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Ethnodoxy in the Diaspora: Armenian-American Religious and Ethnic Identity
Construction in Los Angeles

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Masters of Arts in Anthropology

By

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Abstract

Ethnodoxy in the Diaspora: Armenian-American Religious and Ethnic Identity Construction in Los Angeles

By

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Masters of Arts in Anthropology

Immigrant and diasporic communities use a variety of methods to construct and maintain their cultural identities outside of their homeland. Considering the large immigrant communities in the United States and in much of the world, understanding the methods for cultural preservation can assist in understanding how group membership is established and functions in diverse cultural environments. Religious affiliation plays a significant role in the identity politics of these immigrant communities, including the Armenian community. Understanding its role in identity formation and performance helps elucidate the various forms of ethnic and cultural identity preservation in the diaspora. Whether through practice or symbolic religiosity, the ethno-religious identity of Armenians has been one of the crucial factors of the survival of culture in this area and other parts of the diaspora. The role of the Armenian Apostolic Church since the fourth century CE has been to provide religious guidance to Armenians, but also to unify the

group as a cohesive ethnic unit in the absence of political leadership. Over the centuries, this multifaceted role has resulted in the Church becoming one of the main pillars of Armenian ethnic and cultural identity. I investigate the cultural impact of the Apostolic Church on the Los Angeles Armenian diaspora, exploring how the Church maintains its position as an important Armenian ethnic identity marker. While there is scholarship surrounding Armenian cultural identity in the diaspora, most of it lacks any thorough investigation of the ethno-religious identity of the group. My project bridges this gap, and explores Armenian-American ethnodoxo in the Los Angeles area.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On a calm February night, a large group of Armenian-Americans from multiple generations stood in the courtyard of St. Mary's Armenian Apostolic Church in Glendale, California. Church members holding lit candles and lanterns surrounded a group of priests and deacons from the church. People had gathered here for the celebration of Trndez/Dyarnuntarach; an annual holiday marked in Armenia and the diaspora on February 13th. Trndez was originally dedicated Vahagn, the pagan Armenian god of fire, but was later Christianized and came to represent the presentation of Jesus at the temple 40 days after his birth (The Armenian Church 2016). The tradition includes a church mass followed by the lighting of a bonfire in the church courtyard, during which the priests sing prayers to bless the wood and the fire (The Armenian Church 2016). I stood in the courtyard of the church on that day with two of my cousins, observing the festivities. The priests concluded singing the prayers, and then the bonfire was lit. I suddenly heard more singing and thought that this was part of the prayers. One of my cousins told me that the people gathered around the fire were singing the Armenian national anthem, which was followed by children's performance of an Armenian traditional agricultural folk song for the holiday. While it was not surprising to hear the folk song, the national anthem appeared to be somewhat out of place in a religious ceremony. However, an exploration of the ethno-religious Christian Armenian identity among Armenians in Armenia and the diaspora helps explain this behavior.

Los Angeles is home to one of the largest Armenian diasporic communities in the United States. The members of this community engage in regular performance and

maintenance of cultural identity in a diverse landscape, employing a variety of methods for this task. One of the key methods is identification with the Armenian Apostolic Church. It is used as a cornerstone of Armenian identity in the Los Angeles diaspora, highlighting the significance of religious identity in the group's attempts to distinguish themselves from other ethnic groups. This is regardless of whether one attends church regularly or not (Pattie 1999). An increasing number of Armenians explore other Christian denominations and other religions. Many of those who identify with other religions, however, rarely convert, and often return to the Armenian Apostolic Church for significant rites of passage ceremonies and rituals throughout their lives, and especially while rearing their children. As one respondent who identified as an atheist noted, "I would want my nieces and nephews who are half Armenian to be baptized in the Armenian Church, so they can build a deeper connection to the Armenian culture" (Anet Z., personal communication).

My research explores the impact of the Armenian Apostolic Church on Armenians living in Los Angeles, its role in their efforts to maintain ethnic identity, and how it is used to create a distinct cultural identity. The Armenian identification with the Apostolic Church is the result of ethnodoxo, which Karpov et al. (2012) define as a fusion of religion and ethnicity that creates a dominant ethno-religious ideology. I explore how ethnodoxo develops and plays out among Armenians in Los Angeles, and the role of the Apostolic Church in this process.

Applying the theory of ethnodoxo has helped me approach the topic from the perspective that the Apostolic Church unifies Armenians under the dominant faith and serves as a political and ecclesiastic organization for the Diaspora. Furthermore, it

continues to be one of the main pillars of Armenianness in Los Angeles, and despite the decreasing number of church attendees, it remains an important marker of ethnic identity. I refer to a varied theoretical framework in discussing the role of religion in cultural identity through power, practice, social memory and symbolic action. A reflexive methodology is applied to my approach to ensure that I address any biases that may impact the study.

Scholars have examined Armenian ethno-religious identity in the past, but these studies have neither focused solely on this identity nor on the Los Angeles Armenian population. Considering the diverse cultural landscape of Los Angeles, a project examining the cultural tools used to preserve ethnic identity is necessary for this large community of Armenians with its own internal diversity. This project targets one of the central features of Armenian identity, religious affiliation, that contributes to the groups' notion of what Nelson Graburn (2013) has referred to as true alterity, defined as cultural otherness in relation to other groups.

Armenian Cultural Identity in Previous Research

The issue of Armenian identity in the diaspora has been the focus of research among a number of academics (Bakalian 1993; Jendian 2008; Pattie 1999). These studies have examined various features of cultural identity, including religion. Anny Bakalian (1993) examined the assimilation of Armenian-Americans of New York and New Jersey into the dominant American culture. Bakalian (1993) observed that a large number of Armenians from this population perceived the role of the Armenian Apostolic Church as the link to their ethnic and ancestral identity. They retained their identity, despite increasing assimilation around them, by attending the Church on major holidays, along with family

and community events, to extend their ties to their ancestral kin. This performance of ritual made the Church an important feature for maintenance of ethnic identity, despite lack of regular attendance at weekly liturgies. Bakalian's study illustrates Gans' (1994) discussion of symbolic religiosity as a way for these individuals to participate in their ethno-religious culture. It also illustrates Graburn's (2013) discussion of alterity, which suggests that heritage is constructed to identify the appropriate determinants for individuals' eligibility for the group that is distinct from the neighboring communities. The Church has employed this practice by identifying the distant others as different from the shared kinship of the group, allowing the members to feel unified with one another by avoiding the distant others.

Graburn's (2013) theory of true alterity is also illustrated in Matthew Jendian's (2008) study of Armenian-Americans in Fresno, California. Jendian (2008) explores intermarriage and assimilation of Armenians, with an examination of identity politics and cultural heritage, over four generations. His findings reveal that one of the most effective means of ethnic identity retention and deterrent to cultural assimilation and intermarriage is general membership and participation in the Armenian Church. Jendian's study illustrates Ben-Rafael's (2013) argument that hybridization over time creates a heavier reliance on community leaders for retention of identity. The Armenian Apostolic Church earned its position of leadership in the Armenian-American community in the late 19th and early 20th century through these means (Archbishop Ashjian 1995).

Susan Pattie's (1999) research of Armenian diasporas in London, Cyprus and the United States reveals similar results, highlighting the role of the Armenian Church as a cornerstone and key symbol of Armenian culture among these communities. Pattie

(1999) also addresses the story of loss and survival for the group, which is another force of unification for these communities. However, this narrative also creates an anxiety and concern for losing the younger generations from the culture. The older generation fears that younger members of the community are more likely to assimilate into other cultural worlds. This creates a need for encapsulation by the older members of the group, including Church leaders, who believe the practice is in the interest of cultural capital (Noyes 2003). This preoccupation with ethnic preservation under the threat of assimilation illustrates Sollors' (1989) discussion of the threat to the idealized cultural heritage and authenticity of the ethnic group.

The previous research on the Armenian Diaspora has examined the various features of cultural identity preservation for each community. However, there is a gap in the literature focusing on the role of the Armenian Church in the Armenian diaspora. While these ethnographies have explored the role of the Armenian Church in preservation of Armenian identity in the diaspora, they have not addressed the issues that have led to this important role of the church. Members of the Armenian diaspora have a number of cultural tools at their disposal for performance and maintenance of cultural identity, but ethno-religiosity remains a dominant feature of Armenian identity politics. I address this process and the gap in literature by referring to a number of social theories and applying them to my research.

Religion and Identity Politics

The central theory my project builds on is Bourdieu's (1977) discussions of doxa, orthodoxy and heterodoxy. The theory of doxa is applied to the intertwined nature of religious and ethnic identity in Armenian communities, including those within the Los

Angeles diaspora. The birth of Armenian Christianity and its early role in the political history of Armenians has resulted in the dominant role of the Church in Armenian identity. The Armenian Apostolic Church's hegemony throughout the centuries has created a meaning of religious identity that is deeply intertwined with ethnic and national identity, making this connection a doxa for almost all Armenians. Bourdieu's (1977) theory of doxa is the perception that the natural and the social worlds are self-evident, which is illustrated in the Armenian ethno-religious identity. The blending of the social and natural worlds begins at an early age, with the enculturation and reinforcement of the notion that Armenian identity is analogous with a Christian identity. This continues throughout the lives of the individuals with the significant rites of passages being performed at the Armenian Apostolic Church, regardless of regular attendance, especially while rearing children.

The role of the Apostolic Church as a power structure in Armenia is evident in the special privileges granted by the secular Armenian government, because the Church is deemed an important tool for preservation of national identity (Charles 2009). This power is further reinforced by the high subjective importance of religion and ethnodoxa among the general public of Armenia, despite low religious practice (Charles 2009, Karpov et al 2012). Talal Asad (1983) has argued that power structures create religious identity, which is deeply intertwined with historical and social conditions. The extensive conflict and persecution of Armenians throughout history has created the need for a stable institution that can serve as a unifying force for the group, increasing with the rising rate of migration and dispersion in the 20th century. The Church has fulfilled this need by becoming the ecclesiastic and national authority for all Armenians. It has

maintained its power by allowing for manipulations and improvisations, at home and abroad, to adjust the meaning of the Church for each community's changing needs. This illustrates Bourdieu's (1977) practice theory, which argues that individuals help maintain structure and the formal rules of the group through practice, while also making practical adjustments.

I also refer to Herbert Gans' (1994) theory of symbolic religiosity to illustrate that while the practice of religion reinforces doxa, symbolic religiosity also plays a significant role in the maintenance of doxa and orthodoxy. This has been demonstrated by Durante (2015) within the Greek-American diaspora. Gans' theory is also illustrated by Charles' (2009) study of religiosity in the South Caucasus, revealing a high retention of Armenian religious identity in a secular society, despite lowered religious practice.

Reflexivity and Native Anthropology

Growing up in an Armenian family I frequently heard my relatives say that they were not religious, but their cultural identity made them Christian. I also considered this ethno-religious identity as self-evident, taking for granted that I was Christian because I was Armenian, despite my lack of religiosity. I attended weddings, baptisms, and funerals at the Armenian Church, crossing myself when it was the appropriate time and saying a quick prayer as I lit a candle. My husband and I held our wedding ceremony at St. Peter Armenian Apostolic Church, and even took the stereotypical wedding photograph of lighting a candle together. I took for granted that this Armenian ethno-religious identity was known by everyone, including non-Armenians. I assumed that the countless Armenian Apostolic Churches throughout Los Angeles would be a testament to this self-evident cultural identity; every Armenian was Christian despite their religiosity.

This assumption ended abruptly in the senior year of my undergraduate studies at California State University, Northridge. I was enrolled in an Armenian Studies course called *Changing Roles of Armenian Women*. In this course, the professor, Dr. Vahram Shemmassian, introduced the class to the communities of Islamicized Armenians. Some of these individuals lived in eastern Turkey and were descendants of survivors of the Armenian Genocide; others, who were also descendants of the genocide, lived among Arab Bedouins in Syria. A Muslim Armenian was such a foreign concept for me, because of this taken for granted notion of a Christian Armenian. Through this course, I developed an increased interest in the ethno-religiosity of Armenians, to uncover the reasons behind this presumed cultural identity. My interest in this topic led to my current research, which explores the historical role of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the construction of Armenian cultural identity.

Being a member of the Armenian-American community has offered me an insider's view into the identity politics of Armenians in Los Angeles. My membership in the community has also given me what Abu-Lughod (2014) has referred to as the "halfie" identity of a native anthropologist, which she identifies as an anthropologist who is also a member of the researched community. While this native perspective works to my advantage, it can create issues in terms of the subjectivity of my research. Abu-Lughod (2014) has argued that this is an issue encountered by all halfie anthropologists, whose partiality towards the subject and the community is questioned. She argues that the issue of subjectivity can be applied to every anthropologist who performs fieldwork. The concern for the impartiality of halfie anthropologists is due to the persistent anthropological doxa of studying the Other at some distance, while also attempting to

bridge this gap between the self and the community. Abu-Lughod argues that this perceived distance between the anthropologist and the community does not truly exist, since the anthropologist does not “stand outside” of the group, but in relation with the Other. This relation is dependent on a larger political-historical context that impacts this interaction.

Another issue that halfie and feminist anthropologists encounter is the reception of ethnography by multiple audiences (Abu-Lughod 2014). This places the ethnographer in a difficult position because they are writing for not only the academic discipline, but also the subjects of their ethnography who will hold the anthropologist accountable. The issue becomes more complicated for halfie anthropologists since this is not only a representation of a group, but of themselves. These interests of the different groups can be at odds with one another, forcing the anthropologist to confront the “politics and ethics of their representation” (Abu-Lughod 2014, 389).

Abu-Lughod suggests that in order to overcome these issues, ethnographers need to write against culture, since the anthropological concept of culture not only explains cultural difference, but also constructs, produces, and maintains those differences, creating an “other.” She suggests writing against culture by replacing culture with practice and discourse in theoretical discussions, understanding historical and political connections of the ethnographer and the community, and writing about particular groups. She also argues for a more polyvocal production of ethnography that allows the multiple voices of the community members to be heard and understood within their own cultural context, rather than through outside interpretation. Abu-Lughod argues that

through these means ethnographers can “subvert the most problematic connotations of culture: homogeneity, coherence, and timelessness” (Abu-Lughod 2014, 396).

My membership within the Armenian Diaspora in Los Angeles presents the issues discussed by Abu-Lughod, such as accountability to multiple audiences and awareness of representation of not only the group, but also the self within ethnography. Being aware of these issues allowed me to approach my fieldwork with a deeper appreciation of the political and historical contexts of the community that have contributed to the practice and discourse of the religion. My hyphenated cultural identity offered emic (insider) and etic (outsider) perspectives on the Armenian community, but forced me to acknowledge the increased responsibility and accountability to the group while attempting to remain impartial in my writing.

Ruth Behar (1996) suggests a type of ethnography that is vulnerable. She discusses the concept of a vulnerable observer and ethnographer at length, stressing the significance of understanding how an anthropologist’s experience in the field can lead to a deeper insight into her personal life. This insight, she stresses, should be used in the writing of the ethnography in the form of a short autobiography, but with some limits, so that the product is a “mediated autobiography” (Behar 1996, 30). Behar contends that the anthropologist’s autobiography is important for understanding the ethnography that she produces, since they are complementary to one another. She argues that by including her personal story, the writer connects with the readers on a deeper level and allows the ethnography to come to life, allowing them to “respond vulnerably” (Behar 1996, 16). Behar acknowledges that this form of writing has been problematic within

academia, especially in anthropology, "...which historically exists to 'give voice' to others, [as] there is no greater taboo than self-revelation" (Behar 1996, 26).

Behar's multi-cultural identity and membership in a diaspora forced her to approach ethnography with polyvocality and a deeper appreciation for fluctuating identities. This is especially important for my methodology, since my membership within the diasporic community that I am studying requires me to assess and reflect on my attitudes towards the subject. This reflection allows me to consider the possibility of personal bias on the subject, and convey this information to the reader. Revealing my 'mediated autobiography' within the ethnography gives life to the writing, and allows the reader to better contextualize my data analysis and conclusions.

My identity as an anthropologist and a member of the hybrid community that is the subject of my study blurs the lines between "us" and the "other" (Gupta & Ferguson 1992). However, my hybridity as a member of the Armenian-American group has already blurred the lines between "us" and the "other". As Sabina Magliocco has expressed regarding her hybrid identity of an Italian-American, "...well-meaning people would ask me, when I was a child, whether I was really more American or Italian. This question would always stump me, because it was perfectly obvious to me that I was both, and that being part of one culture did not exclude belonging to the other" (2004, 15). This sentiment is extended to being a native anthropologist, who has the understanding that identity is not fixed; instead it is shifted and negotiated as it moves between socially constructed categories (Magliocco 2004). While the notion of objectivity in the social sciences, specifically in anthropology, has been contested by several prominent post-

modern anthropologists of the 20th century, the initial acknowledgement of personal bias is necessary.

The main source of my own bias may stem from my identity as an Armenian: I love being Armenian! I have a deep appreciation for Armenian history, music, myth, folklore and culture. This attitude was instilled in me by my parents at a very young age. In the past these sentiments have prevented me from critically examining Armenian identity. Over time I gradually gained the ability to counter this through relatively objective research and social theory. The process of transforming into a diaspora Armenian anthropologist has been a difficult task at times. There were certain theories and arguments that contradicted many culturally constructed realities that I had considered to be self-evident, and even essential to Armenian identity. Learning to understand my culture through these theories afforded me deeper appreciation for its history and heritage. Understanding the possibility of bias through my personal sentiments for Armenian culture ensures that I understand my position as an academic and as a member of the community. I utilize the methods outlined above by Abu-Lughod (2014) and Behar (1996) in my analyses of the data to ensure that I remain relatively impartial.

Outline of Chapters

My thesis examines several features of Armenian cultural identity in the Los Angeles diaspora, looking at how each one is connected to the ethno-religiosity of the community. Following my discussion of reflexivity as a native anthropologist, I discuss the purpose of my study and its hypothesis, along with my methodology in Chapter Two. The history of Armenian Christianity and the political issues occurring in Armenia during

this period are examined in Chapter Three, to illustrate how the religious identity was established and reinforced through various historical factors. Chapter Four focuses on the history of the Armenian diaspora, which examines the impact of globalization and transnationalism on the maintenance of cultural identity in host societies. I then utilize religion and practice theory to discuss the significance of religious symbols in performance of ethno-religious identity in Chapter Five. In this chapter I look at how this identity has been reinforced through the Armenian Church as a result of socio-historical factors, becoming a doxa of the group that has been maintained through practice for centuries. Chapter Six consists of discussions of Armenian social identity. Part of Armenian-American social identity is examined through discussions of ethnicity, nationality, heritage, tradition and social memory, to understand the perception of the group and its boundaries by the members of the Los Angeles Armenian diaspora. Analysis of important Armenian myths and legends are also used here, to illustrate how ethno-religiosity is reinforced. Chapter Six also examines Armenian engagement with and further reinforcement of this identity through family and the Armenian language. Chapter Seven consists of discussions surrounding the performance of Armenian cultural identity, which is analyzed through the significance of folk music and dance, along with performance of religiosity in the Armenian Apostolic Church. I interweave my data analysis with discussions of social theory throughout the text, to better demonstrate how ethnodoxa occurs on multiple levels within the Armenian diaspora in Los Angeles. I conclude with a discussion of Armenian-American ethnodoxa and its implications for the Los Angeles Armenian diaspora, suggesting possible directions in future research.

CHAPTER II

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Purpose

Religion plays an important role in the identity politics of many ethnic groups in the United States, especially within the diverse cultural landscape of Los Angeles. The Armenian-American community of Los Angeles is one of the local immigrant groups that utilize cultural heritage processes to preserve ethnic identity and establish cultural alterity from neighboring groups. While there is scholarship surrounding Armenian cultural identity in the Diaspora (Bakalian 1993; Jendian 2008; Pattie 1999), most of it lacks any thorough investigation of their ethno-religious identity. This is an important feature of cultural identity that needs to be investigated, since it is used as a marker for group cohesion and inclusiveness for many communities in the diaspora and in the native country. Charles (2009) explored this process in countries of the South Caucasus, which included Armenia. Tonoyan (2012) examined ethno-religious identity in the Armenian and Azeri populations, and the role of this identity in the conflict over Nagorno Karabakh. While these projects provide a thorough investigation of the role of religion in the ethnic and cultural identity of Armenians, the focus of these two projects has been the Armenian population in Armenia. My project explores this feature of identity in the Los Angeles diaspora, whose members are culturally different from their Armenian counterparts in the homeland. It also contributes to the discussion surrounding the concept of *ethnodoxy* suggested by Karpov, Lisovskaya and Barry (2012), by examining this notion outside of the largely homogenous native country. Furthermore, it contributes to the scholarship examining the role of ethno-religious identity in diasporic and

immigrant groups' efforts to adapt to and successfully function within the American culture and society (Anagnostou 2004, Durante 2015, Gans 1994).

Hypothesis

There are three hypotheses that are central to my research: 1) The Armenian Apostolic Church unifies Armenians under the dominant faith and serves as a political and ecclesiastic organization for the Diaspora; 2) The Armenian Church has remained as one of the main pillars of the Armenian community in Los Angeles because of its significance as an identity marker for Armenianness; 3) Despite low number of regular attendance to the Church by the Armenian community, the Armenian Church remains an important marker of ethnic identity.

Research Questions

The following questions are used to examine the role of ethnodoxy in Armenian-American identity performance and maintenance. My research questions are as follows:

- 1) What are the features of ethnodoxy in the Armenian diaspora in Los Angeles, and how does ethnodoxy shape Armenians' cultural identity in the diaspora as well as their ties and sense of belonging to Armenia?
- 2) What were the historical and sociological antecedents of ethnodoxy among Armenians in Los Angeles?
- 3) How has ethnodoxy remained a significant marker for Armenian cultural identity in Los Angeles?
- 4) What is the role of the Armenian Apostolic Church in this process?
- 5) What is the role of ethnodoxy in Armenian nationalism in the diaspora for Armenian-Americans and Armenian nationals?

Methodology

Several methods were employed in this research to gather data, in order to understand the significance of the Armenian Apostolic Church within the Armenian-American community in Los Angeles. The first task was to perform research on the history of the Armenian Church, and the history of the Armenian diaspora of the United States and in Los Angeles. I relied on peer reviewed articles and books about Armenian history to collect this information. Understanding the current attitudes of the community required direct communication and interviews with members of this group. I used my connections as a member of the Armenian community in the Los Angeles area to interview individuals who had immigrated to the region from Armenia and various Armenian diasporas across the globe. These included Armenians from Canada, Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey and the United States. My understanding of the layers of cultural hybridity in the group helped me locate and identify these individuals.

My research also included participant observation. This was done by attending religious ceremonies at St. Mary's Armenian Apostolic Church in Glendale. I also attended religious holiday ceremonies at St. Mary's Armenian Apostolic Church in Glendale, St. Leon Armenian Apostolic Church in Burbank, and St. Peter Armenian Apostolic Church in Van Nuys. Through my family's and friends' connections, I was invited to several weddings, baptisms, and mourning rituals at Armenian churches across Los Angeles. While I had experienced these events many times in the past through my community membership, approaching the topic through an anthropological lens allowed me to see the ceremonies from a more nuanced and analytical perspective.

In addition to participant observation at the Armenian Church, I also attended protests commemorating the Armenian Genocide, festivals celebrating Armenian heritage, and concerts featuring Armenian folk music. I employed Kathleen and Billie DeWalt's (2002) suggestion for building rapport through participation. I recruited audience members and participants at these events for my research, building rapport with them through common cultural interests. I ensured accuracy in data by consistently writing field notes during interviews and after participation, including reflexive notes on the interviewees' responses and my observations (Bernard 2011, DeWalt 2002).

