those times," Zabelle asserts, "but they were like rotting animals behind the walls of our house" (223-224). The novel lays bare the after effects of the Genocide, like the pain of assimilation, "That was how the Armenians would be finished off. First we were driven out, then the children abandoned the language, and finally they married *odars* and birthed children who were barely half-Armenian" (148). Changing Armenian names follows, family names to sound American and getting a nose job to get rid of the characteristically Armenian nose.

Nancy Kricorian's second novel *Dreams of Bread and Fire* (2003) has also Armenian life

and activism in the United States as a theme, the third novel, *All the Light there was* (2013) is about an Armenian family, refugees from the Genocide in France, caught in the turmoil of Nazi occupation of Paris during WWII.

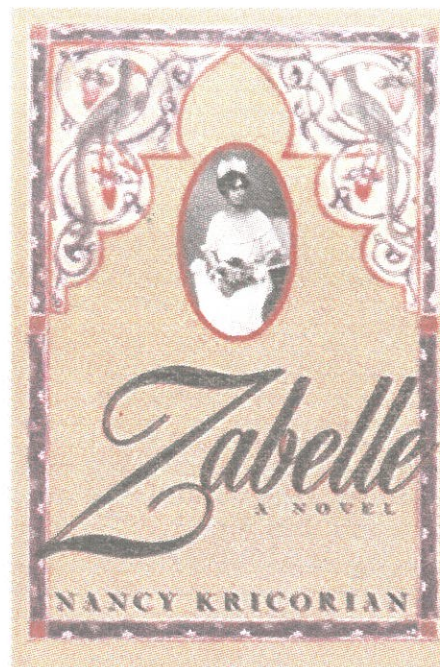
The Survivor (2002) is a true story of Rosmary Hartounian Cohen's grandmother, Arousiak of Khoy. It is the account of the massacres of the Armenian population of Khoy in 1918 by the hands of Turkish soldiers. 18-year old Arousiak with her three-year old daughter were the only members of the family who survived. Rosemary Cohen attests that she had prodded her grandmother to tell bits and pieces from her life, and when it came the time to write her book, she had all the facts and images of the carnage and survival etched in her mind since childhood, ready to pour out.

Adam Baghdasarian has built on his great uncle's harrowing life experience during the Genocide to write his narrative fiction in the voice of his great-uncle. *Forgotten Fire* (2000). After a short "foreword," where the history of the Genocide is sketched, Vahan Kenderian



Goodbye Antoura published by Houry Panian

begins to tell his story, the story of massacres in Bitlis that happened like a *coup de destin* to cut short Vahan's dream world and happy childhood. That was the moment when this twelve-year-old boy witnessed the killing of his two older brothers. His innocent childhood was violated suddenly, a paradise that was lost in an instant. Stupefied and horror-stricken, he stood and watched the gendarmes dragging his brothers to the white wall in the back of their plush garden and shooting them to death. His father had been arrested a few days before and rumors went that he, together with a group of Armenian men, were shot on the way to Diyarbakir. Vahan survived spending years in abject misery, running from a place to another, begging for bread, and finally ending up in the St. Gregory orphanage in Constantinople. Every story of survival has a secret that revolves around resistance to barbarity. Vahan succeeded with a strong will to go on against all odds by passively withdrawing from the morbid reality around him, by imagining himself away from this

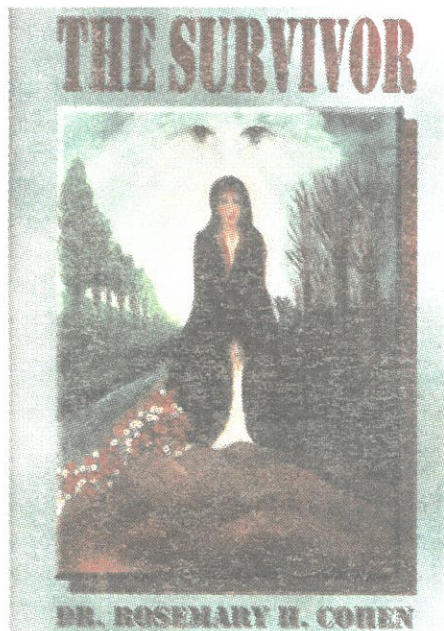


Nancy Kricorian's *Zabelle*

reality in a favorite place in his erstwhile happy life, playing the game of his executioners, shutting off his brain and any sensation in his mind and body and obeying orders. Survival is a form of resistance to atrocity.

Garin K. Hovannisian, named after the city of Garin where Kaspar his great grandfather joined Antranig's troop and took up arms to fight the Turks in 1917, tells the story of four generations and the persistence of the effects of the Genocide in *Family of Shadows: A Century of Murder, Memory, and the Armenian American Dream* (2010). This is not just a family story, but an artistically crafted national history demonstrating the deep insight of the young author into the characters of family members he describes, the history of the Armenian Genocide and the makeup of Armenia-Diaspora relationship.

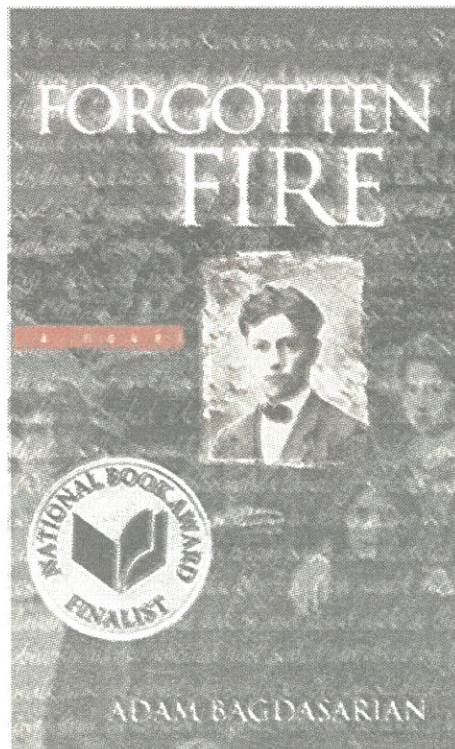
Crows of the Desert (2012), is Levon Parian's English translation of his grandfather's manuscript memoirs as a soldier in the Ottoman



The Survivor by Rosmary Hartounian Cohen

army during WWI, his escape and return to the desert to rescue the remnants of slaughtered Armenians stranded in the desert. Levon Parian is the grandson of Levon Yotnakhparian, the brother of the hero of 1915 defense of Urfa, Mkrtich Yotnakhparian. Levon Parian has elaborated and authenticated the memoir by adding photographs, maps and documents. His high achievement though, in addition to the English rendering of the memoirs, is in the documentary film by the same name, released a few months ago, in 2017. The appreciative grandson had added his own years of research in archives worldwide, gathering rare footage, photographs and documents. The story of the Armenian Genocide is thus presented to a much wider audience through a different, probably more attractive medium of expression.

In some instances, the family story, or the harrowing stories of Turkish atrocities and miraculous survival that were entrusted to or discovered in fragments by the grandchildren or great-grandchildren, worked as an impetus to create a novel that barely touches the real



Adam Baghdasarian's *Forgotten Fire*

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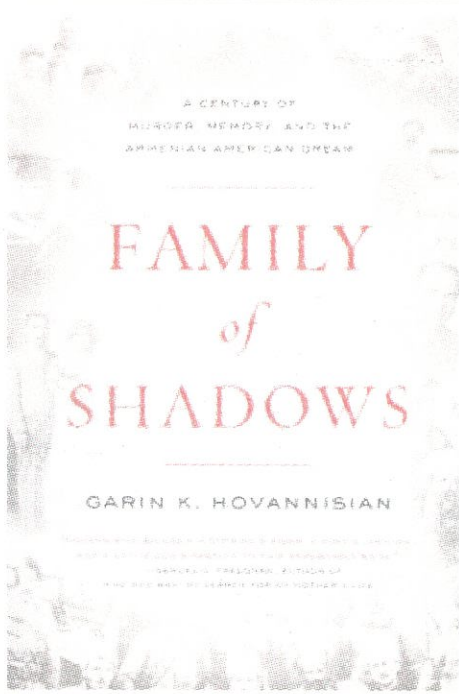
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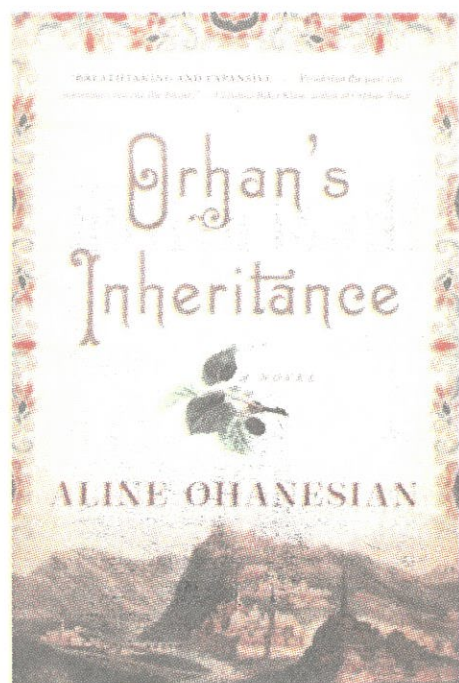
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Garin K. Hovannisian's *Family of Shadows: A Century of Murder, Memory, and the Armenian American Dream*

unfold realistically and with great artistic mastery. Aline Ohanessian speaks of the hidden story of her great grandmother, a passive, quiet, a lifeless woman who for the first and only time shared her story with eight-years-old Aline. Aline was the chosen one to absorb the tragedy that was her family's and her nation's, to incubate it in her mind for long years and give birth to a novel that did not necessarily stay close to her family story but encapsulated the Armenian Genocide.