Sample Population

The participants in my research are members of the Armenian-American diasporic community in Los Angeles. The population in the project consists of members who are half generation Armenian-Americans, born in a different country and emigrated to the United States as an adult; first generation Armenian-Americans, born in a different country and emigrated to the United States as children or young adolescents; and second generation Armenian-Americans, children of immigrant parents born in the United States.

I conducted unstructured or semi-structured interviews with a total of 23 participants, who were at least 18 years of age and identified as Armenian-American. In addition to these individuals' responses, I also relied on the comments made by Armenian-American family members and friends in casual conversations that have taken place around me and throughout my research. I have chosen to refer to the individuals interviewed as 'participants' because it reflects their active role in the project and interest in the topic. The demographic makeup of participants' country of origin is illustrated in the table below. While these individuals were born in the countries listed below, many of

them lived abroad and became citizens of several other nation-states. This further hybridized their identity, shaping their cultural attitudes. Their transnationalism, which Ong has defined as “cultural specificities of global processes, tracing the multiplicity of the uses and conceptions of ‘culture’,” has impacted their responses to my interview questions (1999, 4).

Country of Origin	Number of participants
Armenia	8
Canada	1
Iran	4
Lebanon	1
Syria	1
Turkey	2
United States	6

Interview Structure and Questions

The questions I posed to the participants during our interviews began with brief information about their age, gender, and educational background. Once their background information was established, I continued with the following questions:

- 1) How do you identify culturally?
- 2) What are some of the important features of Armenian cultural identity?
- 3) What qualifies someone as an ethnic Armenian?
- 4) Do you feel connected to the Armenian community?

- 5) Are you connected to the Armenian Church?
 - a. Were you baptized in the Church?
 - b. Were you or will you get married in the Church?
- 6) Do you attend Church regularly?
- 7) How important is it for you to have your rites of passage ceremonies performed in the Church?
 - a. Baptism
 - b. Wedding
 - c. Funeral
- 8) Do you light a candle when you attend church? Why?
- 9) How big of a role does religion play in your personal identity, outside of your cultural identity?
- 10) Would you want to have your children or members of the younger generation have their rites of passage in the Armenian Church?
- 11) Does the Armenian Church play a big role in the creation and maintenance of Armenian cultural identity?
- 12) How big of a role does the Armenian Church play in the maintenance of Armenian community in Los Angeles?
- 13) Does the Armenian Church allow you to feel more connected to the Armenian culture and Armenia?
- 14) Do you think there can be a Muslim Armenian?
 - a. Can a Muslim Armenian be accepted by the community as an Armenian?
 - b. Would you be ok with your child marrying a Muslim Armenian?

These were open-ended questions designed to provide guidance to the participants, but allow for further elaboration on their responses. This method was effective in garnering information from the participants about issues and topics that I had not considered. My responses during the interview through “uh-huh” and nodding probes encouraged individuals to share their experiences (Bernard 2011).

I conducted three types of interviews throughout the course of my research: unstructured, semi-structured and informal. The informal interviews took place in the beginning of my research. During family gatherings or when surrounded by mostly Armenian friends, I would listen to the conversations and comments made by the individuals around me surrounding the topic of Armenian identity. Once I had recruited participants for interviews I utilized the unstructured and semi-structured methods. Interviews with participants who were family members or friends were unstructured, so they would be able to discuss the topic and “express themselves on their own terms, and at their own pace” (Bernard 2011, 157). The semi-structured interviews occurred with participants who were recruited through snowball sampling, utilizing the questions listed earlier.

CHAPTER III

HISTORY OF ARMENIANS

Nestled between Turkey, Iran, Georgia and Azerbaijan in Transcaucasia lies present-day Armenia. It is a small country with a small population of approximately three million, with over eight million people in the diaspora worldwide (The Government of the Republic of Armenia 2017). This small ethnic group has had a deep history that was shaped by its geography, foreign invasions, and international trade. Because of these factors, the Armenian people have cultivated a resilient ethnic and cultural identity that has withstood the test of time. The geographic location of Armenia, which has been the bridge between the East and the West, has invited many foreign invasions throughout history. Invasions from Assyrians, Scythians, Greeks, Romans, Persians, Arabs, Kurds, Turks, Mongols, Turkmen, and Russians have shaped the people and culture of Armenia (Bournoutian 2012). However, while the unique geography of Armenia has resulted in foreign invasion, it has also played an important role in the survival of the culture. As Armenian historian George Bournoutian has stated:

“For although the numerous mountains, which divided Armenia into valleys, prevented it from achieving a united state under a strong centralized ruler during much of its history, this very fact has been a blessing in disguise. For unlike a highly centralized state, such as Assyria, whose entire culture vanished with the collapse of its capital city, Nineveh, Armenia’s lack of political unity meant the survival of its culture even when its kings were deposed and its capital cities were destroyed” (2012, 7-8).

The origins of the Armenian people come from historical and mythological sources. According to Greek historian Herodotus, Armenians came into the region from Thrace, first settling in Phrygia and then moving further into the west of the Euphrates River (Russell 2004). Other scholars have expanded Herodotus' account, creating the "classical" hypothesis, which argues that Armenians were invaders called Mushki from a region of Thrace called Mysia (Russell 2004). According to this hypothesis the proto-Armenians adopted the defeated empire of the Hittites upon invasion, which would have been pronounced as **hatiyos* (Russell 2004). This pronunciation would result in the Armenian word *hay*, which is how Armenians refer to themselves (Russell 2004). Other scholars, including linguists and archaeologists, argue that the Armenian population was indigenous to the region of Hayasa in northern Armenia (Bournoutian 2012). The indigenous population adopted the vocabulary of arriving Indo-Europeans, while also maintaining some features of the indigenous language that corresponds with features of Hurrian language (Bournoutian 2012).

The Armenian folk version of origin is based on Movses Khorenatsi's fifth century text *The History of Armenians*. Khorenatsi has relied on the oral and biblical tradition in his account of the Armenian origin, beginning with the patriarch Hayk, who was a descendant of Noah (Khorenatsi 1978). The historian begins the text with a list of Adam's descendants, focusing on Noah's sons. He traces the Armenian hero's heritage to Noah through Noah's son Yapheth, whose great-grandson T'orgom begat Hayk. Khorenatsi describes Hayk as "handsome and personable, with curly hair, sparkling eyes, and strong arms. Among the giants he was the bravest and most famous, the opponent of all who raised their hand to become absolute ruler over all the giants and heroes"

(Khorenatsi 1978,85). He continues to explain that during the period of Hayk there was constant fighting among the human race and the giants of the land. The fighting allowed the Titan Bel to assert his power over the land and the people. Refusing to submit to Bel, Hayk journeyed to the land of Ararat with his family and clan, including about three hundred individuals of loyal servants and outsiders that joined them. Hayk built his home at the foot of the mountain in the land of Ararat and bequeathed it to his grandson Kadmos, who was Aramaneak's son. Hayk then moved to an elevated plain in the northwest, near Lake Van, and named the plateau *Hark*, meaning "here dwelt the fathers of the family of the house of T'orgom" (Khorenatsi 1978, 86). Hayk then built a village and eponymously names it Haykashen. During this time Bel had confirmed his rule over everyone and sent messengers to Hayk, offering him peace if Hayk was willing to succumb to the Titan's power. Hayk refused Bel's offer, which angered Bel and prompted him to assemble his army against the Armenian hero. Bel advanced in large numbers against Hayk's men, who fought heroically against the Titan's giants. As the Titan began to retreat, Hayk pulled his bow and shot the king with "triple-fletched arrow at his breast armor; right through his back and stuck in the ground" (Khorenatsi 1978, 87). The army of giants dispersed in fear of their lives upon witnessing the death of their leader. The location where the battle occurred became the site for a villa built by Hayk, in commemoration of his victory, which is now called Hayots Dzor, meaning Armenian Valley. Hayk named the hill where Bel fell to his death as Gerezmank, which means tomb. He also embalmed Bel's body and took it to a high place, where his wives and sons would see the body of the slain Titan. Khorenatsi concludes the chapter with the following sentence, "Now our country is called Hayk after the name of our ancestor

Hayk” (1978, 88). The historian continues to tell the story of Hayk’s descendants in the following chapters, who spread across the land of Hayk and established their rule in the region, naming Armenian provinces and landscapes after themselves. Khorenatsi states, “This Hayk, son of T’orgom, son of T’iras, son of Gomer, son of Yapheth, was the ancestor of the Armenians; and these were his families and offspring and their land of habitation. And afterward they began, he says, to multiply and fill the land” (1978, 92).

Historian George A. Bournoutian argues that Khorenatsi’s version, which was based on the early Armenian oral tradition, substituted Babylon for Assyria and the Haik dynasty for the Urartian rulers in Armenia (2012). He states, “The aim was not accuracy but rather a sure place for the Armenians in the history of Christianity, a religion that the Armenians had by then embraced wholeheartedly” (Bournoutian 16-17, 2012).

Armenian Christianity and the Church

In order to understand Armenian religious identity one has to look at the extensive history of conflict in the region, especially during the late third and early fourth centuries CE. Prior to this period, the rising empires of the early sixth to second centuries BCE in the east and the west continually divided the land of Armenia and its people. This was especially the case upon the rise of the Persian Empire in the mid-sixth century BCE, which overthrew the reign of the Medes in the region under the command of Cyrus the Great of Persia (Bournoutian 2012). The name Armenia appears for the first time in recorded history during this period, with the inscription of major provinces of Persia on the Behistun carving in 520 BCE (Bournoutian 2012). Under tolerant Achaemenid rule Armenians were allowed to worship their deities and follow their own customs. Over time Armenians adopted features of Persian culture, including their Zoroastrian deities.

After the fall of Achaemenid rule and as a result of Greek campaigns against the Persian Empire in the fourth century BCE, Hellenism spread to parts of Armenia through the adoption of some of its cultural and religious features (Bournoutian 2012). During this period, however, Armenians also began to cultivate a distinct cultural identity.

The attempt at maintaining a distinct cultural identity was an increasingly difficult task for Armenians, who were constantly caught between the two warring empires of Rome and Persia. Armenia was frequently partitioned between these two empires, with changing Armenian commitment to each side. The rule of each empire in the western and eastern parts of Armenia also included the dispersion of Roman and Persian culture in their respective regions. This threatened Armenian cultural identity, creating a need for an Armenian system of power that would be able to overcome a divided land and unite the people.

Armenian Conversion to Christianity

The Armenian king, Trdat III, who made Christianity the official religion of the Armenian state, was a descendant of the Arshakuni lineage. The events leading up to the Christianization of Armenia are mixed with legend and historical events, much like the origin stories of Armenians. During this period Armenia continued to be divided between Roman and Persian rule. The overthrow of Parthian kingship by the Sasanids in Persia during the third century led to deepening conflict, severing political and religious ties between Persia and the Armenian kingship that was connected to the Parthian royal house (Garsoian 2004). Armenia was incorporated into the Persian empire in 252 CE by Shapur I of Persia, after he defeated the Romans and Trdat II fled to Rome (Bournoutian 2012). Rome under Diocletian managed to defeat the Sasanids at the end of the third

century, reinstalling the Arshakuni kingship in Armenia with Khosrov II. According to the fifth century writings of Agathangelos, the Sasanids continued to plot against the Armenian kingship, and with the help of the king's brother Anak they poisoned Khosrov II (Bournoutian 2012). Khosrov II's son Trdat III escaped to Rome, where he was educated by Diocletius. Anak assumed the throne, but was later murdered by angry Armenian courtiers, and his son Gregory was taken to Cappadocia to live with Christians (Bournoutian 2012). Sasanid Persia applied pressure on the region throughout the end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth century, including Armenia, by trying to ensure that orthodox Zoroastrianism was practiced not only by the ruling class but by the entire population. During this period, Trdat III, also referred to as Trdat the Great, returned to Armenia with the help of Rome and reclaimed his father's throne. According to Agathangelos, Trdat met Gregory, Anak's son, in Caesarea on his way to Armenia (Bournoutian 2012). Trdat took Gregory to Armenia with him for service in his court, unaware of Gregory's lineage. Gregory, who had been raised in the Christian faith, became a trusted member of Trdat III's court. However, upon increasing rumors of Gregory's parentage by jealous nobles, Trdat tortured and imprisoned Gregory at Khor Virap ("deep pit"). Trdat III continued to persecute Christians in Armenia, following his godfather Diocletian's example. He also martyred St. Gayane and St. Hripsime, two Christian virgins who refused his advances (Bournoutian 2012). According to Agathangelos, God turned Trdat into a wild boar to punish him for his sins (Bournoutian 2012). Trdat's sister, Khosrova dukht, dreamt that an angel instructed her to release Gregory, who legend said had survived in the pit for 13 years, in order to cure Trdat of his transformation. Upon release Gregory healed the king, who in turn proclaimed

Christianity as the official state religion of Armenia in 301 CE. Gregory baptized Trdat after returning from Caesarea, where he was ordained by a Greek bishop (Bournoutian 2012).

The legend of Christianization of Armenia has been disputed by historians, who point to the political and social factors surrounding Armenia, Rome and Persia at the time (Bournoutian 2012; Garsoian 2004). Many say that the date of 301 CE is improbable, since Trdat III was closely linked with the ruling Roman Emperor Diocletian at the time, who persecuting Christians (Bournoutian 2012; Garsoian 2004). Trdat's alliance with Rome, which in turn provided protection to Armenia, would prevent him from such a drastic step that was diametrically opposed to the policies of Rome and Diocletian. The more probable date suggested by historians is sometime in or soon after 314 CE (Bournoutian 2012; Garsoian 2004). During this period the Zoroastrian religious zealots of Sasanid Persia were attempting to increase political and religious influence in the region through missionaries, which posed a threat to Armenian cultural, political and religious identity (Bournoutian 2012). In the meantime, underground practice of Christianity was spreading throughout the Roman Empire, and persecution of Christians was stopped by Emperor Constantine in 313 CE with the Edict of Milan (Bournoutian 2012). The adoption of Christianity by Trdat III during this period was a political step that was strong enough to counter Zoroastrianism of Sasanid Persia, while it was also tolerated by its strongest ally Rome.

While the conversion by King Trdat III is accepted by many Armenians, another tradition tells the story of apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus's influence in the conversion of Armenians (Bournoutian 2012). The legend suggests that a king named

Abkar of Edessa (modern day Şanlı Urfa in Turkey) had asked for Jesus's help in curing his illness in the first century (Bournoutian 2012). During this period apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus travelled to Edessa to preach the teachings of Jesus in Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia. Thaddeus made his way to southern Armenia, converting a sizeable Armenian population during his mission, where he was then martyred by the king (Bournoutian 2012; Garsoian 2004). The Armenian Church relies on this story in its claim of apostolic heritage.

Ethno-Religious Symbiosis of the Fifth Century: The Quill and The Golden Age of Literature

The ensuing period of the fourth century witnessed continuous warring between the Persian and Roman, later Byzantine empires, resulting in further partitioning of and devastation in Armenia. Throughout this period Armenia did not have a written script. Classical Greek was used for cultural and artistic expression; the languages for official communication were Latin and Pahlavi scripts; and Syriac served for the script of liturgy. Armenian history was not recorded, since much of the population could not read or write, so it was transferred through a rich oral tradition (Bournoutian 2012). The absence of a written script was becoming an increasing problem for the Armenian king and the religious leadership, especially during the beginning of the fifth century. This was due to the increasing encroachment of the Syriac Church on the authority of the Armenian Church, along with the inevitable ecclesiastic domination of Byzantium in the region (Bournoutian 2012). The official state religion had also not been able to take hold of the entire Armenian population. These factors threatened the Armenian political, religious and cultural identity in a nation that was partitioned by two warring empires.

The king of Armenia in the fifth century, Vramshapuh, and the Armenian Church's Patriarch, Catholicos Sahag, understood the need for a written script in the efforts to unify the Armenian people and maintain political and religious control over the nation (Bournoutian 2012). A highly educated clergyman named Mesrop Mashtots was entrusted with the task of creating an alphabet that was distinguishable from neighboring scripts (Bournoutian 2012). Mashtots and several of his students travelled throughout the region and examined various alphabets, consulting calligraphers. Sometime around 405 CE Mashtots and his students created the thirty-six letter Armenian alphabet, which represented every distinct consonant and vowel in the language (Bournoutian 2012). Legends have circulated about the alphabet miraculously appearing as a vision to Mashtots, in order to make it appear as a divine gift from God (Khorenatsi 1978). Schools were opened by Mashtots and his students throughout Armenia for the instruction of the new written script. Scribes and priests fluent in Greek and Syriac helped translate the Bible into Armenian, along with the canons of Church councils, liturgical works, early Christian writings, and various classical writings of scientists and philosophers from the region (Bournoutian 2012).

The adoption of Christianity had created some unified sense of national identity for Armenians, but some portions of the population were unable to identify with the new faith because of their illiteracy in the Greek language, the language in which the Bible was written. The creation of the Armenian alphabet provided the necessary shield to overcome the obstacles against Armenian national identity. Mashtots, the inventor of the script, travelled and disseminated the alphabet to the Armenian populations throughout the two empires. This created a relatively cohesive Armenian nation with religious and

language tools that allowed it to survive continuous attacks throughout the centuries (Ter-Sarkisants 2007).

The latter half of the fifth century was witness to a bourgeoning literary culture in Armenia, often referred to as the Golden Age (Bournoutian 2012). During this period Armenians produced original works in history, philosophy and theology. David Anhaght (David the Invincible) wrote commentaries on Greek philosophical works and produced original treatises; Eznik of Koghb refuted Zoroastrianism, Manicheanism, and Gnostocisim in *Against the Sects*; and Koriun produced a biography of his teacher Mesrop Mashtots (Bournoutian 2012). Pawstos Buzand's *Epic Histories* is considered to be one of the earliest works on Armenian history, which describes the events of the fourth century in Armenia (Bournoutian 2012). Other historians of this period included Agathangelos, who wrote the *History of the Conversion of Armenia*; Eghishe, who described the events of the Battle of Avarayr in his *History of Vardan*; Ghazar Parpetsi, whose *History of Lazarus of Parpi* told the story of Armenian resistance against Zoroastrianism during the 384 – 485 CE period; and many other texts told stories of Armenian martyrs, such as *The Martyrdom of Shushanik* (Bournoutian 2012). Moses Khorenatsi's *History* is said to have been written during this period as well, which offers a detailed history of Armenians from their mythic origin to the year 440 CE (Bournoutian 2012). This date is under scholarly debate, however, by some who argue that it was written three centuries later, while others insist that the work was produced in the fifth century (Bournoutian 2012). The numerous literary texts produced during this period are a testament to the rising national consciousness of Armenians, as they were struggling to maintain a cohesive ethnic identity in an Armenia partitioned by Persia and Byzantine.

Ethno-Religious Symbiosis of the Fifth Century: Battle for the Cross and Ethno-Religious Alterity

In the beginning of the fifth century Armenia was partitioned between the Byzantine and Sasanid Persian empires, which were constantly struggling for control over the region. The Sasanid Empire had significant control over Armenian political, economic and religious life, but it showed lenience in allowing Armenians to have some control over their cultural and religious affairs. This changed in 439 CE, when the new Persian ruler attempted to reinstate the Zoroastrian religion on the non-Persian peoples of the empire (Bournoutian 2012). Armenian nobles, church leaders, and laity resisted this attempt, with the first armed rebellion beginning in 450 CE that was led by Vardan Mamikonean (Garsoian 2004). This resulted in a several decades long Armenian rebellion against the Persians with the Vardanank Wars. The decisive Battle of Avarayr in 451CE is considered to be a pivotal moment in the Armenian resistance for their religious and cultural identity. While they lost this battle, and where Vardan Mamikonean and many Armenian nobles perished, they gained moral victory in their struggle. The small group of Armenian fighters faced a larger and more powerful Persian army, which included an “elite corps of the ‘immortals’” (Garsoian 2004, 100). The ongoing struggle by Armenians in the ensuing years resulted in the negotiation of peace with the Persians in 484 CE, eventually allowing for religious autonomy (Garsoian 2004).

The Armenian resistance of the fifth century, especially the Battle of Avarayr, is an important moment in history for Armenians in their quest of religio-cultural alterity. The leader of the resistance, Vardan Mamikonean, is considered a saint in the Armenian Church, whose martyrdom is commemorated every year by the Armenian Apostolic

Church (The Armenian Church 2016). There have also been several stories created depicting the events of 451 CE, including a contemporary graphic novel (East of Byzantium 2016).

While the ongoing resistance was occurring against Persian religious hegemony in Armenia, the newly formed Christian church leaders met for the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in 451 CE (Bournoutian 2012). This meeting was for the purpose of discussing the two natures of Christ, an issue raised by Nestorius at the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE (Bournoutian 2012). The council resulted in the first split of the Christian Church between those who supported the monophysite decree, which included the Coptic and Ethiopian Churches among a number of Eastern Churches, and the Byzantine Church in Constantinople, supporting the dyophysite decree (Bournoutian 2012). In an effort to unite the two dissenting groups, Emperor Zeno issued the *Act of Union* or *Henoticon* in 482 CE (Bournoutian 2012).

Armenians were not present at the Council of Chalcedon, due to the Vardanank Wars with the Persians. The decisions of the Council reached Armenia over time and in 491 the Armenian Church, along with the Georgian and Caucasian Albanians, rejected the dyophysite nature of Christ (Bournoutian 2012). The perception of a monophysite order maintained peace with the Persians, who were tolerant of the Nestorians (Bournoutian 2012). However, Armenians did not reject Emperor Zeno's *Henoticon*, to maintain dialogue with the Greek churches. This was due to the Byzantine control of one third of Western Armenia (Bournoutian 2012). As a result, the Armenian Church held its own interpretation of Christ as indivisible, neither addressing directly nor ignoring the question of his human nature (Bournoutian 2012). This gave way to an interpretation that

was strictly Armenian, further solidifying the distinct position of the Armenian Church in the region.

The rejection of the Council of Chalcedon and the decision to accept Zeno's *Henoticon* resulted in theological differences between the Armenian Church and the Greek Churches, but also allowed for some dialogue with the Byzantines. The decision of the Armenian Church was religious and political, in light of the geopolitical circumstances of Armenians at the time. The rejection separated them from the Greek Church, which Armenians feared was trying to bring the Armenian Apostolic Church under its control (Bournoutian 2012). This political maneuver also ensured maintenance of peace with the Persians, who were tolerant of the Nestorians that also rejected the Council of Chalcedon (Bournoutian 2012). As George Bournoutian states, "By affirming both a unique doctrinal position and their apostolic tradition, the Armenians not only maintained their national church but also appeased the Persians" (2012, 62).

Arab Conquest and the Spread of Islam

The seventh century witnessed the rise and spread of Islam in the Near East. Arab conquests began in the early seventh century and made their way to Armenia in 640 CE (Bournoutian 2012). These invasions began with raids that resulted in heavy losses of Armenian lives, and led to the conquest of most of Armenia by the eighth century (Bournoutian 2012). The first ruling Muslim Arabs of Armenia were the Umayyads, who considered Armenians a people of the Book (Garsoian 2004). This offered freedom of religion to Armenians and exempted them from taxes for a number of years (Bournoutian 2012). This treatment was also in response to negotiation of peace offered by the Armenian prince Rshtuni (Garsoian 2004). Rshtuni's decision was in response to the

pressure by Byzantium for accepting the decision of the Council of Chalcedon (Bournoutian 2012). After a short period of relative peace in the area, the Umayyads enforced their authority in Armenia and established a payment of annual tribute in gold by Armenians for governance of various Armenian regions under their control (Bournoutian 2012). The Armenian Church and the Catholicos retained their relative freedom under the Umayyads until the eighth century (Bournoutian 2012, Garsoian 2004). The Armenian Church was considered the primary leader of the Armenian people by the ruling Arabs, allowing for the collection and organization of church canons during this period (Bournoutian 2012).

The end of the seventh century and the beginning of the eighth century was a period of struggle between Byzantium and Arab rule (Garsoian 2004). The struggle between the two empires had perilous results for Armenians, who suffered losses from numerous military campaigns from each side. The climate became increasingly dire for Armenians after 750, when the Abbasids gained control and established a truly Islamic Empire in the Near East (Bournoutian 2012). Taxes were increased in the regions controlled by the Abbasids and most of Armenia was ruled by Muslim governors called *ostikans* (Garsoian 2004). One of the most brutal *ostikans* was Muhammad ibn Marwan, who oversaw the Arab province of Arminiya that encompassed most of Armenia (Garsoian 2004). This governor rigorously applied Islamic law in the region and was responsible for ravaging several monasteries, evoking bitterness and hatred by the Armenians (Garsoian 2004). There were also many intermarriages during this period, along with forced and voluntary conversions to Islam (Bournoutian 2004). The

intermarriages occurred because of Arab settlement in Armenia during this period, which was the first time that invaders actually settled in the land (Bournoutian 2004).

Several Armenian rebellions against Arab rule occurred in this period, as a result of high taxes and repressive rule (Bournoutian 2004). Some of the major clashes occurred in Taron, Sasun, Vaspurakan, and Mokk in the ninth century, where Armenians resisted the Arabs (Bournoutian 2004). The Arab conquests of Armenia were recorded by a number of historians and writers. One of the most popular oral epics that was born during this period, *The Daredevils of Sasun*, tells the story of Armenian resistance against Arab rule, depicting it as a battle between good and evil (Bournoutian 2004). The dominant narratives of this period stressed the importance of Christian Armenian identity, which was reflected in the increased construction of churches and monasteries, including the monastery of Tatev in the Siunik region (Bournoutian 2012). The ninth century also gave rise to the development of the distinctly Armenian relief sculptures of *khachkars*, stone-lace crosses (Bournoutian 2012).

Turkic Invasions and the Armenian Church

The Seljuk and Turkic-Mongol conquests from the 11th to 14th century left much of Armenia in devastation. The conquerors from various Turkic tribes went through Armenia, destroying homes, agricultural lands, crops, and various religious and cultural structures, attacking from the east (Bedrosian 2004). The Byzantines were attempting to expand their control over lands in Asia Minor during this period, removing Armenian princes from their lands and relocating them further west (Bedrosian 2004). The absence of leadership in Armenia created a vacuum in the area, allowing the tribes from Central Asia to invade without meeting much resistance (Bedrosian 2004). The Seljuks were the

first group to conquer the region in the 1070s, establishing an Islamic political rule over Asia Minor (Bedrosian 2004). During this period, a gradual religious conversion to Islam occurred with the indigenous populations, who either converted to save their lives or were obliged to do so as a result of intermarriage (Bedrosian 2004). Some of the Christian population voluntarily converted in the 12th century, driven by financial and social incentives (Bedrosian 2004). While some converted, many Armenians retained their distinct Christian identities, leading to the Armenianization of the Seljuks in east Asia Minor (Bedrosian 2004).

The Seljuk rule came to an end in the 13th century when Mongols invaded the region and took control of Armenia (Bedrosian 2004). A certain portion of the Armenian society supported the Mongols of the 13th century, including the church hierarchy (Bedrosian 2004). The Armenian Church was exempt from taxes and able to develop its power with the help of the Mongols, since many of the Mongol generals and their wives were Nestorian Christians who sympathized with the Armenian Church (Bedrosian 2004, Bournoutian 2012). The freedom and power of the Church during this period, due to absence of Armenian nobles' leadership, allowed for Armenian cultural development in literature and architecture. A number of manuscripts that have survived until today were written, copied and illuminated during this period (Bedrosian 2004). Several large monastic complexes were also built, which became important educational centers for Armenians teaching arts, sciences and religion (Bedrosian 2004, Bournoutian 2012).

The situation for the Armenian Church deteriorated significantly in the 14th century, during the Timurid invasions (Bedrosian 2004). Several monasteries and churches were destroyed or transformed into Muslim centers of worship or education

(Bedrosian 2004). Priests and nobles who refused to convert were executed, along with the Christian Armenian population in the region (Bedrosian 2004, Bournoutian 2012). Much of Armenia was destroyed and reduced to rubble. Yet, despite the destruction, Armenian culture continued to develop during the Medieval period with the erection of many churches and monasteries, where several important Armenian theologians and scientists received their education. Composition of manuscripts and other literary works, improvement of relief sculptures, and the height of the art of *khachkar* production took place in this period as well (Bournoutian 2012).

The Turkic invasions changed the demographic makeup of the region, impacting the cultural and religious lives of the earlier Christian populations. The capture of Constantinople by Ottoman Turks in 1453 resulted in centuries of Muslim Turkish rule over Armenians. The region was frequently split between Ottoman and Persian, then Russian and Ottoman rule. Lacking their own political leadership, Armenians were once again divided between multiple warring empires. The Armenian Apostolic Church became the only form of Armenian leadership, uniting the people under ecclesiastic rule.

CHAPTER IV

DIASPORA AND TRANSNATIONALISM

The history of Armenians and Armenia is one of conquest, deportations, destabilization, political instability, economic crises, massacres, and genocide. These factors have led to the development of a large and global Armenian diaspora that spans from the African continent up to the Middle East, Europe, and out to Australia and the Americas.

The Armenian-American community of Los Angeles is one of the largest Armenian diasporas in the world. This community attempts to maintain its distinct Armenian identity in a multicultural and globalized setting through a number of cultural processes. Nationalism through various local, regional and global diasporic elites and institutions is one of the most prominent methods of cultural identity construction (Tololyan 2000). Globalization has played a large role in this community, increasing access to the homeland through advances in technology, communication, and travel. The increasing global transnational contact with the homeland has required shifts in the attitudes and approaches of the diasporic elites and institutions, to meet the changing needs of the community. One of the most influential elite institutions in both the homeland and abroad has been the Armenian Apostolic Church, which plays multiple roles for Armenians.

Cilician Kingship and the Birth of a Diaspora

The historic development of the diaspora spans multiple centuries. The first significant population migration occurred from 1045 – 1453 CE, when the Mongol and Turkic invasions, along with Byzantine relocation of Armenians, drove large populations

of Armenians outward to nearby areas, such as the region of Cilicia along the northeastern Mediterranean (Bournoutian 2012, Tololyan 2000). High ranking nobility and clergy settled in this region and quickly gained control over the fragmented native populations. The Armenian nobility and clergy established a state in Cilicia, which lasted for three centuries (1080 – 1375) (Bournoutian 2012). This event illustrated the mobility and adaptability of group identity and institutions, becoming a pivotal beginning period of Armenian diasporic identity.

The period from 1453 – 1604 illustrated the role of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the governance of diasporas. The Ottoman Empire designated the Armenians within the empire an ethnic *millet*, which is a distinct and relatively autonomous religious minority. The Armenian Church was granted control over the Armenian population by the Ottoman Empire, allowing the church to become a leader of the community (Tololyan 2000). A similar process occurred under Persian rule in the early 17th century. Between 1603 – 1604 CE the Persian king Shah Abbas' scorched earth policy forcefully uprooted and relocated large Armenian populations living in Persian-controlled Eastern Armenian lands to Persia, resulting in the deaths of thousands of Armenians (Bournoutian 2012). The surviving populations settled in the northern villages of Persia and in New Julfa, a suburb of Isfahan (Dekmejian 2004). A large Armenian diasporic community was formed in this area, which retained its ethnic and cultural identity through contact with the Armenian Church (Tololyan 2000).

The subsequent period from 1603 – 1784 CE witnessed the flourishing of the Armenian merchant communities around the world, especially in Iran, India and Europe (Tololyan 2000). These communities led the development of the printing press in the

Armenian language within the diaspora, where Armenian print culture solely existed until the mid-19th century (Tololyan 2000). The Armenian Mekhitarist Catholic monastic order also developed in the 18th century on the island of San Lazzaro near Venice, establishing educational centers for Armenians throughout Europe (Dekmejian 2004). This allowed an introduction to European nationalist ideologies, shaping diasporic attitudes that later impacted the homeland (Tololyan 2000).

A more “secular, linguistic, and national form of ‘unity’” emerged from 1784 – 1923, resulting in the challenge and displacement of the dominant power of the Armenian Church as an elite institution in the diaspora (Tololyan 2000, 118). A number of historical events contributed to this cultural shift, with the genocide of 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Empire beginning in 1915 becoming a pivotal moment in diasporic history. The genocidal massacre of ethnic Armenians by the Ottoman Empire between 1915 – 1918 resulted in the displacement and subsequent settlement of the survivors across the globe. Some Armenians found refuge in the small remaining nation of Armenia that was recovering from its near extinction. Many others settled in the nearby countries of Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jerusalem, Cyprus, and Greece; in the Western European countries of France, Italy, and England; in Latin American countries such as Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Brazil; and in North America, in both the United States and Canada (Dekmejian 2004).

Prior to the Armenian Genocide, various diasporic elites and institutions that included schools, print media, philanthropic organizations, and political parties were calling for a homeland independent from foreign rulers (Tololyan 2000). The focus of these elites and institutions, including the Armenian Church, after the genocide shifted to

a commitment of rebuilding the Armenian people and the homeland (Tololyan 2000). The emerging discourse from 1923 – 1965 surrounded the notion of national-exilic identity of the Armenian diaspora (Tololyan 2000). Changing global forces during the period between 1965 – 1988 challenged the dominant, post-Genocide, exilic nationalist order of the diaspora (Tololyan 2000). This was caused by a number of factors, including a problematic relationship between the Soviet Armenian government and the global diaspora. This relationship created tensions between diaspora factions who were nationalist loyalists to the homeland and the nationalists who rejected Communism (Tololyan 2000). The Western-educated younger diasporic generation was beginning to challenge the exilic notions of the community during this period as well, calling for a reconsideration of the dispersed community in terms of a permanent Armenian diasporic identity (Tololyan 2000).

The gradual collapse of the Soviet Union beginning in 1988 and the newly emergent Armenian Independent Republic in 1991 increased the rate of globalization in the homeland and in the diaspora, which continues until today. Several important events in Armenia led to the population growth of the diaspora at the expense of the homeland. These included a devastating earthquake in 1988; the secession from Azerbaijan and independence of Nagorno -Karabagh between 1988 – 1994; and the economic blockade of Armenia by Turkey and Azerbaijan from 1988 to the present time (Tololyan 2000). These events led to the immigration of a million Armenians from the homeland, many of whom were seeking economic opportunities abroad, once again shifting early diasporic representations.

The latter half of the 20th century intensified the transnational contacts and relationships formed between the homeland and the diaspora. The diasporic communities across the globe formed dense networks that transcended political borders, in their search for economic and social advancements transnationally (Vertovec 2001). These connections impacted the cultural identity construction and maintenance of diasporic Armenians, since each diasporic community's identity was also shaped by their host societies. The diasporic elites and institutions, along with the members of these communities, used a "flexible notion of citizenship" to accumulate power in their host societies, reshaping the cultural meanings and identities of Armenians in the diaspora and the homeland through globalization (Ong 1999, 6).

The Armenian Community in the United States

The history of Armenian migration to the United States traces back to the 17th century with the arrival of Martin the Armenian in Jamestown, Virginia, from Iran in 1618 (Archbishop Ashjian 1995). The subsequent arrivals of Armenian populations increased in the late 19th to early 20th century with the immigration of Armenians fleeing persecution and genocide by the Ottoman Turks prior to and during World War I (Mirak 1983). This immigration has increased steadily over time because of various factors, creating a large Armenian Diaspora in the United States that consists of migrants from a number of different countries in the Caucasus, Middle East, Europe, and South America (Bourtonian 2005).

While there were small populations of Armenians in the United States during the 19th century, the mass migrations of the group began in 1877 during the Russo-Turkish War (Mirak 2004). The first of the largest groups arrived from 1894 – 1896, escaping

Sultan Abdul Hamid the II's massacres of Armenians in Adana, Turkey and across the Ottoman Empire (Mirak 1983). World War I and the Armenian Genocide resulted in the migration of thousands of Armenian refugees who were escaping Turkish massacres to the United States (Mirak 2004). This stream continued in the 1920s, as more survivors emigrated to North America, with the assistance of their relatives and Armenian institutions in the United States, along with a number of American humanitarian organizations (Mirak 2004). These immigrants settled in the new country with the assistance of the Armenian community and the recently established Armenian Apostolic Churches in the United States (Archbishop Ashjian 1995). Many established communities on the East Coast, such as in New York and Massachusetts, while others moved further west and settled in Fresno, California. Many younger members of the community in Fresno relocated to San Francisco and Los Angeles during the Great Depression in the 1930s, forming new communities in these urban centers (Dekmejian 2004).

The 1920s were also a period of change in the relationship between the diaspora and the homeland, since Armenia became a Soviet republic to protect itself from the advancing Turkish forces (Dekmejian 2004). This event had a lasting impact on the relationship between the United States Armenian diaspora and the homeland. The growing tensions between the members of the diaspora who supported Communist ideologies and those who opposed them was especially evident in contentious encounters between opposing Armenian political parties. These rivalries reached their climax with the assassination of Armenian Archbishop Levon Tourian by one of the political party members in New York City on December 24, 1933 (Dekmejian 2004). This event led to

an ongoing schism within the Armenian Church between the Western and Eastern Prelacies, which continues until today (Archbishop Ashjian 1995).

The ensuing Cold War between Russia and the United States increased the tensions between Armenian political parties in the diaspora, also impacting the Armenian Church (Tololyan 2000). The struggle between the diaspora and Soviet Armenia surrounded the election of a bishop to the Catholicos of the Cilician See in Antelias, Lebanon (Dekmejian 2004). The competing political interests of the diaspora and Soviet Armenia were expressed through all forms of cultural identity construction, including the Church. After the election of Nikita Khrushchev in the Soviet Union, the increased contact between the homeland and the diaspora in the 1960s eased some of these tensions (Dekmejian 2004). Armenians throughout the world, especially in the United States, were able to travel to the homeland and reconnect with their ethnic and cultural identities. In turn, Armenian writers, musicians, composers, scientists, and dance ensembles from the homeland travelled throughout the diaspora centers, impacting the Armenian cultural production in the diaspora (Dekmejian 2004).

The second large wave of migrations of Armenians occurred in the 1960s, when the Hart-Celler Immigration Act of 1965 changed immigration quotas in the United States for a number of countries (Tololyan 2000). These countries included Lebanon, Turkey and Egypt, where there was increasing upheavals and political uncertainty. Members of the Armenian diaspora in these countries seized the immigration legislation opportunity to move to the United States, increasing the size of the small communities in the west coast and forming growing ethnic enclaves, especially in Los Angeles (Tololyan 2000). During this period, the diaspora members was beginning to realize that the

diaspora was permanent, rather than a temporary exile that would result in a future repatriation in the homeland (Dekmejian 2004).

The third large wave of immigration occurred near the end of the 20th century, during the gradual collapse of the Soviet Union, beginning in 1988 (Mirak 2004). The economic and political instability of Armenia, lack of employment, and the Karabagh war led to the migration of two million Armenians to the diaspora, many of whom settled in the United States (Tololyan 2000). While immigration of Armenian populations from Middle Eastern countries continued during this period, even larger groups of the immigrants were arriving from Armenia and former Soviet republics. Many of these individuals settled in the ethnic Armenian enclaves of Los Angeles, which resulted in the region becoming one of the largest Armenian diasporas globally. A steady stream of Armenian immigrants continues to settle in Los Angeles, contributing culturally, politically and economically to this growing community.

The early Armenian immigrants attempted to practice their faith in the United States without the presence of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Herbert Gans (1994) argues that this practice was employed by Jews for centuries during times of crisis and political turmoil that resulted in the absence of a synagogue. These factors have led to the rise of symbolic religiosity through home-centered religions in communities that have faced persecution and continuous conflict (Gans 1994).

The void of the religious institution in the Armenian community was filled with the construction of Sourp Prgich (Holy Savior) Church in 1891 by the largest Armenian community in the United States in Worcester, Massachusetts (Archbishop Ashjian 1995). This was followed by the expansion of the church diocese as the Armenian population

increased in the United States (Archbishop Ashjian 1995). The Church diocese served several purposes for the Armenian community, ranging from political to social needs. The significance of its role increased after World War I, when large populations of immigrants who survived the Armenian Genocide began arriving in the United States (Mirak 1983). The Church promptly began assisting in the resettlement of these immigrants, along with education of the incoming orphaned Armenian children (Archbishop Ashjian 1995). It also assisted the efforts in the reconstruction of the homeland after the devastation of World War I (Archbishop Ashjian 1995). The Church unified the Armenian community in the United States and helped create a distinct group identity by engaging in common causes and collective action, as Dorothy Noyes stresses, “Acting in common makes community” (2003, 29). The religious symbols of the Church and the orthodox faith also allowed Armenians to cope with and address the recent terrors of the genocide committed against their group. This was reinforced through regular church attendance and performance of liturgy by the Church, allowing the members of the community to experience their faith and cultural identity together. The symbols and rituals helped fuse the group’s ethos and worldview. Over time the reliance on the Church increased because of cultural hybridization, which Ben-Rafael (2013) has argued creates a larger reliance on community leaders for retention of cultural identity.

The various streams of mass migrations and steady immigration of Armenians from various countries to the United States has created a culturally hybrid diaspora, where cultural identity is produced, performed, and maintained through a number of different means. The elite institutions, which include the Armenian Apostolic Church, play an important role in these cultural processes.

Diasporic Identity

Scholars have frequently used the term ‘diaspora’ to refer to dispossessed and de-territorialized populations. An in-depth discussion of the term is necessary to identify specific groups that fall within this category, which includes Armenians.

Eliazar Ben-Rafael has attempted to delineate the complex strata of diaspora, examining the various components of transnational groups that construct the central ideology of diasporas and link all the members of a specific diasporic group. One of the key components he identifies is the group’s sense of attachment to a territory of origin that connects the various communities of the diaspora to a shared cultural and geographic past (Ben-Rafael 2013). Armenians have utilized this notion by referring to the current legal territory of Armenia, along with the historic Armenian lands currently located in Turkey, as their territory of origin. The expression of this concept varies, ranging from the performance of dance and music from the various regions in these territories to identifying with specific cities and villages as the origin of their familial and cultural identities. This illustrates Ben-Rafael’s (2013) discussion of identity as being another essential feature of diasporas. He argues that identity has a multifaceted function, allowing members of the group to feel committed to each other through a sense of kinship and a perceived cultural singularity, creating a distance between themselves and others that are not members of the group (Ben-Rafael 2013). The solidifying tendency of the community as a collective identity is dependent on the members’ commitment to and solidarity with the other individuals of the group, creating an identity of a ‘we’ that is different from ‘they’, through common symbols that “singularize the collective as a whole” (Ben-Rafael 2013, 848). The singularity of the group creates a familial

connectivity globally, with the transnational diasporas considering themselves as one ‘people’ stemming from the ‘old country’, despite the inevitable hybridization over time.

The Armenian notion of alterity has relied on several cultural features that include food, language, and history. The Armenian identification with the Armenian Apostolic Church has been a central feature of this alterity for centuries. When other characteristics of the culture have changed or become extinct in the diaspora, the Armenian Church has consistently retained its dominant position as an identity marker. This alterity has allowed the members of the Armenian community throughout the world to feel interconnected and in touch with their ancestral identity, despite the cultural hybridizations through historic contact with other groups (Bakalian 1993; Pattie 1999).

Ben-Rafael (2013) also argues that through migration these groups tend to become somewhat similar to mainstream society yet retain their original cultural traits, creating a biculturalism. This allows them to insert themselves into their current environment while retaining loyalty to their culture and country of origin (Ben-Rafael 2013). Over several generations the original cultural traits that once served as identity markers gradually disappear through hybridization, shifting towards a heavier reliance on community leaders and educational institutions for retention of identity (Ben-Rafael 2013). This has been demonstrated in various Armenian diasporic communities, ranging from Fresno, to New York, and London (Jendian 2008; Bakalian 1993; Pattie 1999). In each one of these communities, the cultural assimilation of the Armenian community had become increasingly inevitable. In each one of these locations, the Armenian community became increasingly reliant on the Armenian Apostolic Church for the retention of their identity.

Ben-Rafael (2013) continues this discussion by arguing that despite such changes, the 'old' country remains the central identity of the diaspora and requires the original homeland to collaborate with the diaspora's interests, since the members of the diaspora consider their bicultural position to be more advanced than that of the homeland (Ben-Rafael 2013). Tololyan (2000) has demonstrated this phenomenon within the Armenian diaspora, where its members rely on a notion of the homeland that encompasses modern day Armenian and Turkish territory in the maintenance of cultural identity. The diasporic elites and institutions have stressed the importance of what Gupta (1992) refers to as the imagined place of the homeland, for the preservation of the group in a new location. These elites and institutions have also used their bicultural positions, impacted by the politics of the host society, to change the political landscape of the homeland (Tololyan 2000).

Khachig Tololyan's (2007) definition of 'diaspora' contains some features of Ben-Rafael's description, but it stresses the significance of specific characteristics of the group for this specific identification. Tololyan (2007) argues that there are distinct differences between diasporic and dispersed communities. The first condition he identifies for a diaspora is that it is born out of a catastrophe that leads to a collective suffering and trauma of the group, shaping the cultural production based on the memory, commemoration, and mourning of the event (Tololyan 2007). The history of the Armenian diaspora surrounds catastrophic events that have led to the dispersion of the group from the homeland, as discussed above (Mirak 1983; Mirak 2004; Dekmejian 2004; Tololyan 2000). The memory and commemoration of the most catastrophic event, the Armenian Genocide, occurs annually on and around April 24 throughout the diaspora.

The commemoration of the Genocide also allows for the establishment of specific boundaries for the Armenian community, which Dorothy Noyes (2003) has argued are essential in defining group membership for immigrant communities. According to Noyes (2003) these boundaries and collective action assist in the construction of communal identities. The Armenian commemoration of and protests for recognition of the Armenian Genocide allow the members of the global community to engage with their larger imagined community through collective action, enabling them to reestablish their communal identities.

Tololyan (2007) continues his discussion of diasporas by stressing that the dispersion resulting from catastrophe is followed by the group's attempts to preserve the culture, language, religious practices, and cultural traditions of the homeland either intact or in hybrid forms. This is in combination with a continuous rhetoric of return to the homeland, and maintenance of ties with the extended kin communities abroad and at home (Tololyan 2007). The early identification of the Armenian diaspora as an exilic community attempting to preserve its cultural identity and heritage, while awaiting repatriation, demonstrates this point (Tololyan 2000). The community held onto this notion for several centuries, coming to terms with the permanence of the diaspora within the last four decades. The Armenian lexicon also demonstrates the anxiety of removal from the homeland and the continuous hope for repatriation through terms like *gaghut* (settlement outside the homeland), *arderkir* (outside the homeland), and *tz'ronk* (scattering) (Tololyan 2000).