In Maral Boyadjian's *As the Poppies Bloomed* (2015), the Armenian village of Salor in the Sassun region, where her grandfather Krikor Harutiunian was born, comes alive with its everyday life, traditions, joys and celebrations. It is the year 1913 and the reality of the imminent catastrophe in the mind of the



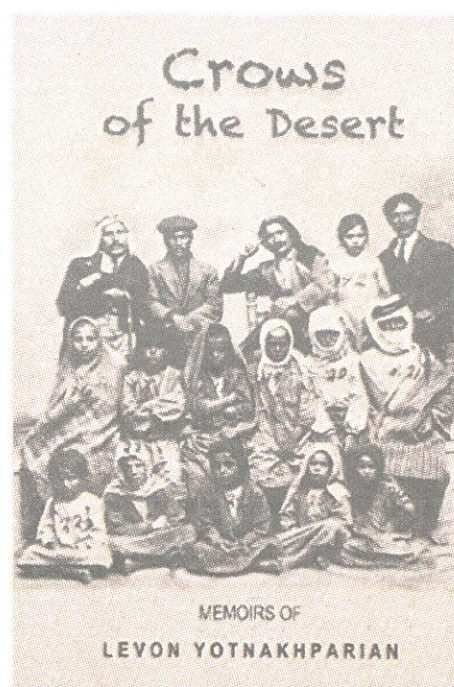
Aline Ohanessian's *Orhan's Inheritance*

homeland like a dark and ominous shadow haunting him all his life.

Dawn Anahid Mackeen had heard from her mother all her life about her grandfather, Stepan Miskjian's tragic experience—his escape just before the caravan of deportees were executed and his wandering for two weeks in the Syrian desert “with two cups of water and a gold coin,” then an Arab sheikh taking pity of him and sheltering him. Dawn's grandfather had died when she was a toddler; therefore, her tie to him was through her mother's reminiscences. The details of the stories of terror were buried in her grandfather's Armenian memoirs, which although published in 1960s in two booklets remained inaccessible to her. Dawn's mother had struggled through the Armenian text to translate it into English, but her Armenian was not adequate; the task was overwhelming, impossible, never to be finished, and Dawn, a career reporter travelling here and there and living mostly away from home, was not any help. Finally, a distant relative translated the Armenian text, and the stories that poured out for Dawn were a stupefying discovery. “Nearly a century later, where was my sense of moral obligation?” She asked herself. “Doing nothing felt like forgetting, and forgetting genocide seemed almost as heinous as the crime itself, especially in light of Turkey's denials” (7). And the difficult journey began, reading the memoir time and again in order to absorb her

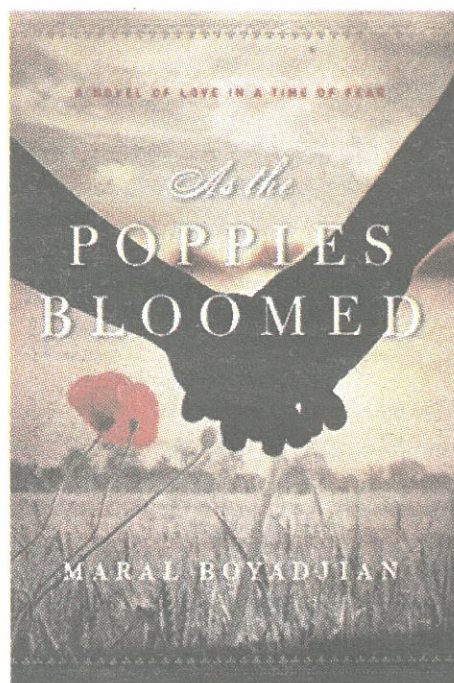
experience, but with the author's powerful rendering it encapsulated the conceptualization of the Armenian Genocide. Chris Bohjalian's *The Sandcastle Girls* (2012) is one example. The inspiration, however, had come from his Armenian grandparents. With this novel, the question if the story is factual or fictional is irrelevant. It is a novel, a personal novel in which the many characters are likely players as victims, perpetrators, rescuers, and indifferent bystanders in the inferno of the Armenian Genocide. It is intended, in the words of the author, to tell you about “the Slaughter You Know Next to Nothing About.” And the effect is tremendous.

Only three years later, in 2015, another masterpiece of this kind was launched. *Orhan's Inheritance* by Aline Ohanessian, a far-fetched romance in 1915 between an Armenian girl, the daughter of an opulent merchant and a Turkish boy, the son of one of his employees. It is against that unfulfilled love story that the horrors of the deportations and massacres



Levon Parian's *Crows of the Desert*

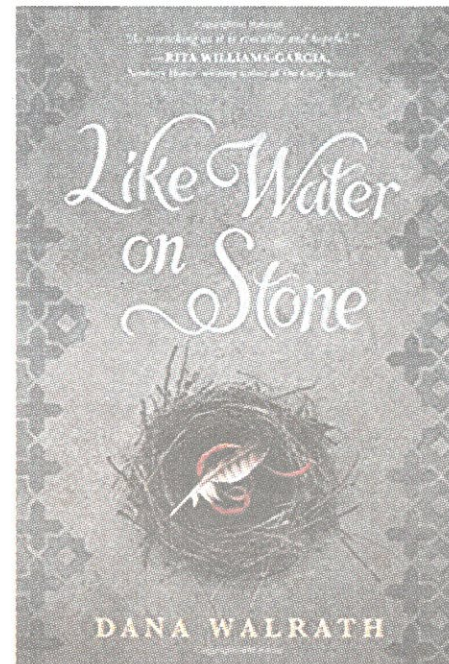
reader creates the tension and the paradox. Although the characters are fictitious, as the author admits, but the story is built on the memories of her grandparents. So, there is nothing fictitious about the events that led to the heroic defense and eventual annihilation of the village population. And meanwhile, the developing love story takes the center stage but ends with the wife and newborn baby falling victim to Turkish atrocities. This is depicted with such strong and distinct images, as if to show the world what unspeakable barbarities were Turkish murderers capable of. Maral's grandfather survived and somehow ended up in Los Angeles to start a second life, with the memories of the happy and tragic events of his



Maral Boyadjian's *As the Poppies Bloomed*

grandfather's story, years of reading about the Genocide, traveling alone to Bashar Al Assad's horror-stricken Syria, step by step walking the route her grandfather had walked. The result was an accomplished book, *The Hundred-Year Walk* (2016), that takes the reader back and forth between 1915, Stepan Miskjian's life during the Genocide, jumping one hundred years with the experience of a granddaughter in her resolve to tell the world what the Turks had done to her grandfather and to one-and-a-half million Armenians.

In Dana's family they did not speak about the Genocide. Her mother had married an American, and Dana and her siblings grew up



Dana Warbath' *Like Water on Stone*

beautifully wrought, a powerful novel in verse, with an abundance of poetic freedom and creativity, but a true portrayal of the horrors of genocide and a miraculous escape of two thirteen-year-old twins, brother and sister, and their little sister. “If magical realism makes up this story's warp, then historical facts are woven into its weft,” she explains.

Anoush Nakashian, an accomplished poetess, is a voice from Jerusalem, whose family story «Այդ սերմը ես էի» (I was that seed) was published in 2016. Forty years after her grandmother's passing, she finally got to spill out the stories her grandmother entrusted her in the last month before her death. Her grandmother lived in her with the image of the statue of “Mother Armenia” in Yerevan waiting for forty years. On the day of her funeral, as she returned home and to the kitchen where she was used to see her grandmother cooking, she realized, “she was not dead; she was the compendium of my people's history, heroism, its victory in survival and perpetuation.”

Մեծ Մայրս չէր մեռած...

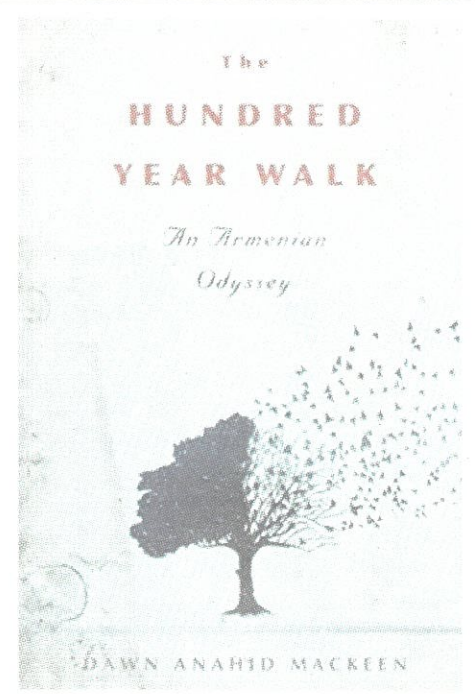
Մեծ Մայրս մոր ծնաւ իմ մէջ...

Մեծ Մայրս՝ ՄԱՅՐ ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԵՆ Էր...

Varuzhan Vosganian, grand-child of survivors of the Genocide, and his successful novel, *The Book of Whispers* (Հռչակների Մատնան), written in Romanian and translated into many language including Turkish. Exerpts of this book was chosen by the Berlin Literature Festival and the World Wide Reading in 2015 to be read on April 21 simultaneously in 400 venues throughout the world in commemoration of the Armenian Genocide. Vosganian defines his book to be an autobiography, but at the same time a fiction and a historical document.

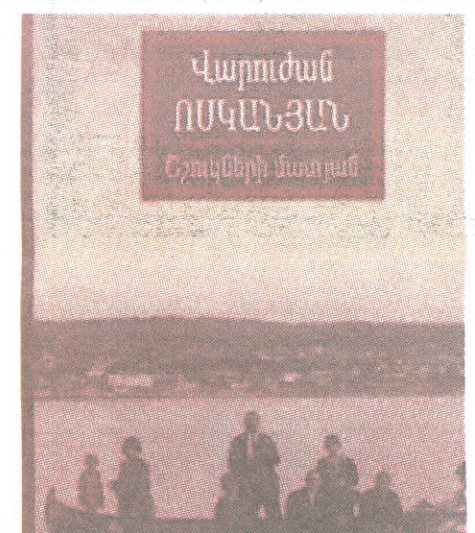
When the family story inspires poetry

Peter Balakian continues to lead the way with his more recent poems eternalizing the Armenia of his grandparents, like in *Dyer's Thistle* (1996), his fourth book of poems, where images of ancient Armenia and the tragedy of 1915 mingle with everyday life and the American dream, *June Tree: New and Selected Poems* (2004) within the same context, the effects of the past on the present. And lastly his *Ozone Journal* (2015), a collection of poems that won him the Pulitzer Prize of 2016. The publishers note reads, “The title poem of Peter Balakian's *Ozone Journal* is a sequence of fifty-four short sections, each a poem in itself, recounting the speaker's memory of excavating the bones of Armenian genocide victims in the Syrian desert with a crew of television journalists in 2009. These memories spark others—the dissolution of his marriage, his life as a young single parent in Manhattan in the nineties, visits and conversations with a cousin dying of AIDS—creating



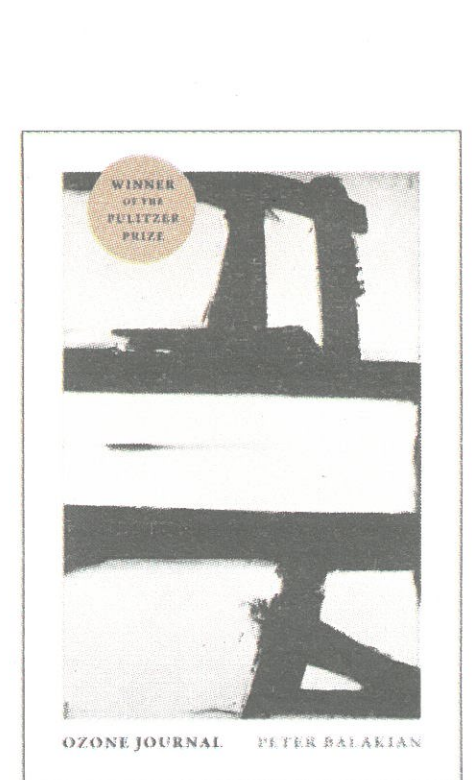
Dawn Anahid Mackeen's *The Hundred Year Walk*

as such, speaking English and knowing little about their Armenian ancestry from Palu. Once, to a question to her mother about her grandmother's childhood in Western Armenia, her mother had answered, “After her parents were killed, she hid during the day and ran at night with Uncle Benny and Aunt Alice from their home in Palu to the orphanage in Aleppo.” Dana was very young then, she did not ask any more questions, but that sentence haunted her. By the time she “thought to ask the serious questions, that generation was gone. But Dana Walrath was determined to tell their story of horrors, courage, and survival, and her strong fictional imagination helped her to concoct a



Varuzhan Vosganian's *The Book of Whispers*

its victory in survival and perpetuation.”



Peter Bakakian's the *Oxone Journal*

a montage that has the feel of history as lived experience. Bookending this sequence are shorter lyrics that span times and locations, from Nairobi to the Native American villages of New Mexico. In the dynamic, sensual language of these poems, we are reminded that the history of atrocity, trauma, and forgetting is both global and ancient; but we are reminded, too, of the beauty and richness of culture and the resilience of love.”

Siroun, the five-year-old orphan girl, the only survivor of her large family, grew up in orphanages and refugee camps, went through ups and downs of life which demanded extraordinary courage and sacrifice, until she settled in Canada. Alan Whitehorn, her half-Armenian grandson, bears witness to her life. In a poem titled “Metzmama” he writes,

All these years later,
I still feel the incredible pain,
and hear the deadly chorus’s refrain:
Never forget.

He promises never to forget, to remember and make the world remember. He fulfils his promise to this amazing matriarch of his maternal side through his academic works and artistic creations on the Armenian Genocide. I will cite a poem here, one that captures and sums up his understanding of the Armenian Genocide reflected in his scholarly and artistic output. It is called “The Verbs of Genocide.” Imagine, each word constitutes a line.

- Categorized
- Stereotyped
- Stigmatized
- Marginalized
- Disenfranchised.
- Deprived
- Victimized
- Robbed
- Ghettoized
- Deported.
- Stripped
- Raped
- Tortured
- Murdered.
- Dismembered
- Discarded
- Denied.

Forgotten?

Alishan was a third-generation survivor of the Armenian Genocide, the inheritor of his grandmother’s devastating memories, living in the grip of the nightmare of the Catastrophe. The ever-present pain that dragged his grandmother from one mental hospital to another reverberated in his literary work, painting a microcosm of a victim nation’s suffering. As an artist in pursuit of beauty in art, Alishan faced the challenge of overcoming the chaotic world of genocide for the sake of order and perceptual harmony. He was not able to solve, and no

one has, the dichotomy between the fragmentation forced upon his art as the characteristic of genocide literature and coherence as a condition of beauty in art. He was born to Armenian parents in Tehran and came to America in 1973 in pursuit of higher education. His literary creations are in English and Farsi. Armenian remained the language he coveted and was never able to attain mastery, a language of spiritual heights in the songs of Lusiné Zakaryan, the singer he worshiped. He was a universal thinker. His deep understanding of the Armenian Genocide had opened his mind and his heart into the universality of human suffering in this unjust world. He writes,

If I had hands
as big as my heart
I would take all small
and big flags of all the big
and small nations and I would
sew them with my big hands
into the biggest blanket and tent
the world has ever seen
for all her naked children –

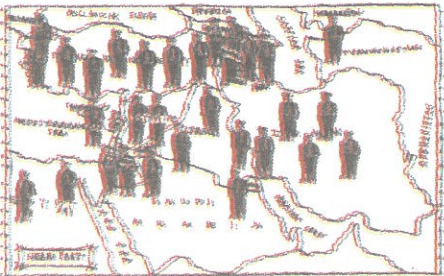
Ancestral Voices
Identity, Ethnic Roots and
a Genocide Remembered



Alan Whitehorn

Alan Witherton's Ancestral Voices: Identity, Ethnic Roots and a Genocide Remembered

Lucine Kasbarian is in constant conversation with her grandparents long gone. They died before she could know them. now their pictures hang in the cellar walls of her paternal home. In a poem “Asking for your Blessing” (2012) she pictures one such conversation. Their “penetrating eyes .../...betray the sleeplessness of tormented memory, and exhaustion from rebuilding shattered lives.” And she talks to them in Armenian “I speak the mother tongue your resolute children, my parents taught me.” She wishes they could tell her about their hometowns Dikranakert and Sebastia, about what happened to them. She speaks to them of her commitment to alleviate the burdens of today’s Armenians and “Then I ask for forgiveness for not doing more.” At the end, she seeks their approval and their blessing. She wishes to hear them say to her:



You carry our blood in your veins.
You feel our ancient world in your bones.
You live with our history.
You possess our ethic.
You dance and sing authentically.
You persist in spite of exile.
You know our sufferings.
You speak for us.
You won't forsake us.
You have our blessing.
You do us justice.
You are Western Armenia.

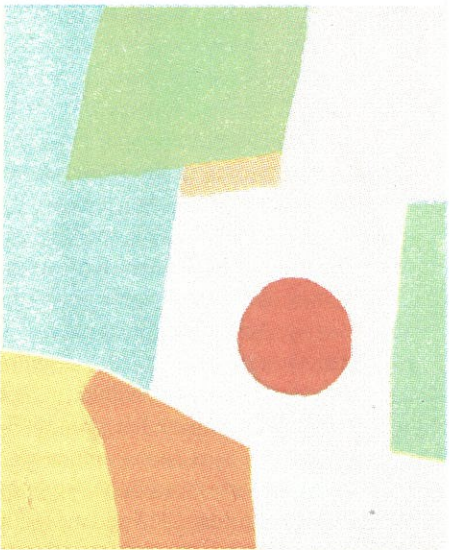
Lucine Kasbarian is a political cartoonist. Her poignant images sometimes with extensive texts, portray the Turkish-Armenian relationship especially the present stance of Turkish denial. Her exhibition titled “Perspectives from Exile” and the accompanying text of her lecture was published in Երկրպագութիւն (translated as “Kissing the Ground”) (2015). Andranik Vartanian’s Armenian memoir of his ordeal during the Genocide inspires his granddaughter Susan Barba’s narrative poem, titled “Andranik.” The poem is shaped like a question and answer. Susan asks grandpa Andranik, papa, and he spills out his recollections of his escape with his father, then the Kurds finding them and killing his father. ... His beautiful sister kidnapped and raped after which the poor victim ran away and committed suicide throwing herself in the raging river And then his own horrible experience and how the Turks made him and his best friend Torkom shoot each other with two guns only one of which was loaded. Susan has kept Andraik’s responses as it was expressed, fragmented, not in a proper English, authentic to his speech, clearly showing distress, agony and the pangs of the revisiting of the unforgettable and tormenting memories. Unlike other poems in this collection, “Andranik” tells a story, records history. In an article in PSA (Poetry Society of America, she explains, “This was the only story I ever felt compelled to tell, the story I grew up hearing throughout my childhood, the story of my grandfather’s survival of the Armenian Genocide.” Susan Barba is a new name and her poetry collected in the volume, *Fair Sun* (2017) is the testimony of this half-Armenian young poet’s deep consciousness of her Armenian ancestry. She is an American poetess with modern outlook, a superb diction and a colorful poetic imagination when it comes to poems on human relationships and relationship to the world and to nature, with a deep knowledge of world cultures, languages, and ideas.

Ana Arzoumanian, born in Buenos Aires, is a young genocide scholar, a lawyer, a human rights defender and a poet.