Tololyan (2007) also argues that the group feels linked but different from the host community and its other settlers by resisting assimilation, despite the great efforts made

to integrate into the new culture. The notion of cultural alterity in relation to the host and neighboring cultures has been a prevalent feature of identity construction and maintenance within the Armenian culture and its diaspora (Dekmejian 2004; Tololyan 2000). The Armenian term for referring to a non-Armenian, *odar* (foreign, alien, unfamiliar, distant) is another illustration of this alterity; despite the familiarity of and relation to the non-Armenian, the term *odar* is used to describe these individuals. Tololyan (2007) continues by arguing that even when some members of a diaspora become assimilated, they are replaced by new immigrants that continue the standard social formation through continuous migration. This constant influx of the members to the group maintains their distinction from the host community, which changes in form over time (Tololyan 2007). The Los Angeles Armenian diaspora also demonstrates this point in Tololyan's argument. The desire to avoid assimilation persists in this community, despite its presence in the area since the 1930s (Mirak 2004). This is due to the constant influx of immigrants throughout the 20th and 21st centuries from various Armenian diasporas and Armenia, ensuring that the community retains its distinct identity in the host society.

Armenian Diasporic and Transnational Identity

Benedict Anderson's (2006) discussion surrounding the origin of nations and nationalism is apparent within the Armenian diaspora. Nationalism and Armenian patriotism shape diasporic values and attitudes towards the homeland. As discussed earlier, during the period of European national consciousness in the 18th and 19th centuries a large Armenian merchant diaspora was forming throughout the world (Tololyan 2000). There was also a growing community of Armenian students throughout

Europe during this period (Dekmejian 2004). The members of the diaspora in Europe, who belonged to the merchant class or consisted of students, were embracing the nationalist ideologies they were encountering in their host nations. This influenced the development of the Armenian periodical press in the diaspora in Madras, India, in 1794, further increasing the cohesive nationalist notions of Armenianness, despite the absence of an independent national rule in the homeland (Tololyan 2004). Encounter with European ideologies also spread to the homeland through these merchants and students, some of whom returned home with a new nationalist fervor. The various elite institutions in the diaspora that included schools, print media, and political parties amplified this fervor and called for the emancipation of Armenia from foreign rule (Tololyan 2000).

This nationalism continues today in the homeland and in the diaspora, through the assistance of elite institutions. Political Armenian organizations and lobbying groups in the United States advocate for Armenian causes that span from recognition of the Armenian Genocide and Nagorno-Karabagh's sovereignty, to growth of economic relations between the United States and Armenia (Armenian National Committee of America 2015). The Armenian Apostolic Church also promotes Armenian transnationalism by sponsoring events and activities, such as scholarship funds and programs for the disadvantaged, among a number of other activities that assist Armenians in the diaspora and the homeland (Western Diocese of the Armenian Church 2016).

Contemporary cultural productions in the diaspora embrace the notion of transnationalism, which Tololyan (2000) identifies as inclusive of all diasporic communities across the globe and in the homeland. These productions range from literary works to polemic discourse and artistic expression. The members of the diaspora also

take part in the cultural production of transnationalism through stereotypical productions of nationalism (Tololyan 2000). These include the display of photographs of Mount Ararat in nearly all Armenian homes and restaurants, which “acts as a marker of ethnodiasporic identity” (Tololyan 2000, 126). The image of Mount Ararat, which is a mountain located within modern day Turkish territory, as an ethnodiasporic identity marker illustrates Akhil Gupta’s (1992) discussion surrounding the naturalization of the association of a culturally unitary group with territory. Tololyan has further argued that, “Stereotype, like polemic, marks Armenian representational regimes in diaspora and are nurtured by their mutually sustaining alliance with Armenian institutions, including those with explicitly political – often nationalist – aims” (2000, 126).

The intensification of nationalism in the homeland and the diaspora is also the result of earlier colonization of Armenia for several centuries. As Akhil Gupta (1992) has observed, the history of third world nations, including Armenia, has required the intensification of nationalism to maintain the new sovereignty that is threatened by cultural imperialism, economic dependence, and indebtedness in a capitalist global system.

While the European nationalist fervor of the 18th and 19th centuries had a significant impact on Armenian identity, the notion of an Armenian nation existed prior to this contact. Tololyan (2000) has argued that the Ottoman and Persian empires, along with other colonial powers later in history, have played an important role in the construction of a nation for many territorialized ethnic groups, which includes the Armenians, prior to the rise of European nationalist ideology. He has stated that minorities, territorialized ethnic groups, tribes and diasporas led by indigenous religious

and political elites developed political identities and institutions during colonization, which was shaped by the “impulse of the imperial edicts” (Tololyan 2000, 132). These social and cultural formations were reshaped, rather than created, by the changing imperial rule and the print culture of the 16th and 17th centuries (Tololyan 2000).

The position of diasporic transnationalism based on the notion of an Armenian nation-state as homeland and the Armenian people across the globe as its ethnic and cultural members can be problematic for the political leadership of the modern Armenian Republic. Arjun Appadurai (1996) addresses the globally widespread issues similar to the Armenian case by pointing out the many problems faced by nation-states in a postnational and translocal world surrounding the issue of sovereign territory. He argues that territorial sovereignty is an increasing problem for nation-states, due to warfare, conquest, defense of borders, and cultural imperialism, along with movements of people and goods globally (Appadurai 1996). The constant movements of people and goods across borders leave the state with only the concept of sovereign territory as something to monopolize, highlighting the importance of this notion to the state and its political leadership (Appadurai 1996). The “postnational cartographies” created by diasporic and translocal populations’ claims to territory threaten this sovereignty, since they do not adhere to the nation-state borders in our current cartography and are not aligned with the self-representation of sovereign states (Appadurai 1996). Appadurai (1996) argues that territory is a crucial problem for the nation-state, since it is based on the notion of ethnic coherence. The increasing mobility of populations as a result of global economic and political conditions lead to the creation of diasporas, whose ethnic plurality violates the

idea of ethnic, territorial, and national identity singularity on which the modern nation-state relies (Appadurai 1996).

Appadurai's (1996) argument has been illustrated by the ongoing contentious relationship between the Armenian diaspora's elites and institutions and the Armenian government. The political and cultural ideologies of these groups have been at odds with one another for several decades. As discussed above, the Communist era in the homeland created rifts within the institutions of the diaspora, impacting its relationship with the homeland (Tololyan 2000). These issues spilled into many aspects of the diasporic culture, including the Armenian Church (Tololyan 2000; Dekmejian 2004). The diaspora's transnational concerns over the homeland have also impacted the sovereign host nation-states, where diasporic elites and institutions impact the governmental policy making of these nations through lobbying.

The transnationalism of the Armenian diaspora is also impacted by global cultural flows that cause disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics (Appadurai 1990). Appadurai (1990) identifies ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, finanscaples, and ideoscaples as the five dimensions of this cultural flow, which turn the previously identified imagined communities into an imagined world. The constantly changing landscape through movement, rapidly spreading technology, and growing global capital are identified as three disjunctures that are highly unpredictable, since they are impacted by local factors. These are also the foundations of mediascaples and ideoscaples, which create and transmit images of landscapes and carefully constructed narratives throughout the world (Appadurai 1990). Appadurai (1990) argues that these images blur the lines between realistic and fictional landscapes, creating a more imagined world for the people

that are further away from that region. These productions are image-centered and narrative-based to serve the special interests producing them, which are often politically motivated (Appadurai 1990). While these imagined landscapes can create and increase tensions in the deterritorialized populations, they also open access to cultures outside of the landscapes and create a sense of linked identity between these groups, recreating a new imagined community and intensifying the sense of connection between the deterritorialized people (Appadurai 1990).

The five cultural flows identified by Appadurai (1990) have played an important role in the relationship and connection of the Armenian diaspora with the homeland. The ethnoscares, defined by Appadurai as “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live,” is illustrated by the Armenian diaspora’s impact on the politics of the host nation-states through political organizations such as the Armenian Assembly of America and the Armenian National Committee of America (1990, 297). The finanscares are illustrated in the fundraising efforts of the diaspora for the homeland, ranging from issues concerning poverty in specific regions to improvement of infrastructure (Tololyan 2000). The diaspora expresses its concerns for specific issues in the homeland through the movement of this capital. The technoscares, along with mediascares and ideoscares, are visible in the connection of the global Armenian community through social media, internet based and locally produced newspapers, and satellite television. These means of communication produce narratives of nationalism for the diaspora and the homeland. They range from calls for military service in defense of the homeland during times of crises, as was the case in the three-day war in Nagorno-Karabagh in April, 2016; to boycotts of Turkish products; and the preservation of culture

through endogamous marriage (Hay Yntaniq 2017). They are created by the political and elite institutions within the homeland and the diaspora to serve the nationalist and transnationalist interests of each group.

The cultural flows discussed above also illustrate Jan Pieterse's (1995) argument, where he suggests that globalization has expanded access to local cultures throughout the world to diasporas, no longer delegating culture to the nation. Pieterse argues that the expansion of access to local cultures intensifies the already hybrid cultures that have been mistakenly considered homogenous in the past, further hybridizing them by opening "the doors of erstwhile imagined communities" (Pieterse 1995, 63). This process makes cultures more interdependent, requiring new co-operations and rebuilding new group imaginaries (Pieterse 1995). The author suggests that this approach in studies of globalization escapes the boundaries of nation, community, ethnicity, and class, appreciating the "kaleidoscope of collective experience" (Pieterse 1995,64).

The reality of a heterogenous cultural identity began to be more visible within the Armenian diaspora after the immigration of Armenians from the Middle East to the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. The hybrid cultural identities of Lebanese-Armenians, Turkish-Armenians, Egyptian-Armenians, Iranian-Armenians, and so on, shattered the homogenous notion of an Armenian cultural identity, since each group offered a different perspective of what this cultural identity entails. This issue persists to some extent in the diaspora, especially in the Los Angeles Armenian community. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the ensuing immigration from Armenia further complicated this matter, since there was an entirely new representation of the cultural identity emerging from the homeland. To further complicate this process, these later

immigrants consisted of earlier Armenian diaspora members who had repatriated to Armenia sometime between the end of World War II and the 1970s (Dekmejian 2004). These individuals had further hybridized cultural identities that were inconsistent with the identities of the American diaspora, the Middle Eastern Armenian diaspora, and the Armenians from the homeland. These various Armenian immigrant communities were living at the very least dual, if not multiple, lives through their bi(multi)lingualism and bi(multi)culturalism, able to flow between two (or more) cultural and in some cases national borders, establishing economic, cultural, and political ties in multiple locations (Vertovec 2001).

The regrouping of these hybrid identities in the United States, especially in Los Angeles, required new co-operations and a reconsideration of the old group imaginaries. These processes illustrated Friedman's (1995) argument that the surrounding environment and the world need to be understood and identified in the fluidity of cultural identification, which moves between categories and world systems. The political and economic issues of the homeland near the end of the 20th century also required a diasporic reconsideration of the group imaginary that relied on the notion of an exilic community (Tololyan 2000). The rebuilding of this group imaginary had to rely on the idea of a permanent Armenian diasporic community, which shifted the priorities and approaches of its elites and institutions (Tololyan 2000).

Armenian Diasporic Patterns

R. Hrair Dekmejian (2004) has identified several consistent patterns that have occurred throughout the centuries within the global Armenian diaspora. He has identified coercion as a causal factor of the diaspora, through massacres and political instability

(Dekmejian 2004). The group also has consistently considered the diaspora as a transient place of existence, with hopes of a future return to the homeland (Dekmejian 2004). This attitude is beginning to change in several diasporas, especially in the United States. The issue of cultural survival and preservation has been a central concern for the group. This preoccupation has allowed the diaspora to resist assimilation in a number of host societies, especially in Muslim countries (Dekmejian 2004). While this mission has proven to be more difficult in secular and Christian host nations, many members of the community have accomplished this task through their membership and association with the Armenian Apostolic Church. Dekmejian (2004) has also identified deprivation, stemming from minority status in hostile societies; destabilization, through catastrophic events leading to mass migrations; and compensation and elitism resulting from economic and cultural achievement in many host societies, which has been detrimental to the group in some cases as it has triggered negative emotions from the dominant majority. The economic and cultural achievements have allowed for a bourgeois lifestyle, while avoiding political involvement in the host countries (Dekmejian 2004). This has usually been the case in the past, however, emerging political activism in the United States illustrates the changing attitudes of the diaspora. This shift is likely due to the reconsideration of the transience of the diaspora, embracing its permanence and seeking to shape its position within the 'host' society through political involvement.

Dekmejian (2004) has also identified heightened intra-communal politics within the group, despite its evasion of the political involvement in the host nation. This is due to the concerns and involvement of the diaspora in the affairs of the homeland, resulting from a transnationalist sentiment. The religio-cultural nationhood of Armenia and the

diaspora is another important feature, which arose in the religio-cultural symbiosis of the fifth century (Dekmejian 2004). Several historical events, including the Vardanank Wars of 451 – 484 CE and the Armenian Church's rejection of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE, resulted in this symbiosis that became an ideological cornerstone of Armenian national and cultural identity (Dekmejian 2004; Bournoutian 2012). This religious symbiosis has been an important preserver of Armenian cultural identity in the homeland and the diaspora.

Dekmejian (2004) has identified social insularity and cultural parochialism as another pattern evident in the diaspora. This is demonstrated in the language used to describe non-Armenians (*odars*), and in the ethnic enclaves present in various diasporas, especially in Los Angeles. Dekmejian (2004) argues that this is due to centuries of persecution by 'outsiders', heightening the threat of the 'other'. A postgenocide syndrome is another persistent feature of the community, which began with pervasive feelings of insecurity and dependency with the first generation of survivors, who transmitted the trauma to new generations (Dekmejian 2004). The following generations looked to the tragic past as motivation to establish flourishing Armenian communities and successful lives. The final feature present in almost all Armenian diasporas is the role of the Armenian Church as a national bastion (Dekmejian 2004). The turbulent past of Armenians has resulted in the loss of political autonomy throughout history, leaving the Armenian people without leadership. During these periods of crises and uncertainty the Armenian Church has served as a national and cultural steward of the diaspora, uniting its dispersed population.

Rooted or Rhizomorphic Culture?

The model of the Armenian diaspora is reflective of what Liisa Malkki (1992) has referred to as “rhizomorphic,” through its multiple attachments and connections to various cultures and territories it has encountered. The rhizomorphic model suggests that groups make multiple lateral connections as they move from one location to another, in contrast to the hierarchical arboreal model that relies on the rootedness of culture. This model is in contrast to the group’s traditional concept of itself, which relies on a metaphysical sedentarist notion of its cultural identity. The roots of the group are believed to be in the sacred land of modern Armenian territory and in historic Armenian territory, located in modern day Turkey. These roots are believed to have produced an Armenian cultural tree that has spread out, resulting from the people’s forced uprooting from their ancestral land. This sentiment is expressed through various cultural processes. These include artistic expression through traditional songs that praise the land and the water, bringing a handful of dirt home after a cultural pilgrimage to the homeland, re-telling of folktales and mythology about the group’s patriarchs’ and heroes’ emancipation of the land from foreigners, and reproducing and displaying images of Mount Ararat in their homes and restaurants. It is also expressed in the traditional conception of an exilic community, uprooted from its land, awaiting return to its homeland, so that the group can once again thrive and grow. The Armenian diaspora that is coming to terms with the permanence of its condition is beginning to embrace the general concept of a rhizomorphic identity, especially in communities like Los Angeles, where there are large Armenian populations.

CHAPTER V
RELIGION AND PRACTICE THEORY

Symbols and Hegemony in Religion

Geertz (2000) has argued that the understanding of the social role of religion requires its examination through an analysis of the meaning of symbols in religion, before considering their social role, because sacred symbols form the cultural character of a group and their worldview. He defines religion as: “(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, persuasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic” (Geertz 2000, 90). Symbols, Geertz asserts, are the physical embodiments of beliefs, ideas, and abstractions of experience, providing meaning to the extrinsic social reality of the group by creating harmony between the group’s worldviews and ethos that allow the individuals of the group to believe that their way of life is well suited for their surroundings. These symbols then create moods, which are a wide range of emotions that are induced by religious symbols, and motivations, which are obligations for specific behavior or emotion according to the religious system (Geertz 2000). When these two are performed and experienced together and according to the appropriate religious symbols, they become fulfilling because they correspond to the way reality is constructed with those symbols (Geertz 2000). This reality is affirmed by the order that is created in the world by sacred symbols, which obscures the general chaotic nature of the world and allows humans to function. Geertz stresses that this chaos can occur from the limits of human empirical knowledge that threatens the meaning of existence, human

suffering and limits of endurance, and the moral dilemma of evil. Religious symbols respond to these problems by addressing the absurdity of human experience and assure the individual that meaning is beyond the limits of human experience and part of a much wider world beyond the immediate reality.

These concepts are then reinforced through rituals, which bridge the gap between induced moods and motivations and the order of existence, fusing the group's ethos and worldview. These "cultural performances" shape the spiritual consciousness of the group, allowing actors and audience members to portray and attain their faith through performance of the symbols and thus experience the ultimate reality together. The result is the individuals' ability to travel back and forth between the mundane world and religious perspectives, making the religious perspective the wider reality that completes the common-sense world. This reinforces the belief that the way of life of the group is the correct one and makes the religious symbols the foundation of the common-sense world. Geertz asserts that these processes demonstrate that religion serves as a general model of morality, behavior, and emotion for the group, creating a framework for social relationships and psychological events in the mundane world by interpreting and shaping these experiences.

Talal Asad (1983) has criticized Geertz's concept of religion as a universal application without the consideration of historical conditions that involve power structures and hegemonic knowledge. Asad (1983) has argued that these processes impact the meaning of religion within each historical context. He forms his argument of power relations in religion by referring to the early history of Western Christianity. Asad (1983) argues that Geertz's system of symbols and cultural patterns cannot solely exist

outside of the individual and are influenced by attitudes and practices of the people, since they are the representation of the communal practices. He also refutes Geertz's argument that religious symbols create distinct dispositions in the worshipper, arguing that these symbols are not solely responsible for these dispositions which can also be induced by economic and social institutions. Asad (1983) stresses the importance of power and discipline in inducing these dispositions. He draws on St. Augustine's discussion of acceptance of God through discipline and punishment, identifying the various social factors that can enact discipline through power.

Asad (1983) continues with a discussion on the processes of creation of religion and the "authorizing discourses" that are responsible for this, which consists of defining from a large number of sources and places the practices, ideas, places, and individuals as acceptable or heretical. Referring to the medieval Church he states, "What it sought was the subjection of all practice to a unified authority, to a single authentic source which could tell truth from falsehood" (Asad 1983, 244). This allowed the institutional power to maintain its control by allowing for improvisation in the community when faced with tensions and contradictions between religious doctrine and practice.

Asad (1983) concludes by questioning the validity in interpretation of religious symbols outside of social disciplines, historical contexts and social life. He suggests a different approach to understanding religion that does not focus on dualisms of internal and external symbols, doctrines and practices, or symbols and rituals. Instead, he suggests, the analysis should consider the role of power in creating a religion that is so deeply intertwined with historical and social conditions.

The arguments presented by both theorists are exhibited in the Armenian ethno-religious identity. Concerning Asad's (1983) argument, the origin of the Armenian Apostolic Church is the result of the Armenian king's conversion to Christianity in the early fourth century. This event has led to the position of the Armenian Church as the ecclesiastic and national authority of Armenians throughout history, especially in times of turmoil. This was reinforced by the creation of the Armenian alphabet, which was supported and authorized by the religious authorities and the king. This unity between the Armenian Apostolic Church and the political powers/the state of Armenia continue to exist today, shaping the politics of the homeland and impacting the position of the Armenian Church in the diaspora (Mkrtchyan 2015). The Church is still considered by many to be an authority of preservation of the Armenian ethnos and nation, whether abroad or at home, which reinforces its power within the Armenian community. Its hegemony has constructed a notion of a specific Armenian cultural identity that is closely linked to the Armenian Apostolic Church. It has played an important role in the authorizing discourse of Armenian heritage through the production of Armenian history and literature in the fifth century. Origin myths written in the Armenian script during this period by notable historians like Movses Khorenats'i combined the stories with the Biblical narrative of Noah. This has created a notion of an inherent Christian Armenian quality, bestowed on the Armenian people by God through their progenitor's bloodline. The Armenian Church and the early political leaders of Armenia ensured a continuous association of cultural identity with religious identity by presenting the conversion of King Trdat III as a divine rebirth and creation of the Armenian nation. This cultural rebirth involved the destruction of pagan sites from earlier religious traditions and the

building of churches at these sites, recreating Armenian identity through the newly formed tangible heritage sites (Bournoutian 2012). Earlier pagan traditions and celebrations were Christianized, allowing the Armenian ethnic identity to continue through a new lens.

These methods employed by the Armenian Church and the political leadership, which made the church a hegemony in the Armenian culture have been largely successful. Almost all the participants interviewed for this study identified religion as an important, sometimes essential feature of Armenian cultural identity. This importance, many stated, was due to the consistent presence of the Armenian Church in Armenian history, being the savior of the culture in times of turmoil and uncertainty, uniting Armenians under their ethno-religious identity. One participant explained, “We take pride in our Christianity and you can’t separate the Armenian Church from the Armenian state. Even when we think there are dirty politics involved in the Church, we can’t turn our back on the Church, because we’ll be considered ‘bad Armenians’” (Tina, personal communication). Others cited the persistent presence of the Armenian Church in any diasporic Armenian community around the world. Martin stated, “Armenians gather around churches wherever they go, allowing the culture to move around with us wherever we end up. It has been a place for community interaction in many places” (personal communication). He continued with, “It’s by gathering around the church that allows our kids to learn about their culture” (Martin, personal communication). Martin does not consider himself to be a religious individual and attends the Armenian Church only on family and friends’ rites of passage ceremonies.

The attitudes of Los Angeles diaspora Armenians reflect Asad's argument that institutional powers maintain their control by allowing for improvisation by the community when there is tension between religious doctrine and practice. While the Armenian Church would prefer to have the Armenian community members attend church regularly, they do not enforce attendance for performance of rites of passage ceremonies. The only qualification they require is baptism in the Armenian Apostolic Church prior to the wedding ceremony. They are aware of the intrinsically linked ethno-religious Armenian identity, understanding that this identity maintains their power within the culture. They reinforce this ethnodoxy through discourse surrounding Armenian values and morals. One of my participants recalled hearing religious leaders on Armenian television shows making statements along the lines of "an Armenian is not Armenian without his/her religion" (Argisht, personal communication).

While the Armenian Church has been a power structure in constructing Armenian cultural identity, Armenian religiosity also reflects some features of Geertz's (2000) definition. Symbols play an important role in Armenian religious identity. Many Armenians, including several participants in my project, wear a cross around their neck. In many cases, especially for men, the cross is in a distinct Armenian design with floral motifs. I observed the cross around the necks of a number of the individuals I interviewed, and have seen it worn by many family members, who do not identify as religious. Those interviewed explained that the cross was more of a cultural symbol than religious belief. One participant, who is not religious remarked, "They wear the cross and have tattoos of the cross, and identify with their religion in this way. But when they really look into the tenets of the religion, they often find themselves conflicted; there is a

disconnect between their lifestyle and the religion” (Gevorg, personal communication). Whether a religious or a cultural symbol, the cross provides a meaning to the Armenian community of a distinct ethno-religious identity, whose art and symbols reflect this alterity. The physical embodiment of these sentiments is also present in the symbol of Armenian cross stones, called *khachkars*. These are relief sculptures with stone lace crosses that developed in the ninth century (Bournoutian 2012). These relief sculptures are another sacred symbol of Armenian Christianity. They can be found throughout Armenia, and in some parts of historic Armenian lands, as well as in the diaspora. They represent the Christian beliefs of Armenians through the cross, and the cultural identity of the group with the distinct design. They are a point of ethno-religious pride by many Armenians, who perceive the *khachkar* as a beautiful physical representation of Armenian culture through art and religion.