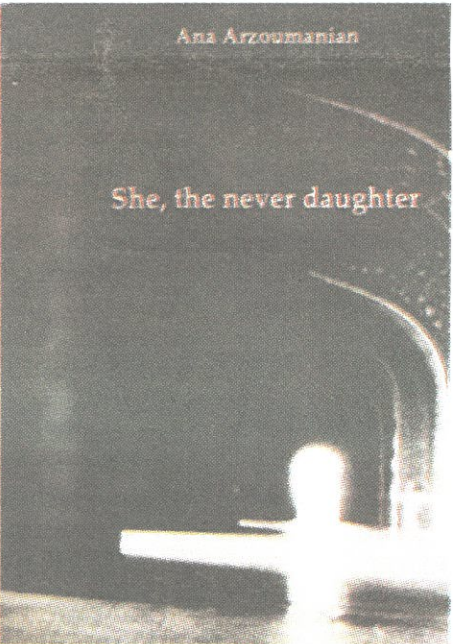
In her artistic creations lives her grandmother a tattered, defiled survivor of the Armenian Genocide. *El ahogadero* (The Drowning - On the bodies, on the effects of the genocide in the daily becoming, 2002) is one of her books and *She, the never daughter* (2010), an English translation of a chapter from that book, is a long poem of twenty segments in which the author becomes the voice of her grandmother and in striking images and a graphic language tells the ghastly story of her rape by the murderers, the impregnation, the childbirth. It takes courage to endure all this unspeakable ordeal, to survive, albeit maimed and muted, and entrust the ghastly memories to the granddaughter for the world to know.

Arto Vaun is a young Armenian poet, born and raised in Watertown, Massachusetts. He

FAIR SUN
POEMS SUSAN BARBA



Susan Barba's Fair Sun



Ana Arzoumanian's She, the never daughter

repatriated to Armenia years ago and currently teaches at the American University of Armenia. His first book of poetry *Capilarity* (2009), is a portrayal of his life in the family of immigrants, originally, survivors of the Genocide, therefore, his life and upbringing is within the context of the trauma of the past.

The collection shows a sort of a drive “to break out of historical circumstances and belong to society and the world.”

As the title of the collection also suggests, it is the tension between two cultures or the tension of duality of identity.

In the poem “Atlas Vertebra” Vaun delineates the route of dispersion his family and all the nation have experienced: “Our insides, my family, are made of crumbled bits/Of atlases umber Anatolian....” And farther down,

Look at the places we find
ourselves while losing
Each fiber of what we

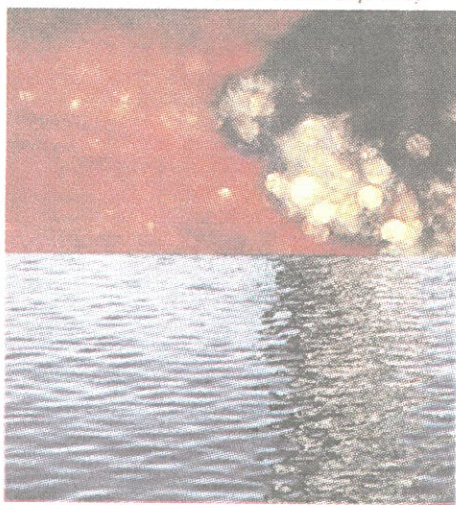
hoped would emerge,

From the waters of our years air-thin flakes
Is all I can imagine it as

Fools are we and brave as red mud
The ache of walking forward is the glow
Of the moons we have swallowed whole
Just to work in textile factories and gas stations
Just to say this is something now
This is something

Arto Vaun provides a typical case when it comes to the choice of language in artistic expression. He has been brought up bilingual, fluent in both English and Armenian, but he prefers to write in English because he believes he does not have the poetic mastery in Armenian. He does not know the world of Armenian poetry as much as he is well versed in American and British and familiar with prominent names in the field. “The Armenian Poet Caught between Languages and Worlds” the paper he presented at the conference in Istanbul, titled “Critical Approaches to Armenian Identity in the 21st Century: Vulnerability, Resilience and Transformation,” openly tackled this issue (incidentally, I was chairing the panel). He began by stating that “Genocide is, in many ways, the ultimate obsession for those it affects. It sucks everything else into its vacuum of helplessness, trauma, and neurosis. In poetry, the after-effects of genocide become the poets given.” He considered Armenian poets of the 21st century with this description, burdened but able to yield “new ways of understanding what it means to be Armenian and transnational, with one foot in the past, but leaning toward the future.”

While in Armenia, he has initiated a literary journal called *Locomotive*. The journal was launched on December 2016 and according to him “*Locomotive* is the first literary journal of its kind in Armenia and the region. Primarily non-Armenian writers are represented in its

ARTO VAUN *Capillarity*Arto Vaun's *Capillarity*

Armenian poets penetrate with their tales of suffering and cries of justice for the nation.

The family story in dramaturgy

The family stories inspire theatrical pieces, with inherent immediate impact, by the third generation. Leonardo Alishan's "The Red Scarf" (2000), the only play he wrote, flows like poetry and is about his grandmother's ordeal in 1915, staged in 1978, with the grandmother in her deathbed in a hospital. The play is the fictionalized reflection of Alishan's own turbulent life in the shadow of the grandmother's harrowing experience. Alishan adopted the form of ancient Greek tragedy, a chorus on stage to begin:

... Could we be the generations,
not just ours, but all the nations.
Could we speak for all the dead
... those who lived and begged for bread;
those with bedrooms filled with ghosts,
and molded skulls on new bed posts?
Let us stay and let us see
If any of them can be free.

"Beast on the Moon" by Richard Kalinosky offers an insight, powerful and emotional, into the struggle of young survivors of the Genocide to begin a new life in the New World, to try to cure themselves of the psychological scars of their traumatic experience of the past. An impossible effort resulting in day to day tragedy. The play has been translated into many languages including Turkish and staged in several countries in the last two decades.

"Red Dog Howls" is another powerful play written by Alex Dinelaris, whose Armenian grandmother confided to him the horrible scenes she, as an eight-year-old child, had witnessed during the Genocide. Alex was only eight at the time. The backdrop of the play is of course the Genocide and its aftermath with pernicious effects on the peace and wellbeing of families in whose makeup there is a dark secret detrimental if revealed.

Adriana Sevahn Nichols' grandfather was from Erzinga. He was sent to America for safe keeping. The next year his entire family was massacred. But Adriana grew up aloof and indifferent toward his grandfather's life story. A successful playwright, she was challenged by Armenian women during a conference to write something on Armenians. She promised she would. "Moon over Erzinga" is the piece she wrote and staged in 2011 as the fulfillment of that promise.

Joyce Van Dyke built her play on the life story of her grandmother and her best friend to show their pain and suffering and their heroic survival in "Deported/a dream play." Using the possibilities of a dream play, she was able to "crystallize a complicated history in visual images on stage," and make a complex representation beyond the linear time and space. It was first performed in 2012.

Judith Boyajian Strang-Waldau's "Women of Ararat" was her homage to the Centennial. Judith had the privilege of growing up with a great-grandmother and two grandmothers, survivors from Mersin. It is their story and their life in the New World that is told through the lens of a modern great-granddaughter.

In a musical called "I am Alive (2016)," Denise Gentilini, co-author and co-composer, portrays the story of the survival of two orphans Kourken and Malvine who fell in love with each other in a refugee camp in Greece. They are Denise's grandparents. Denise Gentilini had previously made a documentary, "The Handjian Story: A Road Less Traveled," about her grandparents' ordeal during the Genocide, and the musical is based on that documentary. "Embarking on this project was almost a calling," she writes, "a deep need to tell a story that was so much a part of my childhood."

Voices from the Middle East

Just a quick glance and a brief observation.

Based on my readings, I would say, the favorite genre is poetry, anthologies and collections of poems by an individual poet, speak of the aspiration for universal values, thoughts, and ideas. The struggle to find one's true identity or to find a way to live in the complexity of dual identity is less pronounced or not at all. Then, Syria and Lebanon being the refuge of survivors of the Armenian Genocide, the third generation is very likely to have a genocide survivor for a

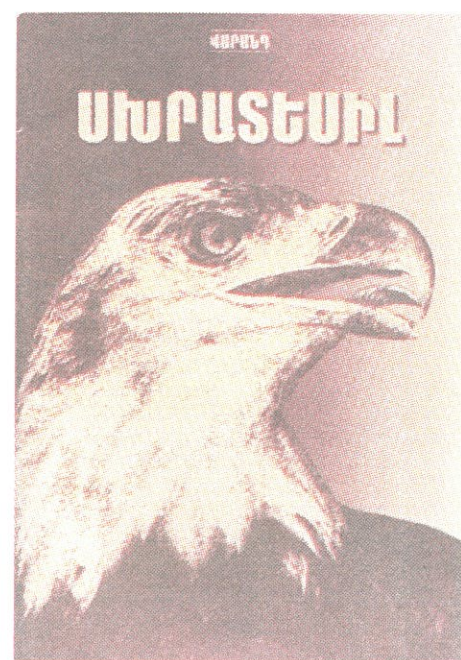
grandparent. The sweet childhood memories thus are intertwined with the inherited memory of the massacres and deportation. Harout Vartanian (born in 1973 in Aleppo) is one such voices who sings the abstract, the advances of the digital world, who expresses rage against "Po! Pot the murderer" and atrocities in Kosovo, but is deeply aware of his own roots. The stories his grandmother Siranush "who left her doll in Aintab," his grandfather Artin of Aintab

pages. These writers will be connected to Armenia and their works will be presented for international recognition from Armenia." The inaugural issue showcases the works of award-winning authors from the United States, Great Britain and Europe. His aim is to open up a door toward trends and understandings of international poetry and launch a passageway for Armenians into that world.

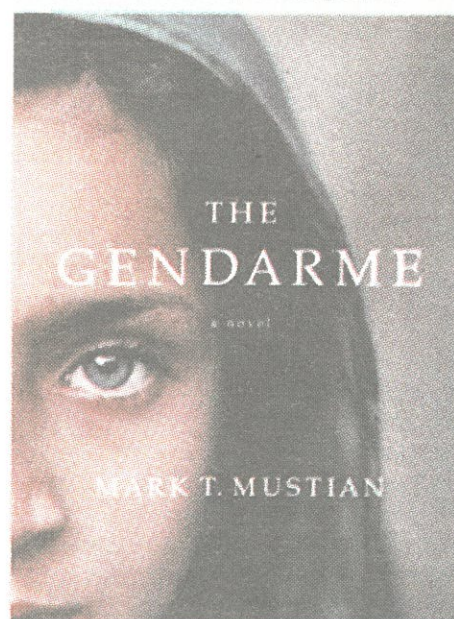
Modernism and post-modernism in poetry has influenced and conscripted Armenian poets regardless of the language they write in. And I mean true modernism, progressing with the time, and not replicating it with strange formal, physical, and visual shapes and appearances. The trend is to oppose conservatism in poetry and keep up with the evolution and development of international poetry. And it is in this international arena that talented

whose "memory lives forever in his heart." (*Yerankiun arev*, The Triangle Sun, 2002). He knows the sad stories of Turkish sword, the suffering in the desert. In a poem simply titled *Tzare* (The tree), he symbolizes the Armenian Genocide with a pomegranate tree laden with fruit, whose blood red seeds are spilling, the Turk devours the fruit and uproots the tree. Armenians have walked barefoot for such long time in the desert. But then, there is the pomegranate bush, all green. Then, there is the giant green pomegranate tree. Then, there is the Hayastan the forest of giant fruit trees.

Varand is a well-known poet in Iran who began to write poetry in an early age to express his yearning for the homeland he has never seen and his anger against those who usurped his ancestral land and brought on the Calamity. His grandparents are from Erzurum, survivors of the Genocide with tragic stories of loss. He published a series of poems on the theme of Genocide, titled *Skhratesil* (With the look of the brave) in 2005 dedicated to the 90th anniversary of the Genocide, with a vision of the past glories, the titans of Armenian history, the invasion of the barbaric tribes,

Varand's *Skhratesil*

subjugation, slaughter, death and resurrection, survival. In a short untitled poem, accompanying the biography of his grandparents and their life story full of misery and misfortune in the aftermath of the Genocide (2014), Varand writes,

Mark Mustian's *The Gendarme*

Նախնիներին ցար տարա՛յ
մանկութիւնից ի՛մ մէջինն՝
Եւ այրուելուց ժառանգել ի՛մ
Ո՛չ թէ մոխիր,
Այլ ջերմութիւն կրակի

(My people's suffering/has bent my back for hundred years/I carried the pain of my ancestors on my back/...../From burning I inherited/Not the ashes/But the warmth of the fire.)

Other names of Iranian Armenians whose poetry is marked by memories of the Genocide, Nunik Darbinian, granddaughter of a Genocide survivor, Ayida Mousakhanian, with no apparent lineage of ancestry in Western Armenia.

Without an ancestral lineage to the Catastrophe

The effects of the Armenian Genocide spread not only vertically, that is from a survivor to the offspring and the next and the next generation, but also horizontally. People with the same ethnic origin can share traditions, culture, history, and of course identity. Common history, an important component of ethnic identity, in the case of Armenians has the Genocide at its core. Diana Der-Hovannessian writes,

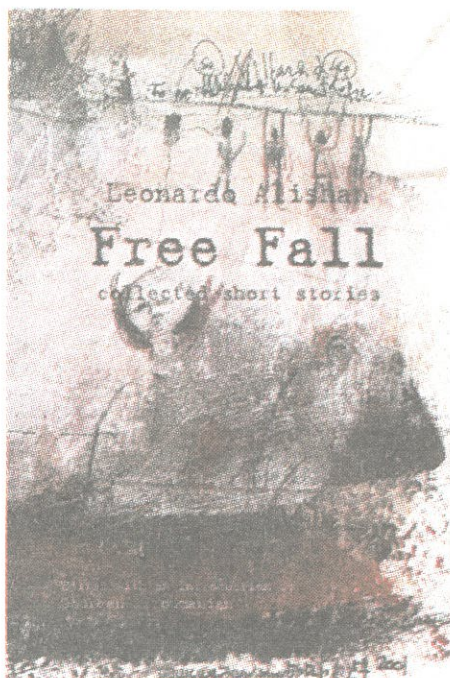
...even without a single
relative who lived to march,
lived past the march.
We are children of Der Zor.

My own academic scholarship is an example.

Recently, I came across a novel on the Armenian Genocide, *The Gendarme* (2010), positively reviewed in *New York Times*. The author Mark Mustian's ancestors had never been a part of the tragedy, and Mark grew up to become a successful writer knowing nothing about Armenian history and the Genocide. One day, someone asked him if he had read Peter Balakian's *Black Dog of Fate*. He had not, so he read it. That was the beginning of his years-long and difficult journey of writing a novel that portrays the deportations, the suffering of the Armenian people, and the brutality of the perpetrators, a journey that took him to Turkey to experience the routes of deportation and the hardship involved.

Mark Aren (Կարէն Կարապետեան) lives in Moscow. His novel «Այնտեղ ուր ծաղկում են վայրի վարդեր, անատոլիական պատմութիւն» (Where wild roses grow, an Anatolian story) is a love story between an Armenian boy, a third generation survivor living in Germany, and a German girl whose mother he discovers is Turkish. The tension builds up when the girl's grandfather, a fanatic Turk, a member of the Gray Wolves" and an Armenian hater finds out that his parents were Armenians, victims of the Genocide, which of course proves to be a mistake after all, a mistake that is not revealed to the players of this enfolding enigma. The novel ends in uncertainty. The conflicts, the twists and turns of the plot remain tangled up with no prospect of any solution in sight. Is the author doing this on purpose, suggesting the complexity of the Turkish reception of the tragedy of the past and the impossibility of Turkish-Armenian reconciliation? Or maybe he faces incapacitation at the end and gives up without being able to collect the loose ends and wrapup. The novel was published in Russian and Armenian and later translated into many language including Turkish.

Meliné Toumani and her book, *There Was and There Was Not: A Journey Through Hate and Possibility in Turkey, Armenia, and Beyond*, falls under this category. Toumani is an Iranian Armenian whose exposure to Armenian nationalist youth organization and members of that organization who in her words are "obsessed" with Genocide, turned her off and drove her to write a controversial book that was strongly criticized for exaggerations and inaccuracies;

Leonardo Alishan's *Free Fall*

Mark Arenis's *Vayn Varter* (Wild Roses)

alarmed by the so-called hardliner's insisting demands from Turkey and shouting slogans in the streets.

Indeed, the accessibility of Turkey in the last couple of decades has offered an opportunity for Armenians to come with physical contact with their roots, a search for ancestral towns, villages, even homes. Some call these Armenian group and individual visits to Turkey, a pilgrimage.

A pilgrimage to the ancestral lands, or a fact-finding mission. A physical confrontation with the Genocide

It may sound implausible, but visits to Turkey generate a materialization or concretization of the inherited but imaginary sense of belonging, a face to face encounter with the Armenian component of one's identity. The trip usually begins with apprehension, even reluctance, but the outcome one way or another is always tangible and effective.

Ellen Sarkissian Chesnut travelled to Turkey, where her father had lived or passed through as a refugee. She needed information about his village, the people, the victims and their experience in order to understand and construct a physical and historical context for her story.

Herand Markarian took the trip to trace the route his father and thousands of others had taken. And at every step of the way, he experienced a close encounter with the denial of the Genocide. Impressions and emotions pour out in «Բարձալն Պատարագ» *Liturgy Sound of Stones* (1998), a bilingual collection of prose and poetry. "A deep, immense and eroding pain tortures me.... I fluctuate between what I have dreamt and what I now see. I am shaken, perplexed, turned inside-out" (p. 173). He grapples with his feelings, trying to define them, "Is it Longing? Demands? Anger? Vengeance? Bitterness? Inability? Injustice?" (p. 17) he cannot figure out.

Arpiné Konyalian Grenier took a trip to her father's Konya to experience the culture of her ancestry. She was even ready to obliterate the category of nationalities and make humanity her nation. She felt the need to connect for the sake of "reflection," and "harmony." She returned transformed. Another cultural connectivity, another component added to her cultural identity resulting in a conclusion, "I am culturally un-locatable.... I developed, moving from unknowingly being Armenian Turkish to knowingly becoming American, Armenianly." ("A Place in the Sun, in Turkey, Malgre Sangre," 2009).

Alicia Ghiragossian seeks to find herself and her identity in the land of her forefathers. In a poem, titled "Fatherland," she writes,

I would like to touch that land
to feel my past
in its fragrance
and reclaim my essence.

Or, in "To be an Armenian," she
confesses to her splintered

We exist here and now but just in halves
as we also belong there
where old voices are
still haunting us.
("To Be an Armenian" 1998)

Before writing her magical novel, *Like Water on Stone*, Dana Walrath traveled to Turkey, to find his great grandfather's mill in Palu. And she did. Her story began from that painful encounter, by the ancestral water mill, listening to the sound of dripping water and the young, "gracious" hostess serving tea and expressing ignorance about previous owners.

Playwright Judith Boyajian Strang-Waldau, the author of "Women of Ararat" too travelled to Turkey, to Mersin where her grandmothers had lived, but with a very different mission. She had copies of family photographs with her to bury in there. But the Mersin her grandmothers had described had changed drastically, and the cemetery was not the place she wanted to leave her family vestiges. So, she took the photographs to the beach, her grandmothers boasted about and entrusted them to the waves of the Mediterranean Sea.