The symbol of the cross is then reinforced through the ritual of crossing oneself when inside the church, whether for prayer or during performance of rites of passage ceremonies, and when passing by the church in some cases. The ritual of the best man holding the cross over the head of the newlyweds during the wedding ceremony reinforces the Armenian cultural and religious values for the couple and the best man, along with the larger social unit. A number of participants in my project had been either a best man, maid of honor, or a godparent. They understood the importance of their role and took their responsibilities very seriously, even if they considered them to be cultural responsibilities.



Image 1. The Armenian letter M on a *khachkar*, displayed at St. Mesrop Cathedral Yard in Oshakan, Armenia



Image 2. The best man holding the cross over the newlyweds' heads during a wedding ceremony

Practice, Habitus, Doxa, and Armenian Ethnoreligiosity

Bourdieu's (1977) practice theory explores human behavior through the interaction of individual action with structure: the individual actions of the group members that improvise and manipulate the underlying structures of the group. Through his case studies of Kabyle kinship and marriage customs, Bourdieu (1977) demonstrates how practice reflects both the maintenance of the formal rules of the group and the practical adjustments made by its actors for their ordinary needs. He argues that these factors of the group are essential components of his theory of habitus (Bourdieu 1977).

Habitus, Bourdieu argues, is "a socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures" that is the main, but not the sole, determinant of practice (1977, 76). Practice is the performance of individual behaviors that are shaped by "a disposition inculcated in the earliest years of life and constantly reinforced by calls to order from the group" (Bourdieu 1977, 14-5). Practical knowledge is acquired through experience with structures of the social environment, social interaction and practice. These processes also produce individual and collective habitus. The collective habitus is reinforced through social structures such as education and kinship. Similar experiences of the collective result in similar performances by the agents who have internalized these structures through shared experience. The constantly changing practice through interaction leads to cultural improvisations of the habitus, which are limited "by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production" (Bourdieu 1977, 95). Habitus resides within the body of the social unit and the social agent, shaping the practice of each unit according to the generative schemes of the habitus. Over time this becomes practical knowledge and the experiences shaped by it become personal and social histories. Since the structures

“transmit this or that form of practical mastery” through social exercises, the shared experiences by members of each social unit express a similar habitus (Bourdieu 1977, 88).

Bourdieu (1977) has also argued that doxa, orthodoxy, and heterodoxy are the processes utilized by the dominant members of the group to embed specific ideals into the psyche of the culture. He explains that members of a group have a general sense of reality, which is the recognition and misrecognition of the arbitrariness of the social group.

This is compensated by organization of the objective and subjective orders to perceive the natural and the social worlds as self-evident, which he refers to as *doxa*. This self-evident notion of the social and the natural worlds is reproduced by political instruments, which reinforce the belief system. Those who do not benefit by this dominant notion must submit to the doxa in order to exist in the group and use it to their advantage in some way. The mythico-ritual systems serve to maintain the symbolic order that serves the dominant members of the group by dividing and unifying social structures temporally. This reinforces the objective and subjective concept of the social structure as self-evident and natural, existing without question. This understanding is further reinforced through practice, such as ritual ceremonies and collective belief, and through traditions like art, myth, and literature, affirming the group’s adherence to the self-evident notion of the world. The process of doxa begins at birth and continues through the lifetime of the individual through cultural tools, such as rituals, proverbs, and sayings that are in accordance to the habitus. This adherence is the result of the misrecognition of the arbitrariness of the group, which remains unchallenged.

The natural order of the social world becomes threatened when the group is confronted with differing opinion and discourse, *field of opinion*. This challenge destroys the self-evidence of the social structure and questions its natural state. The crisis that ensues in the group is the necessity for questioning doxa, which is the desire of the dominated class that wishes to expose the arbitrariness of the social world. The dominant class wishes to maintain the integrity of the doxa during crisis, which is then substituted by *orthodoxy*. Orthodoxy attempts to reinstate the doxa by outlining appropriate ways of thinking and speaking about the natural and social world, and designating speech opposed to this form, heterodoxy, as blasphemy. Language becomes a powerful tool in accomplishing this through the censorship of opposing ideas.

The habitus of a cohesive distinct Armenian cultural identity arose in the fourth century with the conversion of Trdat III to Christianity. Over the next millennium this habitus was adjusted through the improvisations of the people. The features of the cultural identity changed, but the notion of a cohesive ethnic unit stemming from the land of Ararat has persisted. The dominant feature of this group's identity was and continues to be Christianity, becoming a doxa over time. The Christian Armenian identity has been fostered through a number of social structures that reinforce the collective habitus of the culture. These structures include family and education. The success of these structures' reinforcement of the Armenian habitus is due to the historical antecedents and social conditions of the group, which have shaped the thoughts and behaviors of the Armenian people. The historical antecedents that have contributed to the dominant ideology within the Armenian culture have been the conflicts that have caused political turmoil and division and the responses of the elite institutions within the group to these events.

The history of displacement as a result of conflict has made family the symbol of home and stability. It has become one of the most tangible features of Armenian cultural identity, giving authority to this social unit for the reinforcement of the collective habitus. The participants in my research exhibited this notion through a variety of responses. This included understanding of cultural values through contact with family elders, deference to family desire during milestones, and connection to the collective culture through family. The close link of family to culture has resulted in a deeper appreciation and love for the Armenian culture. This has led to the members of the group to perceive one another as distant consanguineal kin, reinforcing the collective habitus of a cohesive primordial ethnic unit. This habitus has then been reinforced within each individual member's body, impacting their perception of other group members. The participants I interviewed used terms like "inexplicable feeling," "visceral connection," and "instant connection and familiarity" when referring to encounters with the culture and other members from the cultural group. Leona, a young participant, explained that she loves living in Glendale, because she is surrounded by Armenians. She stated, "When you go outside in Glendale, you'll see Armenian businesses with Armenian writing. It makes you feel safe and happy, because it's so familiar. Even when you're in a place where there are not many Armenians, as soon as you find that one Armenian there, you build an instant connection" (personal connection). Another participant, Armen, explained, "When it's April 24 and you see another Armenian, you have an unspoken connection. That's not a logical connection; you've never seen that person in your life. Or when you go across the world to let's say Italy, and the barista at the café is Armenian, there is an instant happiness. That feeling is not logical, because you don't know who that person is besides being

Armenian. Your brain doesn't tell you that you'll get happy when you see an Armenian. That feeling just happens and it's a natural reaction that comes from my cultural identity" (personal communication).

I have witnessed several occurrences when Armenians have felt happiness and an "instant connection" with other Armenians. A number of years ago my mother and I were on vacation at a resort in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. The morning after our arrival we were walking towards the beach, when we heard a family speaking Armenian. There was an instant feeling of happiness for both of us. We quickly became acquainted with the family, and began to eat together. The following evening I went to a club in the city with the younger members of this family. My mom felt at ease with me going, because she felt that I was safe with Armenians. The feeling of safety and trust with other Armenians was also expressed by another participant, Aylin. When she was recalling her trip to Armenia with her seven-year-old daughter, she remembered telling her daughter that she can go outside and play unsupervised, because they were in Armenia. She stated, "I can trust my people completely and I can transfer that trust to my daughter" (personal communication).

The doxa of a Christian Armenian identity created in the fourth century also reinforces the habitus. As one participant in my project said, "When I was growing up, religion and Armenianness was sort of one" (Mary, personal communication). This doxa has been maintained within the culture through the structure of education. The creation of the Armenian script is aligned with the Armenian Apostolic Church, since they played a major role in St. Mesrop Mashtots' undertaking of this difficult task. The dominant ideology of the elite institutions like the Armenian Church and the Armenian state that

created the doxa of a Christian Armenian identity was reinforced through literature. The histories and myths produced after the fourth century stressed the significance of this doxa in the survival of the social unit. This notion survives until today, when members of the group refer to the importance of the Armenian Church in the maintenance of Armenian identity that has been threatened throughout history.

The habitus of an ethno-religious identity has also been reinforced through language. The members of the group perceive the Armenian language as an ancient treasure that must be maintained. As William Safran has stated, “Language and religion are related; both have deep structures and both are regarded as constitutive aspects of ‘primordialism’ in the sense that individuals are born into one, the other, or (in most instances) both” (2008, 171). This is especially the case with ethnoreligious groups, such as Armenians, Jews, and Sikhs, whose members tend to remain within the group (Safran 2008). Their language is closely associated with their ethnoreligious identity, resulting in religiosity to be expressed in standard discourse. This is exhibited in the Armenian culture, with the popular expression of “mer havatkeh mer azgi prkutyunneh” (“our faith is the savior of our culture”). Two participants illustrated the deeply embedded religiosity in the Armenian language in the following conversation:

Mary: “In our everyday talk you still hear the terms *asdvats pahi* or *asdvats pahpani* (meaning may God protect). So how much of that is belief and how much is tradition?”

Armen: “When someone has a kid and I say *asdvats pahpani* is because that’s what I’ve heard being said when someone has a child. I don’t know what else to say to be honest, besides congratulations. It’s not a religious

thing I say. I say it because it's a cultural tradition" (personal conversation).

As this conversation illustrates, religion has become so deeply integrated into language that it has become as Armen said, "like muscle memory, it's linguistic memory" (personal communication). The proverbs and the sayings heard throughout an Armenian's lifetime are in accordance with the ethnoreligious habitus, reinforcing it and making the Christian doxa of the culture an essential feature of Armenian identity.

The religious rituals performed at the Armenian Church for liturgy and during rites of passage ceremonies are another tool for the reinforcement of the doxa. The singing of the priests during ceremonies and the burning smell of the incense at the Armenian Church are sacred symbols of the religion that create moods in the individual inside the church, prompting specific behaviors and emotions that are in accordance with the religious system. One participant commented, "Even when outsiders (cultural outsider) enter the Armenian Church, they feel the seriousness of the place" (Vahag, personal communication). Armenians are introduced to this doxa through religious rituals at a very young age, beginning with their own baptism or the baptism of young family members. Throughout their lifetime they witness and perform countless religious rituals, including lighting a candle. A participant in my project, Gevorg, adamantly argued against the importance of the Armenian Church in Armenian cultural identity. However, he admitted that he enjoys lighting a candle at the church, because it provides a sense of peace; "It's a form of meditation" (Gevorg, personal communication). This ritual appears to be one of the most effective tools of the doxa, since it also impacts individuals who are completely opposed to its ideology.

These rituals of the doxa also serve to reinforce the habitus of an Armenian cultural identity for the group, becoming cultural tradition. According to one participant, “An outsider may see the religious behaviors we perform as religious tradition, but we see it as cultural tradition” (Armen, personal communication). This is once again related to the intertwined history of the Armenian Church with the Armenian state, and its role as a political and ecclesiastical ruling body when the group lacked political leadership in the homeland and the diaspora. In the homeland, it served as a governing body when the people were ruled by competing empires or political leaders. In the diaspora, it became a tangible cultural site for Armenians, allowing them to maintain their cultural identity in a foreign land.

My mother, who has strong communist views and rejects most religious ideology, explained to me that the history of Armenian culture and the role of the Armenian Church within the group was the reasoning behind her performance of ethnoreligious rituals. This conversation occurred on Armenian Christmas Eve on January 5th, 2017. As the rest of the family sat down for the traditional dinner, my mother walked into the dining room with an incense burner in her hand. She circled the table with the burner and said prayers for the deceased elders of the family. I asked her why she was performing this religious ritual, when she was not religious herself. She explained that this was an expression of her cultural tradition, which stresses the importance of one’s ancestors.

The rituals my mother performed and those the participants in my research discussed exhibit features of what Herbert Gans (1994) referred to as symbolic religiosity. He refers to symbolic religiosity as “the consumption of religious symbols, apart from regular participation in a religious culture and in religious affiliations – other

than for purely secular purposes” (Gans 1994, 578). The consumption of religious symbols under these circumstances allows the individual to take part in a sacred activity without disturbing his/her secular lifestyle. This process includes the use of cultural objects with religious symbols in everyday life; being occasional spectators instead of participants at worship services, especially during special holidays; communal pride in members of the ethno-religious group who are celebrities; and visits to religious sites that are not part of pilgrimage. These practices are often performed by parents to strengthen their children’s interest in their ethno-religious identity and to maintain this identity over generations, despite acculturation.

Many participants admitted that they did not attend church regularly, but were present for the significant religious holidays and friends’ and family members’ rites of passage ceremonies. During these events, they would light a candle and say a small prayer. The habitus of the group and the doxa of the ethnoreligious identity is reinforced through these forms of symbolic religiosity. One respondent stated, “As an Armenian, I go through every action that is religious and part of the Christian faith, except believing” (Mary, personal communication). Many consider it convenient to take part in this form of religiosity, because it does not disturb their daily life. As one participant who identifies himself as agnostic remarked, “The Armenian Church doesn’t expect much from me outside of weddings and baptisms. If there was more expected of me, I wouldn’t be okay with it” (Argisht, personal communication). Another participant, Gevorg, reflected on the Armenian symbolic religiosity through a historical and geopolitical lens:

“Geopolitically we’ve been at a crossroads between the East and West, and anytime people have crossed over from one side to the other, they’ve gone over

that area [Armenia]. So, we've always been busy fighting for our survival. That's where you become progressive and innovative to survive. That's why you don't have as much time to dedicate to figuring out what John or James or God knows who said something on this page or in this verse of the Bible. That's why Armenians aren't as well versed in religion" (personal communication).

The process of symbolic religiosity has been one of the most important cultural improvisations of the habitus, reinforcing the doxa and the habitus. Through religious symbols, rituals, performance and practice, and the allowance of symbolic religiosity, the Armenian Church has become a dominant cultural feature of the group. However, the doxa of a Christian Armenian identity is beginning to be challenged by individuals who consider Islam their faith and part of their cultural identity as Armenian. These Muslim Armenians are increasingly the topic of discourse among many Armenian academics and intellectuals in the diaspora. The notion of a Muslim Armenian threatens the doxa, which may lead to crisis in the collective habitus. Some of the anxieties of the individual Armenian habitus were exhibited by a number of participants in the project. While many, especially those who were not religious, stated that they are open to the notion of a Muslim Armenian, some were suspicious of these individuals' desire to identify as Armenian. One participant, Armine, stated that she accepts the notion of a Muslim-Armenian, however, when asked if they can truly belong to the community, she admitted that it would be a difficult process for them: "I would be accepting of them, but there would be a stupid voice in the back of my head telling me that they're different; but I would fight that voice" (personal communication). Another participant, Armen A., stated, "I would accept them and consider them Armenian, but there is also the

consideration of how their religious identity affects their Armenian identity. How would it impact their perception of Armenian issues? How does it affect the well-being of Armenia and the Armenian people? Even when it comes to the issue of history, there will be contradictions and conflicts. Throughout history Armenians have associated with Christianity, so this creates further conflict with a Muslim Armenian identity” (personal communication). Other participants wondered if these individuals truly felt the connection to their Armenian identity, or if there were other reasons for their connection:

Vahag: “I would ask them why they want to be Armenian. Their whole lives they’ve lived as a Kurd or a Turk, and now they find out that one of their grandparents was Armenian and suddenly they want to be Armenian? Why? What do you feel for it [cultural identity]?”

Argisht: “I would wonder if they are identifying as an Armenian for certain benefits or if it’s their blood that’s calling out to belong to that group”.

When these participants were asked about their concerns and suspicions towards Muslim Armenians, they cited the history of conflict between Armenians and Muslims. This attitude is also due to the doxa of a Christian Armenian identity, which is part of the collective habitus that perceives itself to be a historically persecuted group because of its faith.

CHAPTER VI

SOCIAL IDENTITY

Ethnos and Nation

The topic of ethnic and national identity is frequently summoned and discussed among Armenians, especially in the diaspora. The need to preserve this identity outside of the homeland is a major issue, creating a cultural preoccupation with the notion of ethnic identity. The issue of group identity as ethnos or nation has been discussed at length by a number of prominent theorists, who have explored the legacy of European romanticism in the invention of cohesive group identities, dubbed by Benedict Anderson (2006) as the ‘imagined community’.

Roger Abrahams (2003) has explored the role of folklore in building and maintaining identity. He has argued that in the center of identity construction lies romantic rhetoric and nostalgia, resting on the notion that the group is socially and culturally different from the others. Identity is then tied to ethnicity and used as a demarcation tool by each group to fence off other neighboring groups, explaining cultural differences as the marker between the civilized (the community) and the barbarians (the neighboring group). Abrahams (2003) traces the history of group identity construction to the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods of Europe, stressing that the growing diversity in the region resulted in the need to mark social and national boundaries.

Nostalgia and romantic rhetoric are central to construction and maintenance of Armenian identity. The notion of distant ancestors who overcame the powerful forces attempting to destroy Armenia and Armenians was frequently mentioned by my participants, and is a recurrent theme in many traditional Armenian songs, stories, and

epics. These narratives are also used as tools of demarcation for Armenians from neighboring groups in many oral and written narratives. The notion of an ethnic group surviving despite all odds is central to the Armenian cultural identity, creating a notion of a unified ethnos that must propel forward and persevere.

One of the participants I interviewed, Laila, explained that she has a “visceral connection” to her Armenian ethno-religious identity, and attributed this feeling to several factors (personal communication). One of the main reasons, she argued, is the antiquity of the church and the culture. She believes the church has been the central governing body for Armenians in times of external persecution, uniting the group and propelling cultural survival. The vulnerable geographic location of Armenia has made its religious identity unique in a region filled with predominantly Muslim neighbors. While the relationships with various Muslim and Christian neighbors have changed throughout history, there has been consistent persecution of Armenians by outsiders. This history has continuously reinforced the position of the Armenian Church within the Armenian culture as a cornerstone of cultural survival and salvation. As a result, she argued, Armenians throughout the world, especially those in the diaspora, feel the pressure to maintain the values and traditions of this identity. Laila’s argument illustrates Abrahams’ discussion of identity construction relying on nostalgia, which rests on notions of the group’s social and cultural difference.

Laila and many of the participants I interviewed frequently referred to Armenian ethnicity, using the term interchangeably with cultural identity. Werner Sollors (1989) has argued that the notion of ethnicity is a recently invented process, rather than an ancient force from the historical past. According to Sollors (1989), the invention of

ethnicity began peaking in 18th and 19th centuries, along with the emerging notion of nationalism, when significant changes were taking place with the American and French revolutions, along with the ruling elite being replaced by bourgeois systems in Europe. During this period the notions of nationality and ethnicity became important concepts that spread rapidly throughout the world. Communities needed to find a sense of cohesion amidst the changes taking place, so they created a system that relied on literacy and ethnic literature. Sollors argues that this has resulted in ethnic groups imagining themselves as “natural, real, eternal, stable, and static units” that have always been in existence (1989, xiv). These groups tend to draw on certain myths and traits that are believed to be unique to them, with the goal for long term survival as a community. This desire to persevere always appears to be threatened, especially from assimilation. Assimilation is perceived to threaten the idealized cultural heritage and authenticity of the group, which has been constructed without regard to a shared history of cultures that interact and borrow from one another continuously.

Sollors (1989) further argues that the notion of ethnicity was invented for members of a community in order to allow them to continue feeling connected to one another despite the absence of visible and concrete communities. It has been perceived as a natural state of being, with the notion of blood being thicker than water, but this perspective on ethnic identity does not account for the fact that it is a process of belonging that is not dependent on a “*priori* cultural difference” (Sollors 1989, xvi).

Sollors’ discussion of the invention of ethnicity through literacy and ethnic literature is illustrated by the period of Armenian history hailed as the Golden Age. He has argued that the invention of ethnicity occurred in the 18th and 19th centuries, however,

the Armenian case, among other groups in the region, illustrate that this process occurred much earlier. The invention of the Armenian alphabet, translation of the Bible with the Armenian script, and production of original works in history, philosophy, and theology in the fifth century solidified the notion of a unified cohesive group identity, despite ongoing conflict between the Byzantine and Persian empires that had divided Armenia between political powers. This division and the encroachment of the Syriac Church on the authority of the Armenian Church, along with the increasing ecclesiastic domination of Byzantium, threatened the power of the Armenian Church and the king. The necessity of a distinct written script and literature for the Armenian people was evident in the need to maintain power and unify the group, resulting in the construction of the Armenian ethnos through literature. One of the most prominent pieces of literature that emerged during this period was the *History of Armenians* by Movses Khorenatsi, which traced the origin of Armenians beginning with the legend of Hayk and on into the fifth century. Literacy and education were usually connected to the Church throughout history, as was the case with the Medieval Armenian monasteries that produced many prominent Armenian scientists, philosophers and theologians.

The various histories of Armenians written in the Armenian script resulted in a notion of a naturally and historically bound ethnic group that is primordial. The ancestry of Armenians through the mythical patriarch Hayk's bloodline allowed the group to feel connected to one another, despite the cultural differences that were present due to the division between two empires. This notion continues to be a dominant theme among Armenians today as well, including among many of the participants in my research. A number of these individuals referred to bloodline as an important defining feature of

Armenianness, some of whom referred to the ancestral bloodline of Hayk. Several participants considered the Armenian bloodline as a final marker of group inclusiveness, even if an individual lacked all other cultural features. They considered blood to be especially important in the diaspora, where a number of Armenians have assimilated into other cultures.

The notion of a primordial ethnic identity is so deeply entrenched in the Armenian psyche that a blood relation can be a final marker of an individual's identity. Recently one of my cousins, who was born to Armenian parents and raised as an Armenian, expressed her apprehension for an ancestry DNA test by stating, "I really want to take the test, but I'm afraid, because I REALLY want to be an Armenian" (personal communication). Her concern for being an ethnicity other than Armenian is due to her appearance. She lacks the stereotypical characteristics of an Armenian and appears to be of Asian descent. This preoccupation with bloodline was also expressed by an interviewee, who stated, "Blood makes you Armenian, but the religion is the stamp at the end. You can convert with religion, but you can't convert into Armenian" (Vahag, personal communication).

While the concept of ethnicity is one of the most important issues in Armenian cultural identity, there is also a cultural preoccupation with the Armenian nation. Benedict Anderson (2006) has explored the notion of nation, tracing its beginning to the late 18th century French Revolution. He has argued that nationalism is a cultural construct that became modular once it was adopted by different groups. It adapted to the different social, political, and ideological terrains, reinforcing its position within society (Anderson 2006). Yet despite the imagined community of a nation, the citizens of each

nation perceive it as very real (Anderson 2006). He defines the nation as imagined because of the limited relationship of its members to one another; limited because of the borders separating it from other nations; sovereign because it was conceived during a period when divinely-ordained hierarchies were being destroyed; and a community, because the people perceive one another as part of a comradeship, despite the internal inequalities of the nation (Anderson 2006). Anderson (2006) has identified several historical antecedents that led to the rise of nationalism and nations. These include the decline of the religious community and authority, spread of publishing in the languages of the common people, the decline of power and status of dynasties and monarchies, and change in perception of time (Anderson 2006). The growing print-capitalism of the time was another major factor, which allowed large-scale publishing in the vernacular languages of larger groups with their dominant dialects (Anderson 2006). This created unified communication models for larger groups, cultivating the springing nationalist consciousness (Anderson 2006).