Ani Hovannisian Kevorkian accompanied by his father, Prof. Richard Hovannisian, visited the rubbles of Bazmashen, Kharbert, the village of her grandfather, Kaspar Hovannisian, Grandmother Siroon's Kesserig in Kharbert, grandpa Hovakim's Dzitogh in Erzeroom, and grandma Chnkouhi's Ordu on the shores of Black Sea. That was in 2012, her first journey to the land of stories she was brought up with, "to the real-life remains of our age-old history that

it did not sit well with even the most conformist Armenians and did not even satisfy the Turks. Christopher Atamian, a reviewer of her book writes, "That her book was published in 2015 seems particularly insensitive, as if she were trying to rub salt in the wounds of collective Armenian memory."

The desire to sound different, to say something contradicting the aims and beliefs of the majority was a misleading trend right around 2015, as were irresponsible, artless statements that harmed the development of a culturally and politically sound direction toward the solution of the Armenian Cause. Misleading is also the lure of Turkey as a cultured, modern, and hospitable

place to visit and the possibility of reconciliation propagated by the 3rd parties for the sake of

peace and less headache in the region. Falling in the trap are those who cannot reconcile with their own past, who are weary of the transgenerational pain and are frustrated or even

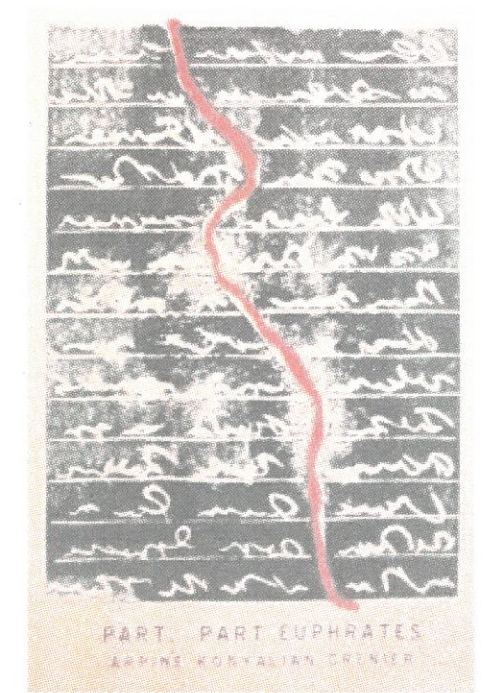
my father and mother have breathed into us, since, well, ever since I can remember." Ani pours her sentiments, her observations and impression in a long piece, which she titles "Uncovering Traces."

She returned with a stronger determination to remember and to make sure that the memories will perpetuate and persist in generations to come. She turned the shots and the footage she brought back into an well-made documentary to eternalize the traces she uncovered.

Before writing her play on life and loss in Erzinga, Adriana Sevahn Nichols traveled there to see the place her grandfather grew up and the infamous bridge of Kemagh to sense the atrocities that had happened to the people of Erzinga on that bridge.

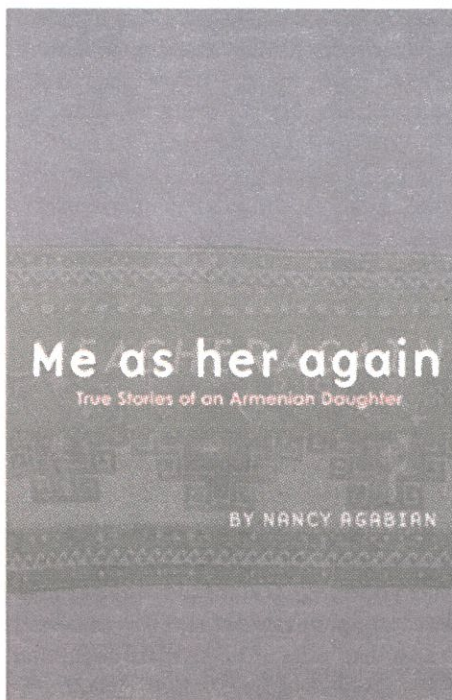
Armenian traditions and mores as well as the nature and atmosphere of Sasun could not come alive so convincingly in *As the Poppies Bloom*, if Maral Boyadjian did not travel to the place to personally experience and come into contact with what remained.

What does Nancy Kricorian, poet and novelist, hope to find? Her paternal grandmother

Arpine Konyalian Grenier's *Part, Part Euphrates*

and her brother, young children at the time, were the only survivors of their large family driven out of Mersin in 1915. In 1916, they were in a camp with thousands of orphans like them in Ras-al-Ain. "We are searching for ghosts, and we ourselves are ghosts come to haunt this land," she writes (*Armenian Weekly*, Nov. 2014). She was there to witness the eradication of the traces of Armenian presence in Turkish towns and villages, toward their existence she had turned a cold shoulder. "It wasn't after my grandmother died, however, that I even bothered to look for these towns on a map." Every 'pilgrim' in their bus has a story about the village or the town their ancestors lived, sad stories of loss, affecting deeper in view of the barren land or a mosque, or a Turkish house they witness instead.

Most often, this so called pilgrimage to Turkey is in pursuit of a closure, a reconciliation. It is quite clear though that the sight of ruined Armenian towns and villages and vestiges of Armenian culture, churches deliberately destroyed or turned into stables, or mosques

Nancy Agabian's *Me As Her Again*

and museums at best, the ignorance/denial of the locals about the Armenian presence ever on that land do not attenuate the pain of the memories. More often than not the effect is the reverse.

In quest of one's own identity

Rejection of the family imposed identity and quest for an independent one begins when the shadow of Genocide or the familial or collective effect of the Genocide sets one apart from the world, in the society, in the workplace, at school.

During our conference in Istanbul, Nareg Seferian, born in New Delhi, India and now a professor at the American University of Armenia, began his discussion of the subject saying that "The United States offers a very interesting context to explore issues of identity at multiple levels. It is a diverse society that promotes a sense of citizenship while at the same time largely allowing for the practices of pre-immigration cultures. The Armenian-American story is fascinating that way." I will capitalize on that idea in my discussion which begins with a question: how do you define your identity? There is no doubt that even in this globalized world, one is always tempted to find out about one's roots. What do you feel yourself to be? An Armenian or a hyphenated one, American-Armenian, Iranian-Armenian, and so on?

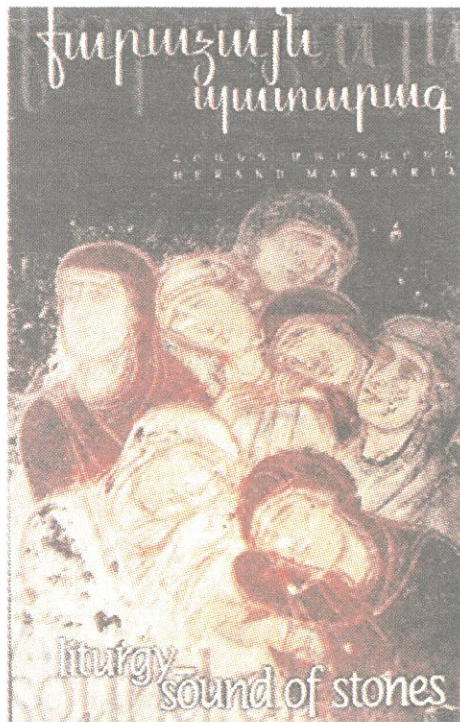
Grappled with this soul-searching dilemma Diana Der-Hovanessian tried to ignore the duality of her identity, the two voices in conflict, and think of herself as a woman brought up in New England with all the attributes of an educated American lady. And this, despite her grandparents' ever-present stories of blood and tears, always a part of her subconscious. Responding to a query from D. M. Thomas, she writes,

No. Most of the time, even as you, I forget labels.
Unless you cut me.
Then I look at the blood.
It speaks in Armenian. ("Two Voices," 1998)

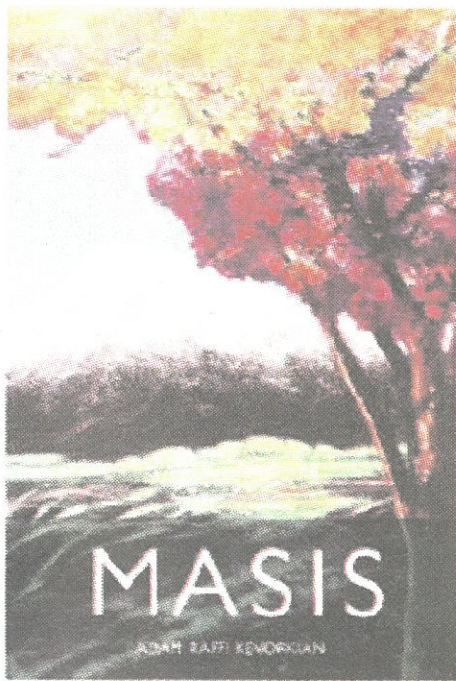
Sometimes the clash between the two voices is unbearable, a source of pain and guilt, the pressure of the past that will not let her live her present. Who is she? Where to is her sense of belonging? She is profoundly conscious of this element in her identity and at the same time aware of the present environment, no matter how much of the past is also present. This is just an example of the 1990s America. The dilemma of the duality of one's identity has continued on, and examples are many. Of course, Michael Arlen's *Passage to Ararat* (1975), is the classic example of this theme. Then the newer ones, Theodore Kharpertian, *Hagop: An Armenian Genocide Survivor's Journey to Freedom*. (2003), Hrant Khatchaturian, *The way it Turned out* (2012), and others.

Janine Altounian knew nothing about her parents' past but she knew that she "was living in a heavy atmosphere, very serious and overly crowded, where you sensed the proximity of this huge disaster which 'they' had certainly escaped but which touched me and kept me apart from the world I encountered 'outside,' at school." ("Parcours d'un écrit de survivant," in *Mémoires des génocide arménien: Héritage traumatique et travail analytique*, 2009, p. 115.)

Nancy Agabian's *Me as her Again, True Stories of an Armenian Daughter* (2008), is this woman's search for her own identity in the conundrum of the Armenian American reality, liberating herself from being the replica of her mother. That time had passed. Her mother and grandmother "had tried to find a way to be themselves at a time when Armenians were

Herand Markarian's *Liturgy Sound of Stones*

spatiotemporal sense of belonging:

Adam Raffi Kevorkian's *Masis*

exterminated and women were oppressed” (p. 242). But that falls within the realm of personal identity, she as a teenager, then a woman and the possibilities and opportunities the liberal American society can offer, free to love and make out with anyone, anywhere, even free to make sexual preferences and chose your sexual orientation. She has found her identity as bisexual (111). By the way, in the liberal societies in the West, it has become a trend among young Armenians to explore their sexual preference and declare themselves as queer. They consider this as a strong component of their identity, mind you, not personality, and in many cases, it comes alongside their accentuated ethnic identity, their active Armenianness. As a typical example of that category, Nancy Agabian’s consciousness of being an Armenian, having ancestors who survived Turkish atrocities and took refuge in America was still nebulous or rather she saw herself rejected, because she knew that “any divergence from the traditions of family and church (such as marrying a non-Armenian or

being gay) was seen as disunity threatening the survival of the entire culture” (148).

She had grown up free of the burden of the past. Her parents chose not to share the family stories of the Old Country. Her first encounter with a Turk was in elementary school a Turkish classmate whom she grew to like and become best friends. She was able to ward off the fear from Turks, nested in her soul with repeating statements around her “You know what Turks did to us?” But that Turkish girl was so nice and timid with family customs so much like hers (50). Through this friendship she had learned to be more tolerant and understanding about the Turkish stand and ordinary Turkish men and women carriers of that stand. She was uncomfortable with the demonstrations and demands of reparation beyond the recognition, and was relieved that the Armenian Assembly of America did not share that goal either.

Agabian was an artist, performing her own poems, shocking her audience, mostly Armenians, with her explicit sexual references and metaphors. Her later association with Armenians in Los Angeles and Glendale brought her to realize that her being Armenian is only through her grandmother. She had to keep apologizing here and there for not speaking Armenian. That’s how much Armenian she was. Now, in this stage of her life, engaged in a love affair with a Latvian American man but ready to break up with this one too like many before him, suddenly comes an invitation from her Aunt to accompany her to Turkey. Nancy’s aunt had decided to visit Istanos (now Chimenyence), her mother’s village in Sebastia and wanted Nancy to accompany her. They were traveling with a group of Armenians with the same interest of searching for their ancestral homes. Nancy’s aunt was hoping to find her mother’s paternal house and the family bible in which the story of the entire clan was recorded. Nancy had a different purpose: “I hoped going to my grandmother’s village, to stand on the dry land whence my blood evolved, would somehow give me a sense of clarity, of completeness” (144). The passage describing her discovery of an Islamized relative of her grandmother’s and his family and their interaction without understanding each other’s language is impressive. “I’d come here to stand on the land, but found that living, breathing people were more important” (159). That was the morning of September 8, 1998.

Her interest enflamed after her trip to Turkey. She had returned to her roots late. She delved into research in Armenian history and got a copy of the interview of her grandmother way back as a part of the Armenian Assembly’s oral history project. And the family story of pain, suffering, death, and survival enfolded in front of her mind’s eyes. Then, learning about the testimonies of other survivors, she realized, “grandmother’s experience became less singular and I suddenly realized the immensity of the Armenian genocide” (167). It had completely reversed her view of the Armenian struggle to maintain their language and heritage. She was immersed in the history of the Genocide and well aware of her own family history, “Now, it was time for me to mourn, like [Zabel] Yessayan weeping with the orphans, in lineage and empathy” (172). Chapter 15 of her book, titled “These Words are being Woven,” is her own version of her grandmother’s story who wanted so much to find a listening ear to speak to, because every time she tried to recount a tragic moment of her past during the death-march, her daughters would cut her, “Oh, Ma, I don’t want to hear it right now” (185). How typical of the second generation’s response. Now her granddaughter was fulfilling her wish addressed to the world to know.

Nothing is solved though. Nancy Agabian is still “trying to balance my individuality and my need for collective identity” (242). It is more than coincidence, however, rather an ingenuity on her part to title her autobiography *Me as Her Again*, to sound like a new word she learned in Armenian *Mee-ah-ser-a-gahn*, meaning gay (198), so close to her own identity.

In a complex poem “Where the Lone Clarity?” Susan Barba is in search of her “shadow” she left somewhere or another and kept going, the shadow of her childhood self with a strong footing in Armenianness bolstered by her Armenian grandfather’s dire experience and constant reminding of it. The past comes alive in the scene of her grandparents, survivors of the Genocide and new immigrants in the U.S., struggling, being abused, and still hopeful. But her present is engulfed in uncertainty. She is oscillating in the world of oppositions, where the system of “New Economy” haughtily strives to efface ethics, humanitarianism and friendship, and where “The moon is so bright and the waters luciferous.” What is certain, though, is that nothing remains the same in the changing world/weather she walks “out into.”

Nancy Kricorian, accomplished poet and writer, contemplates the loss of Armenian language and identity. And that is happening in her family. She contributed to that loss ignoring her grandmother’s pleas to speak Armenian. She writes,

.... My grandmother sang songs to me
in Turkish, a language she never could
forgive.

From generation to generation, fearing
the loss of language and identity
how

do we know who we are? What have I
to pass on more than tragedy, possibly
a name?

Victimhood is not a self. Of more than
Suffering was this language made
To speak. (RAFT, vol. 12, 1998-1999)

I will end this chapter of the quest for identity with a typical observation Vahe Oshagan made, which still holds true, in his Journal *Raft*, in 1990 (vol. 4). “For centuries, to be an Armenian has meant being torn by two opposing tendencies—one of escape, the other return. Those who have resolved this conflict between the centrifugal and the centripetal forces have survived as Armenians.” I want to add that entertaining this theme of the duality of identity is a sign of having found the place to stand strong, unharmed and intact between these opposing forces.

The factor of Armenia

The reality of Armenia and its accessibility, albeit only in the eastern corner of Armenian historic homeland, and therefore, not including the land to which a great majority of Diasporan Armenians attached some sort of sense of belonging, has introduced a significant shift in the understanding of identity and sense of belonging. This is an important factor for the new generation both in the shaping of their identity and in terms of developing relationships with the locals, becoming the carriers of the ideas and concerns of the Western world: the Armenian Diaspora inspiring and being inspired.

The second generation basically lost the opportunity of imbibing from that genuine source of strength and inspiration, because of the Soviet regime and its iron curtain policies. But for the younger generation, Armenia is that source to inspire national pride, a pleasant and not annoying sense of belonging. It is a positive factor in the shaping and reshaping of the Armenian ethnocultural identity.

However, paradoxically, Adam Raffi Kevorkian’s novel *Masis* (2013) comes to mind. The grandson of survivors of Genocide from Moush, depicts his protagonist, Arin Karian’s struggle to adapt to the changes present day Armenia can bring in the life of a young repatriate. He remains the outsider deeply rooted in his ancestral past.

Lalai Manjikian, the granddaughter of survivors of the Genocide, attempts to find an answer to the question “where is home,”

“As Armenians living in the Diaspora, we are faced with multiple attachments to people and places around the world. Our condition is a complex reality, as we try to negotiate a sense of belonging to ancestral homes our grandparents were forced to leave; to birthplaces in the Middle East, such as Syria and Lebanon, that gave refuge to survivors to the Armenian genocide; to the lands of promise in North America; to current day Armenia; and to various cities across the world where Armenians maintain communities.... This idea of home is not so much an actual location but a sentiment we may experience in more than one location, always accompanied with a tinge of uneasiness, as our identities are far from being fixed and stagnant realities.”

This thought takes us to another level of understanding of the Diaporan literature and the theme of exile reverberating from the early post-genocide era to the present.

The Theme of Exile

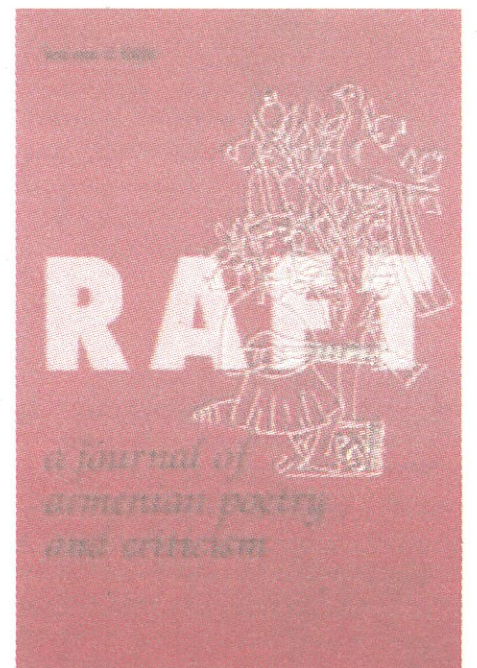
It was quite natural for survivor/refugees of the Genocide to view the host countries that offered safe shelter to them as exiles. The umbilical cords were not severed. The impossible return to their homeland, their birthplaces still caressed their souls. Exile, Genocide, Trauma were the major components of their being, their heritage. But how can a young person, even as a second generation born in the Diaspora, that is the third generation survivor of the Genocide, have this sensation of being in exile?

Shooshig Dasnabedian, born in Beirut lives in the shadow of the memories of her grandparents and longs for the homeland they were driven out of. She embraces the opportunity to study in Armenia, but the feeling of an exile would not let go. “in the homeland yet once more in exile.” She is hesitant, unwilling to express this tormenting feeling, “ought I speak out but not yet am I and never was/a poetess of exile, preferring silence more...” (RAFT, 5, 1991).