The imagined community of Armenians across the globe is rooted in the history of the Armenian conversion to Christianity as a defining moment for the Armenian state. This event resulted in the rise of the Armenian Church to political power for the Armenian people. The invention of the Armenian alphabet and the ensuing literature that arose in the fifth century unified Armenians under the power of the Church and created an imagined community that spanned across two empires. The European concepts of nation and nationalism were introduced to Armenia in the late 18th century by Indian Armenian merchants who established the first printing press in Echmiadzin, the headquarters of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Pontifical Residence of the

Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of all Armenians (Bournoutian 2012). The Indian Armenian merchants also sponsored the printing efforts of the Mekhitarist Catholic monastic order in Venice (Bournoutian 2012). The goal of the printing press in Armenia and in the Armenian diaspora was to disseminate concepts of democracy and liberation free from Muslim rule. These events created the notion of an Armenian nation and an Armenian imagined community in the homeland and the diaspora, with the Armenian Church playing an important role in the process. These events once again illustrate the role of the Armenian Church as a political and religious organization, interweaving it with the concept of nation, and the entanglement of religious identity with national identity.

Heritage, Tradition and Social Memory

The building of Armenian cultural identity in the Diaspora is heavily influenced by cultural heritage, history and social memory. The members of this diaspora draw on a combination of heritage and cultural processes to maintain their identity. David Harvey has argued that concepts of heritage have been present throughout history, but have changed in form and interpretation according to the societal needs of the time, demonstrating that heritage is not a thing, but a process (2001). He has contended that the political, national, or religious agendas attached to heritage are not a recent trend (2001). The tangible heritage of Armenians surrounds cultural and religious sites that serve as places of social memory. Many of these heritage sites are relatively new, as the presence of the group in the area is fairly recent, demonstrating the changing needs of the society. The intangible heritage ranges from stories of family history to songs about the homeland. This heritage is then transmitted to the future generations through repeated

and ritualistic behaviors that reoccur annually. The cultural heritage of the Los Angeles Armenian diasporic community is what Graburn has referred to as acquired or ‘achieved’ heritage (2001). The transmission of this heritage demonstrates the learning processes involved in the “constructed cultural model” of heritage that is “constantly refined by someone...and transmitted to members or segments of a population” (Graburn 2001,71). Through the transmission of this information, the powers that be, who in this case are religious and political leaders of the community and the older generations, determine the central concepts of this specific group’s cultural heritage, which become solidified through the presence of the other and unifies the identity of the group (Graburn 2001). The continuous transmittance of heritage is then maintained by the elders of the group, who instill the understanding and awareness of cultural heritage in younger generations. They do this by demonstrating the impermanence of things and the importance of the past that may have been taken for granted, effectively creating traditions that become consciously understood by the younger members of the group (Graburn 2001).

There are numerous ethnonational narratives that define the Los Angeles Armenian diasporic community, all of which are tied to Armenian history, however, two particularly important historical events are frequently marked as defining features of the group. These are the adoption of Christianity as a nation by Trdat III in the fourth century and the Armenian Genocide in 1915. Each of these events have resulted in the creation of traditions and heritage in the diaspora.

The events of 1915 are known as the first genocide of the 20th century. The subsequent denial of this genocide by Turkish authorities have developed into an important marker of contemporary Armenian identity in Armenia and the diaspora,

becoming “foundational to identity” (Panossian 2002). As Panossian states, “Being Armenian, namely in the diaspora, meant being a survivor of genocide, and therefore a member of a community of sufferers” (2002, 136). Several participants expressed these sentiments during their interviews. They referred to the continuous narratives of loss in Armenian history, with the Armenian Genocide becoming a pinnacle event.

The significance of the Armenian Genocide is illustrated in the annual commemoration ceremonies and protests throughout the diaspora and in the homeland, including in Los Angeles. Every year on April 24 Armenian-Americans in Los Angeles take part in the tradition of Armenian Genocide commemorations, engaging in activism that includes the younger and older generations, who call for genocide recognition by the United States and Turkish governments. As the Armenian writer Peter Balakian has noted, “Commemoration is an essential process for the bereaved and for the inheritors of the legacy of genocide. It is a process of making meaning out of unthinkable horror and loss” (2009, 291).

The traditions surrounding commemoration of the Armenian genocide are usually an “attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past” (Hobsbawm 1983, Handler & Linnekin 1984). The aims of these traditions are to represent some parts of life as “unchanging and invariant” by connecting them to a distant past, in response to significant events that have altered history and have threatened its continuation, which in this case was Armenian Genocide and the continuous denial of the event by the Turkish government (Hobsbawm 1983,1). Through ritual performance, these traditions have become ingrained within the popular mind and have created a social cohesion, manufacturing a form of cultural heritage (Hobsbawm 1983). Hobsbawm has

emphasized the significance of traditions and their changes in society, stressing that close examination of changing traditions can shed light on the internal shifts in society and highlight specific features that would otherwise be unnoticeable (Hobsbawm 1983). Henry Glassie has expanded on Hobsbawm's theory, calling tradition "the means for deriving the future from the past", making it a "volitional, temporal action" that makes history and culture congruent (Glassie 1983, 192).

The migration of the Armenian-American population to Los Angeles began in the early 20th century and has grown continuously, rapidly increasing within the last 30 years (Mirak1983; Baser and Swain 2009). Armenians consider themselves to be members of the nation of Armenia, which extends beyond the legal boundaries of the current Armenian nation. This imagined community encompasses all its members both within and outside the borders of the nation, creating a sense of comradeship among the individuals who consider themselves Armenian. The diaspora that currently exists contains individuals with a vested interest in the state of the homeland in order to "preserve the memory of their homeland and keep the emotional attachments of solidarity and kinship" (Baser and Swain 2009, 48). The intensification of these sentiments is the result of the circumstances that the diaspora was born out of, which in this case was initially a catastrophe that resulted in collective suffering and trauma (Tololyan 2007).

The catastrophic event of the genocide has become one of the main cultural identity markers for Armenians and the Armenian Diaspora, and is especially exhibited in the month of April, reaching its peak on the anniversary of the Armenian Genocide on April 24th. On this day in 1915, under the Young Turks' orders Armenian leaders and intellectuals were arrested and killed, beginning the process of genocide (Palakean 2009).

Each year on the anniversary of the genocide, Armenian communities throughout the world remember the 1.5 million individuals that perished with vigils and commemorations at various designated heritage sites, and demand the Turkish government abandon its policy of denial and acknowledge its crimes. The Armenian community also educates the public about the history of genocide throughout the year, but especially during the month of April.

My own fieldwork led me to several events organized for the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide. I have attended a number of annual protests for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. The purpose of these marches was to draw attention to the politically forgotten genocide of Armenians by the Ottoman Turks in 1915, and to demand the American and Turkish governments to accept the crimes committed against Armenians during this period as genocide. The protesters usually march down the streets of Little Armenia in Hollywood and in front of the Turkish consulate in Los Angeles. The participants carry signs displaying various slogans calling for justice and recognition, along with flags for the United States, the Republic of Armenia, and of various Armenian political parties, demonstrating the multiple stakeholders involved in this event. Because of its size, the Los Angeles area march draws significant publicity. It has also attracted the attention of a number of local key politicians who are now committed to the cause, including Congressman Adam Schiff. An important consideration for these events is the number of students present from all the local Armenian private schools, who range from ages seven to seventeen, demonstrating the intergenerational participation in activism and highlighting the significance of the cause.

One of the most important protests for this event occurred in 2015, when a number of Armenian organizations collaborated and organized the largest Armenian protest in Los Angeles in honor of the centennial of the Armenian Genocide. Over 150,000 participants gathered and began walking from Little Armenia to the Turkish consulate, to simulate the deportation marches of Armenians during the Genocide (Armenian Council of America 2017). The multi-generational crowd at this event, and in other demonstration events from the past, illustrates the role of activism in transmittance of cultural heritage. During these protests one will encounter children as young as three years old, sitting on their parents' shoulders as the parents walk, sometimes holding signs that demand the recognition of the genocide; along with elderly Armenians walking with the assistance of their children or grandchildren. The traditions surrounding commemoration of the Armenian genocide are usually an "attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past" (Hobsbawm 1983; Handler & Linnekin 1984). These traditions' aims are to represent some parts of life as "unchanging and invariant" by connecting them to a distant past in response to significant events that have altered history and threatened its continuation - in this case the Armenian Genocide and the constant denial of the event by the Turkish government (Hobsbawm 1983,1). It is illustrated by the symbolic march from Little Armenia to the Turkish consulate. Through ritual performance, these traditions have become ingrained within the popular mind and have created a social cohesion, manufacturing a form of cultural heritage. As one participant noted, "The memory of the genocide keeps our community together in the diaspora and maintains the connection we have with one another as Armenians. It's

similar to the religious traditions that we have maintained” (Armen A., personal communication).

The large participation of Armenian-Americans at these protests demonstrates how this tragic history has remained a cornerstone of Armenian identity, especially for individuals who are descendants of survivors. The historic trauma that has remained unaddressed by the perpetrators of the crime and a number of influential nations in the world has created a need for “truth telling” to resolve the issues surrounding the event (Lonetree 2012). The residual impact of this crime has become embedded into the national and cultural identity of every Armenian, emphasizing the collective suffering and survival of the group, and creating what Victor Turner has referred to as *root paradigms* (Turner 1974). Turner defines root paradigms as cultural models that “have reference not only to the current state of social relationships existing or developing between actors, but also to the cultural goals, means, ideas, outlooks, currents of thought, patterns of belief, and so on, which enter into those relationships, interpret them, and incline them to alliance or divisiveness” (1974, 64).

A number of studies of Armenian Diasporic groups have noted that the traumatic occurrence of the genocide has remained a permanent preoccupation of the collective imagination, but it is also identified as a symbol of survival, strength, pride and continuity of a glorious and rich ancient past (Pattie 1999; Phillips 1989). This attitude is due to the history of constant loss resulting from the country’s geographic location, which is worn as a badge of honor and a testament to the Armenian collective strength (Pattie 1999).

The annual protests in Los Angeles demonstrate the continuous building of Armenian identity through collective action. The performance and repetition of performance of activism have become essential components of the community. While these actions have unified the group, some of the rhetoric used presents the danger of what Roger Abrahams has referred to as *dolorism* (Abrahams 2003). Abrahams contends that in the center of identity construction, especially within diasporic groups, lies nostalgia (Abrahams 2003). This is then “converted into narratives of victimization”, resulting in a sense of loss of the past (Abrahams 2003, 215). Continuously referring to the narrative of this event, which has become an Armenian intangible heritage, has simultaneously singularized and commoditized the event, using it as symbolic capital for political transactions and social justice (Hamilakis 1999).

The transmittance of heritage by the elder members of the community is also illustrated in the need to maintain a Christian Armenian identity. This is tied to the history of Armenians becoming the first Christian state in the fourth century, offering a distinct cultural identity to the group. The need to remember and maintain this intangible cultural heritage is reflected in the Armenian community’s association with the Armenian Apostolic Church, which is reinforced through the older members of the community. Many of the participants in my research mentioned that their relationship with the Armenian Apostolic Church, whether through regular attendance or symbolic religiosity, is the result of family influence. One of the participants, Tina, explained that she attends Church every Sunday with her mother because the significance of the faith and the Church was instilled in her at a young age (personal communication). Another participant, Leona, explained that while she attends both Armenian Church and non-

Armenian churches for her spirituality (personal communication), she held her wedding at an Armenian Catholic Church and baptized her children at an Armenian church. Her decision was shaped by her cultural identity and the fact that she and her spouse's families are Armenian. She explained that she wants to allow her children to decide on their spirituality when they grow older, but she wanted to be the one to introduce them to God and to the Armenian Church (personal communication).

Other respondents who only attended church on special occasions for rites of passages and on religious holidays cited family and cultural obligation as the reasoning behind their tie to the Armenian Church. Many of them were married in the Armenian Church because it was the cultural and family expectation. Those who did not have children admitted that they planned to baptize their children in the Armenian Apostolic Church, so they can be more connected to their Armenian heritage and culture. One of the participants, Anet Z., who identified as an atheist, explained that she would like her nieces and nephews, who are part Armenian, to be baptized in the Armenian Church to build a deeper connection to their Armenian cultural identity (personal communication). Anet's reasoning for this was that she had gained a deeper appreciation for her cultural heritage through contact with the older members of her family and the community, and was hoping to pass this down to her children, nieces, and nephews.

A married couple in my research, Angela and Martin, expressed their desire to baptize their children in Armenia (personal communication). Their reasoning behind this is that they were both baptized in Armenia and want to continue the tradition with their children. They felt that this ritual would be a nice foundation which would allow their children to establish their religious identity in the homeland and maintain their cultural

heritage. Martin explained, “I want to put their roots in Armenia. If they’re going to have any religious identity, I would prefer them to have the one that’s tied to the culture” (personal communication). Angela’s and Martin’s desire to continue the tradition of baptism in Armenia illustrates Handler and Linnekin’s argument that tradition “encompasses both continuity and discontinuity” of the past (1984, 287). This couple’s immigration to the United States at a young age has created a new identity for them of diaspora Armenians, who were uprooted from their homeland. The desire to maintain the tradition of being baptized in the homeland reflects the need to maintain their family ‘roots’ in Armenia and in the Armenian culture.

The need to connect the future generation to the past through tradition was also expressed by another participant, Aylin. She travelled to Armenia with her seven-year-old daughter Nicole in June, 2016, with the desire to introduce Nicole to her cultural homeland and her mother’s past in Armenia. Aylin baptized Nicole at a medieval church in Tatev during her trip. Aylin explained, “By baptizing my daughter in Armenia, it gave me and her the connection to who I was when I lived there as a young woman. I wanted my daughter to experience the steps that I took before. I shared with her memories that I had [from Armenia], because I wanted her to be part of my memories and also create a connection to my memories” (personal communication). Aylin felt that her personal identity was deeply connected with her cultural identity, and the memories she had forged at a younger age were part of the identity that she wanted to share with her daughter.

Most of the participants discussed the historical role of the Armenian Church in preserving Armenian cultural identity, especially during tumultuous periods in history. They explained that this is the reasoning behind their decision to maintain their

connection to the church. The Armenian Church, many explained, has been the only constant Armenian cultural body of leadership that has survived for over 1700 years, offering and maintaining the distinct cultural identity to Armenians. A participant who was not religious stated, “If you have 1700 years of history bearing that aspect of your culture [Christianity], you cannot totally ignore it; it’s there and I acknowledge it. I understand that us as an ethnicity, a nation, a society, vast majority of the [Armenian] population around the world considers that as an undivided part of our identity and I cannot ignore this” (Gevorg, personal communication). The history of cultural division and persecution that threatened the ethnos, and its subsequent survival through the Armenian Apostolic Church has become part of the collective memory of the Armenian people. This memory, and the cultural alterity, is reinforced in the new generations through rituals and behaviors that become what Connerton (1989) refers to as habit-memory. This notion of Armenian alterity is transmitted to the younger members of the community by the older generations through constant contact, whether in a family setting or through contact with the larger Armenian community. As Graburn (2013) has demonstrated through his kinship model, just as a child comes to understand his/her relatives over time, an individual discovers his/her heritage in a similar fashion.

Intangible Heritage: Myths and Legends

A number of theorists have examined the role of myths and legend narratives in the construction and cohesion of the social group. Bruce Lincoln has defined myth as “a small class of stories that possess both credibility and authority (1989, 23). While these stories may not have historical truth, they have social truth and express, enhance and codify beliefs. They are what the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski referred to as

“social charter.” Lincoln argues that myth serves as a tool for constructing and reconstructing social forms. Additionally, ethnic or clan origin myths provide a beginning for the identity of a group, creating an affinity among the members that connect them through common descent or kinship. Society can be constructed and restructured through sentiments of internal affinity (affection, loyalty, mutual attachment, and solidarity) and external estrangement (detachment, alienation, and hostility). Whether it is the Nuer myth of the First Cattle Raid or the Abrahamic tradition, these stories construct a social form that is shaped by the bonds and borders of these sentiments.

Anthony Smith (1991, 2004) has argued that myths and symbols representing ethnic origin and territory of the community are used as foundations for the creation and maintenance of national identity. These myths and symbols consist of notions that are considered as ‘givens’ in a society. They include concepts of a homeland, common lineage and ancestry, a sacred language, and national heroes. These symbols create the notion of a collective identity for the community, which are then utilized by the state and intellectuals for the construction of national belonging (Smith 1991). Myths of a deep ethnic origin are necessary for a strong and meaningful sense of belonging to the nation. Smith has argued, “The reasons for the durability and strength of national identities can be understood only by exploring the collective beliefs and sentiments about the ‘sacred foundations’ of the nation and by considering their relationship to the older beliefs, symbols, and rituals of traditional religions” (Smith 2004, 3 – 4).

One of the prominent narratives in the Armenian culture that has created a deep sense of ethnic belonging and has assisted in the construction and restructuring of

Armenian society has been the Armenian genesis myth of Hayk. The story reflects Lincoln's description of the four levels of social construction and cohesion through narrative. The primordial level of unity in the narrative is in the descent of Hayk from Noah, who was also the ancestor of Noah's adversary Bel. According to the myth, the descendants of Noah, which included the human race and the giants, were fighting among one another. This allowed the Titan Bel to assert his power over the land and the people. When Hayk refused to submit to Bel, the Titan garnered his army against the hero. This marks what Lincoln (1989) considers to be the initial episode of rivalry. Hayk defeats Bel in battle and establishes his rule in the land of Ararat. According to Khorenatsi, the hero and his descendants spread across the land of Hayk, establishing their rule and naming Armenian provinces and landscapes after themselves. The historian states, "Now our country is called Hayk' after the name of our ancestor Hayk" (Khorenatsi 1978, 88).

The second episode of rivalry common in myths is in Hayk's descendant Aram's battle with the Medes and the Assyrians, which allowed him to expand the borders of Armenia. Khorenatsi describes Aram as industrious and patriotic, willing to die for his fatherland in protection of its sovereignty against foreign rule. Regarding the foreign name of Armenia, the historian writes, "Thus he became so powerful and famous that by his name up to today, as is clear to all, the nations living around us call our country" (Khorenatsi 1978, 95 – 96). The enduring social division of Armenians from their neighbors takes place with the death of Ara Geghetsik (Ara the Beautiful). Ara is Aram's son, whose rule over his father's lands occurs a few years before the death of Assyrian king Ninus. During his rule Ninus's wife, queen Semiramis, becomes infatuated with Ara, after hearing about his beauty. Upon her husband's death, Semiramis continuously

proposes to Ara, who always refuses her advances. Semiramis becomes increasingly angry at the rejection and sends her army to Armenia, with instructions to not kill Ara, so he can satisfy her desires. Ara dies in battle, and Semiramis attempts to revive him through sorcery and magic, but fails to achieve this task.

Aram Petrosyan (2002) has argued that the story of the Armenian primordial ancestor closely corresponds with the Indo-European “basic myth”, which is comprised of the thunder god defeating his adversary, the serpent. He argues that the site of the battle between Hayk and Bel, which is in the south of historic Armenia, located between the Taurus and Zagros mountains, is a derivative of the cosmogonic myth between the Taurus and Zagros mountains. Taurus, representing the bull that is the zoomorphic symbol of the thunder god, broke Zagros’s horns with his stroke, creating the mountains of Masius and Masis with the horns, and the Zab River and Lake Van with his blood. Additionally, the description of Hayk corresponds with the constellation of Orion, who was a giant hunter, also known as a “dog strangler.” These features of the myths illustrate that Hayk was likely the chief god of the pagan Armenian pantheon. The ethnogonic creation myth of Hayk has cosmogonic character. Petrosyan (2002) states that cosmogonic creation myths occur in the beginning of time. They take place in the center of the cosmos that is represented by the site of a victory over the monster, who is a representation of the initial sacrifice. This framework is adapted for ethnogonic myths where the geographic landscape and the tribe become the celestial model, while the lands of foreign tribes that are unknown are inhabited by monsters. Hayk establishes his rule over the land of Ararat, which becomes the sacred land for his descendants and the

Armenian people. He slays the Titan Bel, representing the monster of the foreign land, establishing sovereignty for the people of Hayk.

Hayk Nahapet's story, as told by Khorenatsi, is the historicized version of the cosmogenic creation myth. Hayk, Aram and their descendants are the epicized figures of Armenian gods, representing Theogony; the geographic landscape features and settlements are named after Hayk and his descendants, representing cosmogony; Armenian ethnonyms stem from the central hero, Hayk, and his second incarnation, Aram, representing ethnogony; the descendants of Hayk are forbearers of aristocratic houses, representing dynastic saga; and finally, Hayk's family reflects the Armenian family pantheon and patriarchy, representing sociogony (Petrosyan 2002, 2009). In this myth, Hayk represents the beginning of time, with the divine line ending in the death of Ara Geghetsik, who represents the last divine patriarch. The death of Ara also represents what Mircea Eliade has referred to as the end of the sacred time and the beginning of the profane era.

Bruce Lincoln (1989) has discussed the social function of myths in constructing and restructuring society. He has argued that they can also be used in a number of ways to construct new social formations: 1) its status can be reduced to history or legend, contesting the authority or credibility of the myth; 2) history, legend, or fable can be elevated to the status of myth for constructing new social forms when they are invested with authority or credibility; 3) the details of a myth can be modified, so the sentiment that is evoked is changed (Lincoln 1989). Khorenatsi has employed the latter technique in his telling of Hayk's myth. Based on the correlation of the story with the basic myth of Indo-Europeans, the epic of Hayk is likely to have been the cosmogenic creation myth

for pagan Armenians. The historicized and modified version of the story in Khorenatsi's text reflects the Biblical tradition. In this version Hayk is a descendant of Noah, which allows him and his descendants to maintain their sacred identities through this lineage.

Why would Khorenatsi modify the narrative? The answer to this question lies in the socio-historical factors of Armenia during the fifth century AD. *History of Armenians* was written at a time when the Armenian nation had witnessed years of political turmoil, insecurity and conflict, leaving the state and the people in disarray. The new Christian state, which had adopted Christianity in the beginning of the fourth century, was facing the threat of elimination through foreign domination once again. Christian Armenians were under the foreign rule of Zoroastrian Persians. The defeat against the Persians at the Battle of Avarair in 451 had reduced Armenia to a vassal state. However, the fifth century had also been a period of exciting developments. The Armenian alphabet was created by Mesrop Mashtots, establishing the beginning of the Armenian literary tradition that started with the translations of the Bible. Sahag Bagratouni, a prominent member of Armenian nobility at the time, needed to ensure the Armenian people sustained their national consciousness. Understanding that this could be achieved through knowledge of their history, Bagratouni commissioned Khorenatsi and entrusted him with the task of collecting and conveying the history of Armenia. As Eric Hobsbawm has stated, "What makes a nation is the past, what justifies one nation against others is the past, and historians are the people who produce it" (1992, 3). It is also important to mention that the scribes and historians during this period were very much connected to the Armenian Church, receiving their education through the religious

tradition. Khorenatsi was no exception, which is reflected in his writing of the text and his reinterpretation of the epic of Hayk.

Lincoln argues that in times of social disorder, the lineages (in this case the ethnos) invoke the primordial ancestor through “allusions, gestures and narratives” (1989, 20). This process restructures society through sentiments of internal affinity and external estrangement. The story of Hayk and his descendants was part of this process in fifth century Armenia. Khorenatsi’s modification of the story in the Biblical tradition conveyed a Christian sacred lineage to the people of Armenia. They were the people of the sacred land of Ararat, where Noah’s Ark had landed. This not only elevated the status of the ethnic group, but also created an ethno-religious identity for Armenians. Their Christian-Armenian identity was the will of God, since it was part of the Biblical tradition and lineage, making them a chosen people of the land. Khorenatsi was the literary instrument of the Armenian nobility in the fifth century, illustrating Talal Assad’s (1983) argument that power structures create religious identity that is deeply intertwined with historical and social conditions. Rather than create the religious identity, he simply reinforced the Christian-Armenian identity through ancestral narratives. He also ensured the future of this ethno-religious identity by ascribing to it a sacred quality that transcends time and place.