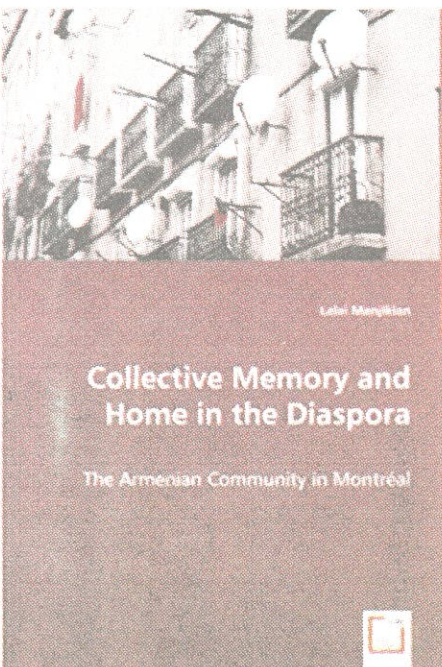
Driven away from their homeland, those who survived the Genocide were scattered in four corners of the world, sometimes from a place to another. Lena Maranian Adishian’s grandmother would at times say that she didn’t know where she belonged. She lived in so many places in her life, that it was hard to call one place ‘home.’” So Adishian, co-author and co-curator of the “100 Years and Hundred Facts” project, thought that if her grandmother thought that way, then there must be many more like her and especially one hundred years after. She viewed her grandmother as a little piece of Armenia and she sees many many little pieces of Armenia scattered around the globe. And these little pieces “still care and are more eager to learn about their heritage.” The project was intended to educate to inspire knowledge and pride of being Armenian, to celebrate survival and look proudly to the future with the knowledge of the past, and never forget. Her co- author, Nareg Seferian, also mentioned before, is another Diasporan Armenian artist-poet with grandparents who survived the Genocide and treaded the world to finally settle in New Delhi, India. The book they published, *Impact of an Ancient Nation, 100 Years and Hundred Facts* (2016) is the printed form of the online project that ran from April 24, 2014 to April 24, 2015. Significantly, Fact #1 in this project is on the Genocide, “The Armenian Genocide began on the 24th of April, 1915. Fact # 100 is also on the Genocide “...and the Armenian people continue to remember and to seek justice.” Of course they have added 5 more facts “to symbolize that the Armenian experience can never be fully encompassed...”

The fading of the effects past the immediate transmission

The children of the survivors are affected, and the effects are transmitted in various ways including but not limited to family stories or the silence and the secrets kept. It is also proven that the transmission can be genetic. I have discussed that method of transmission in my latest book. My point here is that the third generations no matter how conscious of the past do not suffer from the immediate effects as the second generation has. The most explicit of these effects is the recurring nightmare, seeing himself or herself trapped within the same disastrous milieu as the parent long time ago. We see testimonies of this kind of delirium in Lorne Shirinian, Diana Der-Hovannessian, Alicia Ghiraghossian, and among Hacop Karapents’



Raft A Journal of Armenian Poetry and Criticism was started by Vahe Oshagan



Lalai Manjikian's *Collective Memory and Home in the Diaspora*

Survivor, an account of her grandmother's ordeal through the Khoynik massacres, remembers that under the spell of her grandmother's stories of the carnage, during her childhood, whenever she came down with a high fever she would become delirious and in that state she would see Turkish soldiers killing men and women, mothers running to save their children, and she would cry out for help.

Leonardo Alishan remained pathologically stranded in the grip of the effects of the Genocide and under the spell of his grandmother's traumatic experience during that period. A third-generation Iranian-Armenian-American writer, Alishan was never able to transcend, or rather he never tried to transcend the tragedy that was his grandmother's, the tragedy that became his fate at the age of nine. His strongest literary creations are about his "Granny" and "bearing witness to her agony." He shares her agony; he is part of it: "I try to be a spectator of that tragedy which culminated in a London hospital room in 1978 where Granny saw Turkish horsemen around her bed before she died. But, alas, I am not the spectator. I am a character caught in that play which never, never, never reaches its equilibrium."

There may be other examples of such grip of the past, but overall, according to my observation, the immediate effect is fading; the transmitted memory of the Genocide does not impose the heavy and incapacitating burden of nightmarish terror and hate. Lucine Kasbarian asks the question, "But how long will the greater burden persist? Is it better to keep silent and spare our children this agony, or to boldly expose them to our treasured and tragic history?" No, with the survivor generation gone, the unbearable burden will not persist with the same intensity, but I believe, it will transform into a conscious and rational aspiration introduced in various ways in the artistic expressions of generations to come.

Before concluding this presentation, I'd like to briefly touch upon the influence of literary criticism on the direction that the new responses take.

characters.

I have rare examples of this phenomenon occurring in the later generations, and Lucine Kasbarian, also mentioned before, is one. She is an author of children's books, a journalist, and a political cartoonist, and her piece that appeared in *Kalyani Woman's magazine* in October, 2012 is titled "Hand-me down Genocide - Live in Technicolor." She writes about her grandmother's bedtime stories of harrowing scenes of massacres and deportations that she went through and survived. And these scenes in various versions now and then appear in Lucine's dreams. She is the victim and Turks are the predators. "These dreams highlight that which is unresolved [and] continue[s] to hover over us despite any wishes to live untroubled lives in the present," she explains. Significantly, she treats this legacy as the Armenian "birthright" in the national struggle for "recognition, reparation, restoration," as the "System of a Down" called it.

Rosemary Hartounian Cohen, author of *The*

The role of literary criticism

The legacy of Vahe Oshagan continues and the seeds sewn by the journal *RAFT, A Journal of Armenian Poetry and Criticism* he published with John Greppin, another armenologist, is bearing fruit. The emergence of generation of young literary critics and cultural anthropologists, equipped with the deep knowledge of the discipline, is a sound reason to believe in the continuation of the Armenian literature in the Diaspora and its development parallel to the literary movements in the West. They act as gatekeepers of modern Armenian Diasporan literature and other artistic expressions, film, music, and other forms of fine arts. Maroush from Lebanon and Ishkhan Chiftjian from Germany, both poets and literary critics, editors of *Banasteghtsutiun* (Poetry) a journal, and the focuses on the variations of Armenian identities and the possibility of a common identity should be mentioned.

Talar Chahinian is a fresh voice in modern Armenian literary criticism, in the context of world literature and transnationalism as well as the politics of literary history. She has written articles on the questions in trauma and its aesthetic representations. She is a staunch advocate of the preservation of the Western Armenian language.

Nellie Hogikyan's *Atom Egoyan's Post*

Exilic Imagery: Dissociation and Transmission in Four Generations of Armenian Diaspora (2016) presents an indebt analysis of Egoyan's work which she considers "as a process of mourning in the Freudian sense." *Femmes et exils: Formes et figures* (Women and Exile[s]) (2010) that she edited together with Dominique Bourque, focuses specifically on women's experience in cultural displacements, as expressed in literature and other forms of art.

Sima Aprahamian, Canadian-Armenian with anthropological approaches to the post-Genocide narratives.

Lalai Manjikian's *Collective Memory and Home in the Diaspora* (2008) a research in the Armenian community of Montreal, Canada, "sheds light on the challenges and the complexities diasporic communities face." It provides the context within which to understand the Armenian identity, literature and other art forms.

Aram Kouyoumdjian, a playwright and a literary critic, is another young intellectual whose articles in the "Critic's Forum" section in *Asbarez* are always sought for and have a decisive word to say about the quality and value of a book, a play, a performance.

To conclude

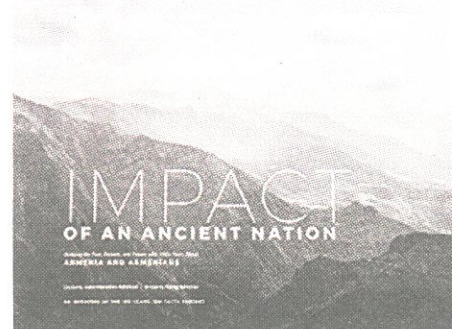
This paper, is only a brief survey of the new trends and directions in Armenian literature in response to the the trauma of the past and its present effects. It is by no means a comprehensive portrayal but certainly adequate enough to reach the following conclusion.

The literary responses to Genocide will work as an essential fuel to keep the fire burning in the souls, to keep alive the Armenian consciousness of a colossal injustice awaiting redress, to maintain the collective memory of the Genocide alive and functional. In the external level, this literature has the potential to impact public awareness and world public opinion to lead to the possibility of world recognition and eventual reparations.

With the gradual engagement of youth in the movement for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide in Armenia and unbridled production of art, literature, film, music with the theme of the Armenian Genocide, in other words with the response to Genocide playing into the center-stage in Armenia, the potentiality of a common theme in Armenia and the Diaspora grows stronger. This phenomenon can be instrumental to remedy the fragmented Armenian literature, despite the difference of language and orthography, to efface suffixes of separation and otherness, and to find the path to one healthy national literature. The foundation of "one people and one national literature" can be laid by consciously relating to the past, recognizing the rupture that the Genocide brought about, recognizing the lasting effects, political, psychological, even social and economic. This will also free the Armenian literature of foreign influences and misinterpreted concept of internationalism. The Genocide, then, will lodge in the subconscious of Armenian literati to function not as a source of pain but as the bedrock of Armenian national aspirations.

To look at the future from a different vantage point, let me join Lena Adishian and Nareg Seferian in the *Impact of an Ancient Nation, 100 Years. 100 Facts*.

The impact of this ancient nation has reverberated across time and space. Even as Armenia and the Armenian people have undergone dramatic changes. Versatility, openness to new frontiers, both physical and intellectual, and the ability to adapt have been some of the secrets of Armenians surviving and thriving. The next hundred years, the next thousand years will in all likelihood witness profound evolutions in humanity—and the Armenians will be there continuing to enliven and enrich the world.



Impact of an Ancient Nation, 100 Years. 100 Facts