The Armenian king’s conversion to Christianity serves as another important myth that unites the ethnos under the notion of a distinct group that belongs to the same nation. The legend of the conversion begins with God’s punishment of King Trdat III for his sin of persecuting Christians by transforming him into a wild boar. Prior to this event Trdat had imprisoned St. Gregory the Illuminator in an underground dungeon for thirteen years

at Khor Virap, as punishment for preaching Christianity to the people. When Trdat was punished by God, he sought a cure for his state, but was unable to find anyone that could help him. One night Trdat's sister had a dream, where a divine being told her that the cure for her brother's condition could be gained only through the release of St. Gregory the Illuminator. Upon the release of St. Gregory, Trdat was transformed back into his human form. This miracle prompted him to find his faith in God and convert to Christianity.

This myth has become one of the main pillars of Armenian cultural identity, since it offered a distinct identity to the group through its narrative. Razmik Panossian states,

“Both the myth version and the more research-based version of Armenians' conversion to Christianity is indicative of the interpretation of a past event in a way that emphasizes the desire of a people to remain distinct. One of the most powerful means to reinforce such uniqueness has been the notion of ‘chosen people’” (2002, 126 – 127).

This notion of a ‘chosen people’ has been reinforced throughout Armenian history by various intellectuals, including Khorenatsi. The creation of the Armenian alphabet contributed to this distinct identity by framing the narrative within religious ideology. Khorenatsi wrote in his *History of the Armenians* that St. Mashtots invented the script after his encounter with a divine vision from God.

Armenian legends and epic stories that emerged later in history have drawn on these origin myths to stress the alterity of the group. One example is the Armenian national epic *Sasna Tsrer (The Daredevils of Sasoun)*, where the heroes fight against various Arab rulers to ensure the salvation of the Christian Armenian people. This epic

draws on the structure of the myth of Hayk and his descendants, by beginning the story with the progenitors of the region that later becomes Sasoun. The daughter of the King of Armenia, Dzovinar, is forced into marriage with the Caliph of Baghdad, who threatens to destroy Armenia if she does not oblige (Surmelian 1964). The King of Armenia continues to resist by stating, “I am Armenian, he is Arab. I am Christian, he is heathen. Our girls do not marry heathens” (Surmelian 1964, 35). To ensure the safety of her people Dzovinar obliges to the marriage and is expected to bear the Caliph’s children. Dzovinar goes to the monastery of Hili on Ascension Day during the wedding festivities. On her pilgrimage, she drinks from the Milk-Fountain and prays in front of a *khachkar* (cross-stone), and without knowing conceives twin sons. The story states,

“Nine months, nine days, nine hours, nine minutes after she drank from the Milk-Fountain the lady Dzovinar gave birth to twins, one bigger than the other. They were secretly baptized on the tonir [kiln] by Father Melchizedek. The bigger boy was named Sanasar and the small one Balthasar” (Surmelian 1964, 38).

The boys developed faster than average children and grew to be like giants. Their father, the Caliph, was convinced that he did not father Sanasar and Balthazar. He wanted to execute them, but their mother warned them and they escaped on horses in the night. The story continues with the heroism of Sanasar and Balthazar as they free the water source for a town from a dragon. They later father children, and Sanasar’s son Meherr overcomes greater forces with his might. Meherr then fathers a son named David, who becomes a hero for the Armenian people by defeating the greater forces of the Arabs, similar to the Biblical tale of David and Goliath.

This epic illustrates Dumézil's tripartite structure of the sacred, physical force, and fertility and agriculture/prosperity. The sacred conception of Sanasar and Balthazar on Ascension Day illustrates their superhuman quality, which is passed down to their descendants. Their conception is also deeply embedded within the Christian tradition, resembling the divine conception of Jesus. The prowess is illustrated in the numerous battles the progenitors of Sasoun and their descendants have against greater forces, defeating the enemy with their might and power. The fertility and prosperity of this structure is reflected in the heroes' ability to provide water and food to the Armenian people upon their defeat of greater forces.

Razmik Panossian (2002) has identified three sets of factors that contribute to the recreation and maintenance of national identity: the groups' myths and symbols; the community's imagination of belonging; and structural realities that shape ideological processes. These three factors play an important role in the formation and maintenance of national identity, as the myths and symbols interlink with the social and ideological changes that are occurring at the time. The myths and epics discussed illustrate the role of these narratives shaping the ideological realities of Armenians as Christian people with a distinct cultural identity that was bestowed on them through divinity, allowing the group to triumph against greater forces of evil. These narratives create attachment among the group members, evoking what one participant described as "an indescribable instant feeling of connection and familiarity" (Leona, personal communication). Lincoln (1989) has argued that when the members of the group hear the stories, they feel pride in the accomplishment of the primordial ancestor. This allows one to feel affinity with others

members of the group who also take pride in these stories, and estranged from those who do not share the feeling.

The sentiment of survival against all odds expressed by these myths was reinforced after the Armenian Genocide, amplifying the notion of a small distinct culture that has always been persecuted for its faith and alterity, but has triumphed. Another participant, Jack, expressed this sentiment in quoting famous Armenian poet Paruyr Sevak, who wrote “We are few, but we are Armenian”. Jack stressed the importance of the distinct identity by stating, “since we are so few, we are lucky to be Armenians” (personal communication).

Family and Cultural Identity

The role of family in construction and maintenance of cultural identity was frequently mentioned by my participants. Bourdieu (1996) has argued that the reasoning behind the significance of family in shaping social identity is because it is perceived to be one of the most natural social categories. He identifies family as “a collective principle of construction of collective reality” that is part of the *habitus* (Bourdieu 1996, 20). The family as a social category becomes subjective in individuals by being “rooted in the objectivity of social structures,” allowing it to become transcendent through its self-evident conception in the *habitus* (Bourdieu 1996, 21). This social order is then reproduced through various forms of representations, such as marriage and biological reproduction, becoming a self-evident social category that is taken for granted as natural. Because of its role as one of the most natural social categories and as a “classifactory scheme” in *habitus*, family plays an important role in providing the model for all individuals’ integration into the larger social unit, ensuring the larger unit’s constant

existence and persistence (Bourdieu 1996, 21). The affective bonds of family members turn the notion of a family into a real social group through various ordinary daily exchanges that allow for the accumulation of social capital within the unit. This is done to ensure the persistent existence of the social unit, allowing the family to function as a field where symbolic power relations are negotiated and reproduced.

“The structures of kinship and family as *bodies* can only be perpetuated through a continuous creation of family feeling, a cognitive principle of vision and division that is at the same time an affective principle of *cohesion*, i.e. the adhesion that is vital to the existence of a family group and its interests” (Bourdieu 1996, 22).

Bourdieu (1996) further argues that the state reproduces the social category of family to ensure that its dominant narratives and ideologies are maintained through this private unit, instilling public interest through the private social unit. It also determines the appropriate form and mode of existence of this unit, since family is one of the most powerful social categories that shapes the perception of the social world.

All the participants I interviewed connected with their cultural identity through their elders, who help the younger members of the group to learn and understand their cultural identity and heritage, as demonstrated by Graburn’s (2013) kinship model. Many of them connected with their ethno-religious identity through family association, whether it was in the form of attending the Armenian Church or holding special rites of passage ceremonies at the church. A number of individuals explained that they got married at the Armenian Church because it was expected of them by their family, illustrating Bourdieu’s argument that the family plays an important role in social and cultural

integration. Others explained that baptism is one of the first methods of incorporating an individual into the culture, offering a distinct ethno-religious identity to the child. Anet Z. remarked that she would prefer to have her nieces and nephews, who are half Armenian, to be baptized at the Armenian Church, so they can build a deeper connection to the Armenian culture.

Madlen: “How would the baptism build a deeper connection to the culture?”

Anet Z: “Baptisms don’t only consist of the event at the church. There is family celebration, when everyone gathers together to celebrate this event. Being surrounded by the Armenian family for the celebration creates a connection to the culture. Even though I was very young when I got baptized, I built a deeper connection to my Armenian culture through the celebration afterwards with my extended family members” (personal communication).

Another participant, Gilbert, was baptized at the age of 21 at the Armenian Apostolic Church (personal communication). He explained that he was somewhat religious, but did not attend church regularly. His decision to go through this religious rite of passage was based on feelings of exclusion from a mostly baptized family. The members of this social unit did not exclude him from the group, but he felt like an outsider because his status deviated from the norm. He also explained that his family made the decision to hold the event at an Armenian Church, but he did not object. Gilbert’s family had been an important feature of the Armenian *habitus* that set the tone for an appropriate cultural identity, reinforcing this concept through the practice of baptism.

The importance of family in setting the tone of appropriate cultural behavior is illustrated through the negotiation and reproduction of symbolic power relations. As the example of Gilbert's baptism illustrated, he did not object to his family's decision for the event to take place at an Armenian Church because it was important for them. The older members of the family possess more symbolic capital, resulting in the deference of the younger members. Argisht, a first-generation Armenian-American, explained, "Respect your elders is more of a cultural thing, because we are first generation members of a Western [American] society. We try to stay more in our lanes to please our parents, because the culture is more in their roots than ours" (personal communication). Argisht is implying that American society is significantly different from Armenian culture in terms of its values, requiring the cultural expertise of the group's older members for maintenance of Armenian cultural identity, because they are considered to be more authentically Armenian.

The performance of wedding ceremony at an Armenian Church is another feature of symbolic power negotiation and reproduction. A Turkish-Armenian participant discussed her reasons for holding her wedding ceremony at an Armenian Church. Her father is Armenian and her mother is Turkish, requiring her to negotiate this family and cultural identity during significant events in her life. She explained that she was adamant about the religious ceremony taking place at the Armenian Church, because it reinforced her Armenian identity through this significant event in her life. This rite of passage was also a way to show respect and gratitude to her paternal grandfather and her father. She expressed her respect and gratitude to her mother by holding a traditional Turkish henna party before the wedding. The religious ceremony was performance of her paternal

Armenian identity, while the henna party was an extension of her maternal Turkish identity. Menije explained that she must split her identity to experience and accommodate both cultures, since each one belongs to each parent (personal communication).

Menije's desire and need to accommodate both her parents' cultures illustrates the affective bonds of family members, creating cohesion within the social unit that reproduces the state's, which in this case is the ethnos' dominant narrative and ideology. This is illustrated in all three examples, since the younger members of the group seek guidance from their elders for appropriate cultural identity. The elders of the group reproduce the ideology of the ethnos instilled in them by their elders, consisting of an Armenian Christian identity, ensuring the existence and persistence of the larger Armenian cultural unit.

The importance of family becomes amplified within the diasporic communities, since as Susan Pattie has observed, "the concept of 'home' for many is mobile and nomadic, more synonymous with family than with particular place" (Pattie 1999, 82). This is due to the feelings of exile and displacement that are felt by many, creating issues of longing and belonging in their host communities (Pattie 1999). While they continue to feel attached to a 'territorialized origin' that connects Armenians to the same geographical past, they also "wish to insert themselves into their new environment, even though they are also often motivated to retain a degree of loyalty to their singular legacy and original milieu" (Ben-Rafael 2013, 843). They adjust to these bifurcated needs by creating networks that "become foci of cultural, social and political activity" (Ben-Rafael 2013, 843). Family becomes the nucleus of cultural identity understanding in the

diaspora, by ensuring that the Armenian language is learned and spoken, the cuisine is prepared properly and consumed, the history is remembered, and the religious identity is maintained.

Language of the Ancestors

Language is a way of understanding the culture that speaks a particular language. It is a window into the values, ideologies and sentiments of the group. These notions were expressed by the participants in my project, many of whom stressed the importance of Armenian language as a cultural feature. Their reasoning was behind the antiquity of the Armenian language and its important role in Armenian history. One participant stated, “it would break my heart if my children and grandchildren didn’t know Armenian” (Armine, personal communication). Others similarly feared for the extinction of the language in future generations. These preoccupations are connected to the association of language with cultural and national identity. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) have argued that through discursive interaction identities are produced, which are constructed through intersubjective relations with other group members. This creates a notion of sameness within the social unit, establishing a difference from outsiders and a notion of group authenticity through language (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). One of the participants interviewed felt relief and happiness being surrounded by a large Armenian community in the diaspora, because it allowed her to speak Armenian at home and in public. She was born and raised in Turkey, where she was afraid of speaking Armenian in public places. Her ethnic and cultural identity had to be concealed at times, since she lived in a country that resented certain minorities (Hera, personal communication). The

ability to perform her linguistic identity through interaction with other members of the Armenian community allowed her to reinforce her cultural identity.

The concept of a national language connected to culture had long been a part of the folk culture of the peasantry, but officially emerged in Europe in the late 18th century (Magliocco 1992). Official language became a way of group representation, especially surrounding its social relations. Language replaced religion in national identity after the Enlightenment (Safran 2008). Standardization of vernacular language was a tool employed by the state to create social cohesion, based on the notion of an imagined community (Anderson 2006). Bourdieu has argued that official language, “sanctions and imposes what it states, tacitly laying down the dividing line between the thinkable and the unthinkable, thereby contributing towards the maintenance of the symbolic order from which it draws its authority” (2008, 21). The official Armenian language represents Armenian identity and its cultural values. It also demarcates the group from their neighbors, highlighting its significance for notions of alterity.

The importance of the language was illustrated in Susan Pattie’s (1999) research of Armenian diaspora members in the United States. She discovered that the authenticity of early diaspora Armenians in the United States was questioned by later arriving immigrants, because the former did not speak or understand the Armenian language. The recently arriving immigrants also protested the use of English for liturgy in the Armenian Church on the grounds of its inauthenticity. This is due to the religious association with language for centuries, making it a sacred feature of culture. Bourdieu (1977) has argued that an authorized language validates and legitimizes the things it designates when it receives the authority of the social group. As a result, language and linguistic practice by

members of a social group make the members complicit in the power relations of the wider social unit, such as the state, which has naturalized the use of the standard language (Bourdieu 1977). Competence in the official language becomes symbolic capital, which is perceived as containing intrinsic value. Armenian language has been identified as one of the standards for achieving complete Armenian identity by many members of the group.

While many informants expressed the importance of language in cultural identity, they understood the issues of diasporic identity and loss of native language over time. They explained that another important cultural feature, a Christian religious identity, can compensate for lacking in the Armenian language. Safran (2008) has argued that while language and religion are related in their presence within the deep structures of the social group, religion has preceded and been the foundation of the nation in many cases, constructing the collective consciousness of the people. This has especially been the case for ethnonational communities who perceive themselves to be ‘God’s chosen people’ (Safran 2008). The Armenian king’s conversion to Christianity and becoming the first Christian nation has embedded religion into the deep structures of Armenian ethnonational and cultural identity. Language, which is also considered to be an important cultural feature, solidified the distinct Armenian identity through the invention of the script, which was connected to the Armenian Apostolic Church.

CHAPTER VII

PERFORMANCE OF IDENTITY

Songs and Dances of the Homeland

Music, especially Armenian folk music, plays an important role in cultural identity performance, which is deeply intertwined with Armenian culture at home and abroad. It is heard in homes during family gatherings, at large gatherings for special occasions, during cultural festivals, and at concerts. The songs are frequently performed by popular Armenian artists at concerts and on Armenian television shows. The various means of hearing and performing folk songs allow the diaspora members, from young to old, to reinforce their ties to their cultural heritage.

Armenian folk music and dance appeal to members of the older and the younger generations. One of the reasons is that many songs are performed at family events, especially at rites of passage celebrations, associating them with fond memories. One respondent, Anet Z., explained that for her, the role of music in the culture surrounds the family. She comes from a large family, and felt that music and dance temporarily brings family members together, including those who may have animosities with one another (Anet Z., personal communication). Armenian folk music and membership in an Armenian dance troupe allowed her to reconnect with the Armenian culture, evoking pride in and attachment to her cultural identity. A number of other participants expressed similar sentiments, especially those who had been members of folk dance groups.

Folk and traditional Armenian music can also evoke nostalgic sentiments in the members of the community, becoming a means of connection to a distant cultural past. As Alan Dundes has said, “Folklore *means* something – to the tale teller, to the song

singer, to the riddler, and to the audience it addresses” (1980, 33). I witnessed this process at a concert I recently attended at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium. The show featured many folk songs, with some newer songs, which were performed both individually and as a group. The concert evoked a great deal of emotion from the audience members, who interacted with the singers through various forms of responses. While every song received a wonderful reception by the audience, one song stood out from the others. This song is called “Horovel” and is a song of nature and agriculture. The song is usually performed by a small group of male singers who sing their individual parts, then join one another for a collective performance of the chorus.

The song “Horovel” was one of many songs collected by composer and ethnomusicologist Komitas Vardapet in the late 19th and early 20th century. Solomon Solomonian, Komitas’ real name, was born in 1869 to Armenian parents in Kutahye, Turkey (Poladian 1972). Through his musical education at the Armenian Apostolic Church seminary in Echmiadzin, Eastern Armenia, and at European conservatories Komitas gained an appreciation for and a desire to collect the folk music of Armenia (Poladian 1972). Influenced by the prevailing European attitudes of the mid-19th century, Komitas believed that the authenticity of cultural expression through music could only be found in the folk culture of peasants. This led him to travel throughout the Armenian villages to discover the folk music of these groups, living among the peasants for extended periods of time. As a result, he collected approximately 4,000 pieces of folk music from these villages, which also included Turkish and Kurdish songs from neighboring villages (Poladian 1972). Among the collection were children’s lullabies, wedding songs, funeral songs, and work songs, which also consist of songs of

nature/agriculture. His goal in this endeavor was to preserve the Armenian national heritage, make folk music available to wider audiences, and analyze the music through ethnomusicological and historical study.

Komitas employed a historical approach to study and understand songs of the peasants, whose story was not recorded. He examined their songs and oral traditions and created a catalog of peasant songs. He included explanations of context that help the understanding and form of performance of these songs, illustrating the historical research approach discussed by Stone (2008). Komitas discovered through his studies that the folk music of the villagers mainly consisted of improvised songs that responded to the events taking place within their environment. This was especially the case with the songs of labor, which evoked shared experiences of working together and made social interaction possible, illustrating the sociological phenomenology assumption of ethnomusicology (Stone 2008).

The agricultural song “Horovel” is an especially noteworthy example of this process. It was sung by the peasants and farmers in Armenia, as they collectively cultivated their fields (Poladian 1972). “Horovel” was sung during agricultural labor to encourage and cheer up the ploughmen and the oxen during the difficult chore of tilling the soil. However, the metaphors used in the song illustrate the “symbolic constructions and multiple realities” of the song (Stone 2008, 115). At one point in the song the singer refers to the oxen as brother, *axper jan* or as beauty *matagh elnim*, (which literally means “I will sacrifice myself for you”). In this case the singer is using the metaphor of the brother to illustrate the connection of the peasant to the oxen and to nature. It is also an illustration of the unity of the ploughers, who are the people from the same village. This

sentiment is extended to all Armenian people today, who see themselves as kin of one another that emerged from the same small land of Armenia.

The singers performing the song at the concert appeared to connect with the piece emotionally, which can be due to the antiquity of the piece. The audience responded to this delivery by interpreting the song as a representation of the history and landscape of Armenians, reinforcing the nostalgia of the performer. The nostalgia and romantic rhetoric in the center of identity construction, as discussed by Roger Abrahams (2003), was illustrated in the responses given by some of the audience members interviewed. Tololyan (2007) has argued that the history and memory of cultural catastrophe and collective suffering of the group is one of the main features of diasporas' attempts to maintain identity, which sets them apart from other immigrant communities. This is combined with continuous rhetoric and interest in the homeland in their efforts to maintain ethnic and cultural identity. The history of Armenians is filled with the tragedy of being forcefully removed from their ancestral lands, creating diasporas throughout the world. Songs praising the landscape of Armenia help the group cope with this narrative, evoking nostalgia when the music is performed, and reinforcing the connection to the homeland.

The impressions of melancholy and longing interpreted in the song are another illustration of the sentiments experienced by the diaspora. The distance from the homeland has left the members of this group longing for what they perceive to be their real home. Most are aware of the issues in Armenia that prevent them from returning to the country. However, the social construction of Armenian ethnic identity revolves around the notion that an Armenian's heart is always in the homeland. This sentiment is

then applied to the interpretation of folk music, regardless of the context of the song. This is because folk music is considered to be a form of authentic cultural expression.

Another feature of nostalgia in this case is the song's link to the past. Joli Jensen argues that in the genre of American country music, "...enthusiasts locate 'the past' in whatever they believe to be disappearing in modern life and find the expression of nostalgia in country music to be useful in facing the realities of the present..." (Wade 2013, 182). My mother and uncle expressed this sentiment in their interpretations of the song "Horovel." Their reasoning for the beauty of the song is in its ability to illustrate the everyday life of the Armenian peasant through simple lyrics and melody. The simplicity of the song, they argued, reflects the modesty and humbleness of a life which no longer exists.

Folklorists have posited that folklore "represents collective fantasy; in these fantasies, we find the projections not of an individual author, but of an entire community" (Magliocco 1992, 453). "Horovel" is one of many Armenian folk songs that resonate with the members of the Diaspora and the homeland. This connection is due to history and socio-political conditions, which have created nostalgia for the distant past that allows the individual to connect with ancestral lands. The physical detachment of the diaspora members from the homeland shapes their interpretation and sentiments of Armenian folk music, which is utilized as a tool for performance and maintenance of cultural identity in Los Angeles.

Music and dance evoke sentiments of nostalgia and nationalism in many Armenian-Americans. However, it doesn't encompass all Armenian-Americans in Los Angeles, since they have emigrated from numerous countries across the world. Their

membership in other diasporas has shaped their hybrid cultural identities that can also impact connection to Armenian music. Some respondents who were born in Turkey did not feel the nostalgia and connection to many Armenian folk songs. This was due to the inaccessibility of traditional Armenian music in Turkey. They established their connection to and perform their Armenian cultural identity through other means, including family and the Armenian Apostolic Church.

The Armenian Church: Space Becoming Place

The literature surrounding the transformation of space into place spans from concepts of embodied space, inscribed space, contested space, and transnational space. I will utilize these theories for the analysis of my gathered data.

Embodied space refers to the creation of space through the behaviors, presence, orientation and verbal/non-verbal language of the human body. This develops spatial experience and consciousness, which transforms space into place. Miles Richardson (2003) has discussed the impact of material culture on communities, shaping the individuals' notions of "being-in-the-world" and creating an embodied space. He has argued that materials are fixed expressions of our experiences, which allow us to read, interpret, and perform their narrative in our interactions. As a result, an objective reality leads to a subjective response that is created through three steps. The first step is the setting's production of a preliminary definition. This is followed by the human interaction with the material culture or setting, which leads to the emergence of the image of the setting through this interaction that confirms its "sense of place" (Richardson 2003, 76). The setting in question requires each person to become an observer of his/her surroundings and other individuals' interactions, shaping the behavior of the participants

in the place. The Armenian Apostolic Church has defined itself as a representative of the faith, the nation and the ethnos since the fifth century, after the composition of the Armenian alphabet and the fusion of Christianity with ethno-cultural identity.

Participation in religious activity, whether through the performance of rites of passage, lighting a candle, listening to liturgy, or simply walking into church, allow the members of this community to interact with the religious and cultural space of the Church, restating its sacred and irreplaceable position within the culture.

Inscribed space considers the behaviors of a group that allow the creation and attachment of meaning to a space, which transforms space into a place. This is done through “writing” a place, which is the inscription of cultural meaning onto a locale that make the place a repository of memory and history. This is done through motifs, praxis and movement, which shape the landscape, culture and attitudes of individuals, who in turn reshape the landscape through new motifs and practice. The Armenian Apostolic Church has been inscribed with meaning throughout centuries, as a result of various historical and political factors. In the beginning of the tenth century Armenian churches and monasteries became the intellectual and educational centers of the culture (Cowe 2004). During the Seljuk and Mongol invasions from the 11th to the 14th centuries, the Armenian churches also became repositories of religious and Armenian cultural history. According to a tour guide in Armenia, some churches near the Armenia – Turkey border served as testaments of survival for the Armenian Genocide survivors that escaped to Armenia; a number of these survivors inscribed their names on the walls of some churches, especially at Khor Virap, to let their loved ones and relatives know that they were alive. These factors reinforced the central role of the Church within the Armenian

culture, inscribing multiple meanings to the place. The historical significance of the Armenian Church also evokes sentiments that several participants described as ‘inexplicable.’ Angela recalled her trip to Armenia, where she visited Armenian Churches, experiencing “a different level of spirituality there, because of the history of the buildings and the fact that they were in Armenia” (personal communication). Armen recalled his trip to Armenia and to the historic religious landmarks, stating:

“When we were in Armenia we visited Khor Virap, the pit where St. Gregory was imprisoned. To a more religious person it would have evoked more spiritual feelings. But to me it was amazing, because I felt like I was standing in the middle of history. Looking at the ground there, I wondered what this place looked like during that time and what the landscape outside looked like that long ago. I’m dressed like a typical tourist during this time, but I’m feeling those cultural historical connections that are also connected to Armenian religious history” (personal communication).

James Fernandez (2003) has applied the concept of ‘architectonics,’ which he defines as “feeling tones that activity in various constructed spaces evokes and that makes them places,” to his discussion of inscribed spaces (Fernandez 2003, 187). He argues that certain constructed spaces amplify the feeling tones evoked. Sacred sites are more likely to have an additional quality of architectonics, which can evoke symbolic feelings in the participants. This is done through the symbolic processing of experience, which occurs through the performance of rituals. These processes are also shaped by the natural environment, history, and cultural practices of each group (Fernandez 2003). The performance of ritual behaviors, such as lighting a candle or crossing oneself in the

Armenian Church is the result of the symbolic feelings evoked in the individuals within the space. The history of the ethnos and the important role of the Church in this history amplify the already symbolic ‘architectonics’ of the place, impacting the behaviors of the religious and non-religious members of the community. The ritual movements during marriage, baptism, or simply in lighting a candle are not only the symbolic processing of religious experience, but also of cultural experience.

The natural environment surrounding churches in Armenia also create architectonics. One of the participants in my project explained that when he was visiting Armenia the reality of being in his homeland occurred at a monastery surrounded by the beauty of nature. He stated, “When I went into Tatev monastery, which is built on top of a mountain with greenery all around, that’s when I felt the connection to my land and my country” (Armen, personal communication). This sentiment in part was due to his connection with his ancestors and the ancestral cultural identity through this space. Prior to his visit to Tatev, Armen had been staying in the capital city Yerevan. The environment in the capital city did not evoke the feeling of being in his homeland. Tatev monastery served the purpose of his trip, connection with his ancestral homeland, through the natural environment that is stereotypically used to describe mountainous Armenia.



Image 3. View of nearby village from the balcony of the Tatev Monastery Complex

Margaret C. Rodman (2003) has argued for the multilocality of place, which takes into consideration the social construction of place from multiple viewpoints of its inhabitants. She argues for the “lived experience” of place, which consists of praxis and narrative of the space that shape its meaning (Rodman 2003, 206). This argument takes into account the politicized, culturally relative and historically specific nature of place, which is shaped through multiple social constructions. They hold various physical, emotional and experiential realities for their inhabitants, who continuously inscribe new meanings into these places. Rodman’s argument illustrates the complex and multiple meanings of the Armenian Church for the Armenian diaspora. A religious participant may attend church for the fulfillment of spiritual needs. A non-religious member of the community may take part in religious rites in the Church as a way to perform their

cultural identity through this cultural heritage of the group, which has been inscribed within the Church for many centuries. Other members of the community may perceive the Church as a connection to their family, and participate in these activities to maintain familial ties.

John Gray (2003) has examined the role of movement and praxis in space in the construction of alterity through locality, and in turn attachment to this locality. The Scottish sheep herders in his ethnography establish a distinct group identity through their movements around the hill, attaching special meaning to this locale and place-making. The practice of attending the Armenian Church for Sunday service or for rites of passage allows religious and non-religious Armenians to establish a distinct identity of Armenianness. This notion of alterity through belonging to the Armenian Church has been an essential feature in the construction and maintenance of Armenian cultural identity since the inception of the Church. Historical and mythological Armenian narratives are filled with stories about heroes who have battled to maintain this group alterity and save the Armenian people from extinction. Young and old members of the community refer to this alterity when discussing their cultural identity and heritage. The movements of crossing oneself, lighting a candle, walking through the Church, or performing traditional rites distinct to the Armenian Church allow for the reinforcement of attachment to the locality of the Church and its alterity.



Image 4. Armenians lighting candles during the Holy Thursday vigil before Easter Sunday at St. Mary's Armenian Apostolic Church

Theories surrounding contested space examine how each group applies their own meaning to a space, disputing and changing the dominant cultural themes that have been applied to the space in the past. Hilda Kuper (2003) has examined the role of space in the defining and re-establishing of national identity. She has argued that each culture applies different techniques and perspectives to space, structuring their distinct concept of the physical space (Kuper 2003). Kuper cites Radcliffe-Brown's discussion of "arbitrarily delineated localities" of social space, underscoring that every group has a "territorial structure" that serves for political, social and economic organization (Kuper 2003, 248). The Armenian Apostolic Church has been the territorial structure of the Armenian community throughout history, both within the homeland and in the diaspora. This has been due to the history of conquest and dispersion, which has frequently left Armenians

without a central political power. In most cases, the Armenian Church has been appointed by foreign powers or the Armenian people as an acting agent of the Armenian political system. This is illustrated by the number of churches that have been built in the Los Angeles area, to meet the needs of a growing Armenian population in the area. While the Armenian community of Los Angeles has several non-governmental organizations that work to advance various causes of the Armenian people in the diaspora and the homeland, the Church maintains its position as a political representative of the group. The customary presence of Armenian priests during various large scale Armenian events, which includes the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide in April, illustrates the Church's persistent dominant position in the Armenian community of Los Angeles.

Kuper also addresses Evan-Pritchard's structural analysis of social space, which includes structural space that is constructed through the shared values that determine the social relations between individuals within a group (Kuper 2003). The Armenian Church's role as a national bastion of the Armenian people has been constructed by the Church and the people throughout history. While the Church had established itself within the political realm of the Armenian nation, its role as a cultural symbol for defining Armenianness was amplified during the Medieval period of Arab conquests and the spread of Islam in the region. This cultural symbol became even more important after the Armenian Genocide during World War I, which resulted in a large Armenian diaspora throughout the world.

Mircea Eliade's discussion of the *axis mundi* is also presented in Kuper's argument, illustrating that every society creates its own fixed point at the center of the

world which marks the group's beginning. Eliade has argued that the beginning must always be a sacred point, since nothing can be borne in the chaos of the profane (Kuper 2003). The conversion of King Trdat to Christianity in the fourth century has marked the starting point for a cohesive ethnic identity for many Armenians. This moment in history is also marked as the birth of Christian national identity, which is frequently summoned by Armenians in their self-identification. This transformation of national identity that is marked as the new beginning for Armenians was accompanied by the introduction of the Armenian alphabet. The alphabet was created by St. Mesrop Mashtots through the sponsorship of the ruling noble family at the time and the Armenian Apostolic Church (Bournoutian 2012). The tangible identity marker of the alphabet further reinforced the *axis mundi* of the Armenian Church within the Armenian culture and its alterity from surrounding groups.

Kuper (2003) continues her argument of the role of space in defining national identity through her discussion of Kenneth Burke's (1945) five ingredients of drama: scene, act, agent, agency, purpose. Kuper stresses Burke's argument that scene becomes a force of motivation for action; meaning that space can evoke specific actions appropriate for the setting. This occurs in the Armenian Church through the act of religious behavior, despite lack of religiosity. A number of participants in my research referred to their disagreement with or lack of understanding of the religious tenets of Christianity. However, these individuals continuously discussed the religious rituals they performed when they entered the Armenian Church. These rituals included crossing themselves after prayer, lighting candles and praying, and kissing the cross when participating in specific rites of passage. This reaction is due to several factors. These

range from the sanctified space of the Armenian Church within the culture to the significance of these actions in the performance of cultural identity, resulting from the role of the Church in the diaspora as a bastion of national identity. The Armenian Church does not only serve as a site of religiosity, but also as a political representation of the homeland, due to its deep historical ties with the state. This has allowed it to be transformed into a representation of the sacred ground for Armenianness in the diaspora, including in the Los Angeles area. This attitude is similar to Kuper's description of the Swazi *umphakatsi*, the most important village, as the group's *axis mundi*. She states, "Swazi conceptualize each *umphakatsi* as a continuation and extension of their past; and old sites are remembered together with their founders, and a new *umphakatsi* is given the name of a historical landmark" (Kuper 2003, 253).

Kuper continues the discussion of space with an emphasis on the significance of a site, which she argues is a piece of the social space that was "socially and ideologically demarcated and separated from other places," becoming a symbol that articulates social relations through various messages (2003, 258). These sites express their significance not only through their appearance, but mostly through their "qualifying and latent meaning," despite the manipulation of the site's meaning by various individuals or groups (Kuper 2003, 258). These sites and social space are never neutral or homogenous, since each site can have different levels of power and significance (Kuper 2003). Kuper's theory was frequently illustrated in my participants' responses, when discussing their relationships with the Armenian Church. One respondent, Anet, who does not identify as a particularly religious individual, but considers herself an Armenian Christian, demonstrated the difference in a site's power. She was recently married in an

Armenian Church to a non-Armenian religious Catholic man. She expressed her desire to get married at St. Mary's Armenian Apostolic Church because she viewed this specific church as a necessary means for performing her cultural identity through the rite of passage of marriage. Anet explained that St. Mary's Armenian Apostolic Church in Glendale, California was an important site for performance of cultural identity during a wedding, because it had been the site of important events in her friends' and family members' lives (personal communication, November, 2016). She did not feel a spiritual connection to the site, but felt that its architecture and history was a representation of the Church's position within the community. This specific site was the setting for when the "show happens" (personal communication, November, 2016). This was in contrast to the newer, but smaller and more intimate St. Peter Armenian Apostolic Church in Glendale, California, which she considered a more spiritual space. Anet argued that St. Peter Church was a place she would go to feel the religious and spiritual connection, while St. Mary's Church was the site for special life events of an Armenian (personal communication, November, 2016).

St. Mary's Armenian Apostolic Church has established itself as an authoritative religious site for Armenian cultural identity in Glendale, California. While there are other Armenian churches in the area "the permanent and enduring blueprint" of this site's religious and cultural authority persists within the community (Kuper 2003, 259). This is due to its history as one of the first Armenian Churches in the San Fernando Valley, but also due to its central role in the significant life events of many Glendale Armenians. Being the first Armenian Church in the area has made the site a 'cosmic centre' for the

community in the area, reinforcing its position through social memory and performance of ritual, or what Connerton (1989) has referred to as ‘habit-memory.’

Kuper (2003) concludes by arguing that certain sites allow for the creation and re-establishment of national identity after colonization. This is done through the manipulation of the meaning of the site, which changes over time with the changing needs of the culture. This argument was illustrated in the significance of the *umphakatsi* for the Swazi national identity. It is also the case with the Armenian Apostolic Church for Armenian national identity in the diaspora and the homeland.

The site of the church has had multiple meaning for different members of the diaspora throughout history. In Los Angeles, each group expresses their connection to the site through the meanings that they have formed, as a result of their cultural hybridity. The Armenian Church became a means for reinstating national identity after colonization in post-Soviet Armenia. This interpretation has migrated to the Los Angeles Armenian community with the arrival of immigrants from post-Soviet Armenia. Respondents from this immigrant community explained that they attend Church on religious holidays and special events because of its connection to the Armenian ethno-national identity. Many of the respondents expressed that they are not religious, but see the Church as more than a religious site. They felt that the representation of this place encompasses Armenian ethnic and national history, culture and religion, allowing them to attach their own meanings to the site when participating in Church ceremonies.



Image 5. Anet's wedding ceremony at St. Mary's Armenian Apostolic Church in Glendale, California



Image 6. My wedding ceremony at St. Peter Armenian Apostolic Church in Glendale, CA

Armenians in Iran utilized the Church as a means of maintaining their distinct ethno-national identity in a majority Muslim country for over four hundred years. There were many cultural similarities between Persians and Armenians, since the two groups were from neighboring countries. The length of time in Iran also led to further cultural hybridization of Armenians, who were left with a limited number of cultural features that defined their alterity. The Armenian Church played an important role in this process. As a result, the significance of the Church as a cultural, ethno-national and a religious feature has maintained its position within the Iranian-Armenian community in the Los Angeles diaspora. Several Armenian respondents in Los Angeles that migrated from Iran, many of whom did not consider themselves to be religious, perceived attendance and rites of passage at the Armenian Church as a necessary feature of their cultural identity. This form of identification with the Armenian Church was common with Armenian-Americans from other diasporas. Lebanese-Armenians and Syrian-Armenians also considered the Armenian Church as a necessary ethno-national feature, due their background in a majority Muslim country.

Other Armenian-Americans attached significantly different meanings to the Church. Armenians from Turkey viewed the Church as a means of performing and maintaining an ethnic identity that was marginalized and threatened. One respondent explained that the Armenian Church was one of the few public places in Istanbul, Turkey where they could speak Armenian and be Armenian, without being fearful and facing harassment (personal communication). The Armenian community in Turkey had compromised a number of cultural features, including changing of Armenian surnames in some cases, in order to survive. However, the connection of the Armenian community in

Istanbul to the Armenian Church was maintained. Despite the fear of harassment from the dominant population, Armenians continued to attend Church and hold their important rites of passages at the site. The Armenian private schools in Turkey were also connected to the Church, so Armenian children began their education through the Apostolic Church. Another respondent, Menije, whose father is Armenian and mother is Turkish, established her connection to her Armenian identity in Turkey through the Armenian primary school and the Armenian Church (personal communication). These respondents, along with many Armenians from Turkey, have transported this connection with them to the Los Angeles diaspora. While the first respondent attends Church regularly for cultural and spiritual reasons, the second respondent attends only on holidays, to light a candle and on special occasions. The second respondent, Menije, explained that despite her lack of religiosity, the Armenian Church was a tangible site for her connection to her Armenian identity. She reinforced this connection by getting married at St. Peter Armenian Apostolic Church in Van Nuys, California, after her husband was baptized in the Church.

Armenians who are second, third or subsequent generation Americans perceive the Armenian Church as a symbol of cultural identity that is from the “old country.” In many cases these individuals have lost touch with other Armenian cultural features, and consider attendance to the Church as one of the few ways they can reconnect with their heritage. Lack of religiosity is not an issue for those who attend on occasion, since they do not perceive it as a necessity for connection to the ethno-national identity. American celebrity Kim Kardashian illustrated this connection in April, 2015, when she baptized her daughter at the Armenian Apostolic Church of the Cathedral of St. James in the

Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem. Kardashian, who is a fourth-generation Armenian-American, has maintained some contact with her paternal cultural identity. However, she has lost touch with a number of Armenian cultural features, including language and music. Prior to her daughter's baptism and her visit to Armenia in April, 2015, Kardashian's main connection to her Armenian ethnic identity was through advocacy for recognition of the Armenian Genocide. The baptism of her daughter was a reinforcement of her connection to her Armenian cultural identity, which served as a symbolic representation of her cultural heritage and ancestral homeland.

Other Armenian-Americans have expressed similar notions, arguing that the sites of the various Armenian churches in Los Angeles have become a place for reinforcing ethno-national identity. Many of these individuals have assimilated into the dominant American culture, feeling a greater need for a reconnection to their Armenian culture. These individuals have more access to Armenian culture in Los Angeles, because of the large Armenian diaspora in the area. However, they feel that certain features of their cultural identity are either disappearing or changing, while other features of Armenian cultural identity are incompatible with their individual identities. Attendance to the Armenian Church, whether it is regular or on special occasions, along with performance of certain rituals connected to the Church, allows them to maintain a cultural connection to Armenian heritage and history. Several respondents who are second generation Armenian-American referred to the history of Armenians and the central role of the Church within this history as an important reason for this connection.

Some second-generation Armenian-Americans continue to have a strong connection to their cultural identity, as a result of living in a densely Armenian populated

area like Los Angeles. Despite this connection, they continue to view the presence of the Armenian Church in the area as a necessary feature of cultural identity. Gilbert, a second-generation Armenian-American in Glendale, California, who was baptized in the Armenian Church at age 21, felt that this event completed his Armenian identity. Gilbert felt that his identity was incomplete prior to his baptism, because it was missing the essential piece of belonging to the Armenian Church (personal communication). This was due to other Armenian community members' reactions to him not being baptized, leading him to feel somewhat disconnected from this identity. Gilbert regularly engages with the Armenian community through his job as an event videographer. Yet this missing piece of his identity was so significant that he felt somewhat disconnected from his family, friends and his Armenianness (personal communication). Gilbert explained that he attends Church only on some religious holidays, during rites of passage of family and friends, and for his job as a videographer (personal communication). Despite his disagreement with some religious teachings, he feels that the Armenian Church is an important part of Armenian identity (personal communication). This is due to the tragic history of Armenians, who have faced near extinction in the past. The Church has become a site of connection to this history and to Armenian ancestral identity, which was preserved through Christianity and the Church. He associates attendance to the Church with the occurrence of special events. He feels that significant Armenian rites of passages, such as baptisms and weddings, rely heavily on the Armenian Church. He stated that without the Church the people will not be able to perform these events appropriately, which will alter Armenian identity so much that it will cease to be a distinct cultural identity.



Image 7. Menije's wedding ceremony at St. Peter Armenian Apostolic Church in Van Nuys, California



Image 8. Gilbert's baptism at St. Kevork Armenian Apostolic Church in Glendale, California

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The large Armenian community in Los Angeles has a number of different means of maintaining and performing their cultural identity. These range from family connections and celebrations to language, food, music, dance, festivals, non-governmental organizations, and Armenian private schools. However, the different routes of migration to the region has resulted in a culturally hybrid population that interprets cultural markers in various forms. The one constant cultural feature that has persisted in the community has been the Armenian Apostolic Church. Membership in and attendance to the Armenian Church for religious ceremonies, religious holidays, cultural commemorations and special rites of passage have allowed almost all members of the community to perform their identity. This has elevated the position of the Armenian Church as a significant identity marker, allowing the group to connect with their Armenianness and their ancestral homeland. Many respondents have felt that the Armenian Apostolic Church has been a necessity in the preservation of Armenian identity throughout history in the homeland and the diaspora. They have come to this understanding through early education in Armenian history from parents and institutions, and participation in rites of passage ceremonies in the Armenian Church from childhood to adulthood. The attitudes of the respondents towards the Armenian Church's role in ethnic cohesion and identity preservation are regardless of their religiosity. Throughout history the Armenian Apostolic Church has been the beginning orientation and center of Armenian identity, becoming in Mircea Eliade's (2009) words an *axis mundi*. Eliade has argued that the Achilpa have carried the sacred pole, as a representation of their *axis*

mundi with them wherever they have gone, making sure that they would never “be far from the Center and should remain in communication with the supraterrrestrial world” (2009, 286). Armenians have done the same with the Armenian Apostolic Church throughout the diaspora, including in the Los Angeles area. However, their *axis mundi* is not only a representation of the spiritual “supraterrrestrial world,” but also of their cultural and ethnic identity.

This dominant position of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Armenian identity, illustrates the phenomenon of what Karpov, Lisovskaya and Barry (2012) have referred to as ethnodoxy. Ethnodoxy is defined as “an ideology that rigidly links ethnic and religious identity, perceiving the religious other as harmful to the group’s unity, achieving a protected and privileged status for the group’s dominant faith” (Karpov et al 2012, 644). This ideology occurs on three levels: macro, micro, and meso. Macro level considers the societal and cultural conditions that create this phenomenon. In the case of Armenians, the geographic vulnerability that has resulted in external persecution of the group has been one of the most significant socio-historical factors that has contributed to the ideology of ethnodoxy. Mobility is another factor contributing to this ideology, illustrated by the Armenian Church’s position within the large Armenian Diaspora. The Church has preserved its position within the diasporic community and in Armenia by being a unifying force in times of turmoil and in the absence of political leadership, becoming the ecclesiastic and national authority for all Armenians that transcends geography and fosters ethnonationality.

At the micro level the social psychological mechanisms shape the individual’s identity, relying on stereotypical and normative lines of the culture to build and maintain

cultural identity (Karpov, et al, 2012). In this case, it is an Apostolic Christian Armenian identity that connects the individual to the distant past of the ancestors from the homeland, creating a distinct in-group of Armenianness that separates the diasporic community from their neighbors. There is also the notion of a sacred ethnic identity that results from the fusion of religion and ethnicity. Armenian-Americans display this notion by referring to their faith and the Church as the spiritual saviors of the culture, expressed by the popular phrase “mer havatkeh mer azgi prkutyunneh” (“our faith has been the savior of our culture”). This sacred identity intensifies Armenian-American responsibility to the group, ensuring that all future generations maintain their connection to the Church, even if it is done in the form of symbolic religiosity (Gans 1994). The understanding that an individual is born as an Armenian Christian creates the notion of an innate ethnoreligious identity that cannot be separated through conversion.

At the meso level the beliefs from the macro and micro level become institutionalized through socio-historical circumstances that allow the religious authority to address emerging issues for the group. In the case of Armenians, it has been the continuous external threat of division or cultural extinction, which intensified after the Armenian Genocide. The Church emerged within a political context with the conversion of King Trdat III, securing its position of power from the beginning. The dominant position of the Armenian Church has not been contested for many centuries, allowing it to become an important structure within the collective habitus. Ethno-religious practice has reinforced this habitus, making the Armenian Christian identity an ethnodoxy.

While this ethno-religious identity has allowed the group to persist and survive for almost two millennia, it has also created some barriers for individuals of Armenian

descent who do not identify as Christian. As discussed earlier, there are Islamicized Armenians, who live in Turkey and Syria. An increasing number of these individuals are attempting to rediscover and engage with their Armenian cultural identity. Some Islamicized Armenians are choosing to convert to Christianity through the Armenian Apostolic Church, to reclaim their Armenian cultural identity (Özgül 2014). However, there are many others who are not ready or willing to take such a drastic step and change their religious identity, despite their desire to engage with Armenian culture. This creates an issue for these individuals, and other Armenians in the homeland and the diaspora. As several my respondents stated, Muslim Armenians will have difficulty gaining a seat at the table because of their religious identity and the Armenian history with their religion. As my respondent Mary explained, “While I would be accepting of Muslim-Armenians, I don’t think the Armenian community will be readily able to do so. The genocide was a cultural and religious attack on Armenians, so to most Armenians a Muslim is a red flag” (personal communication). This leaves us, Armenians, with the question of how we can bridge this gap and become more inclusive.

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