ARMENIAN-CANADIAN WOMEN IN DIASPORA: THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN (UP)ROOTED LIVES, BURDENED SOULS, AND ENLIVENED SPIRITS

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a life history research—a collective process of remembering, telling, writing, and unravelling. The participants, including myself, are seven Armenian women in Toronto and Montréal who have been educators in Armenian schools and/or in Canadian Universities.

Participants have refashioned their lives as Armenian-Canadians and faced the discomfort of living in displaced identities, the disconnect between self and communities, and the ambivalence of belonging neither here nor there. Even though uprooted from their birthplace and deracinated from their ancestral land, participants continue finding ways to establish roots and to secure spaces within Canadian communities in their efforts to renegotiate their identities as diasporans. In their community of learners and teachers, they are resolute with their fragmented selves—multilocal, multilingual, hybrid. They find a *home* in their hostland Canada and a spiritual *homeland* in Armenia.

The qualitative nature of this research allowed me to balance my dual roles as researcher and participant. Life history research demanded complex and interconnected relationships among the researcher, the participants, and the communities. It involved a reflexive practice and a responsive engagement with and within the context of the research. Interviews, group discussions, and autoethnographic writing were the methods I used to gather data.

I conceptualized my findings within the theoretical framing of feminist poststructural theory and diaspora concepts. I explored the following: Participants'

motivation to pursue education in their mature years; the role of formal learning in reconstructing uprooted lives and at the same time, renegotiating socialized and historicized identities; the burden and the privilege of an inherited history, in particular the history of the Armenian Genocide.

This is a project that finds significance not only in the struggles of displacement and resettlement of Armenian women in Canada but also in the recalling, the reliving, and the reconstructing of stories. It is an interpretive inquiry into the personal that stems from and is shaped by individual, historical, social, economic, and political forces. Therefore, I have addressed the context of telling, the spaces participants spoke from and about, the communities they represented, the ideologies they promoted, and the silences they may have maintained.

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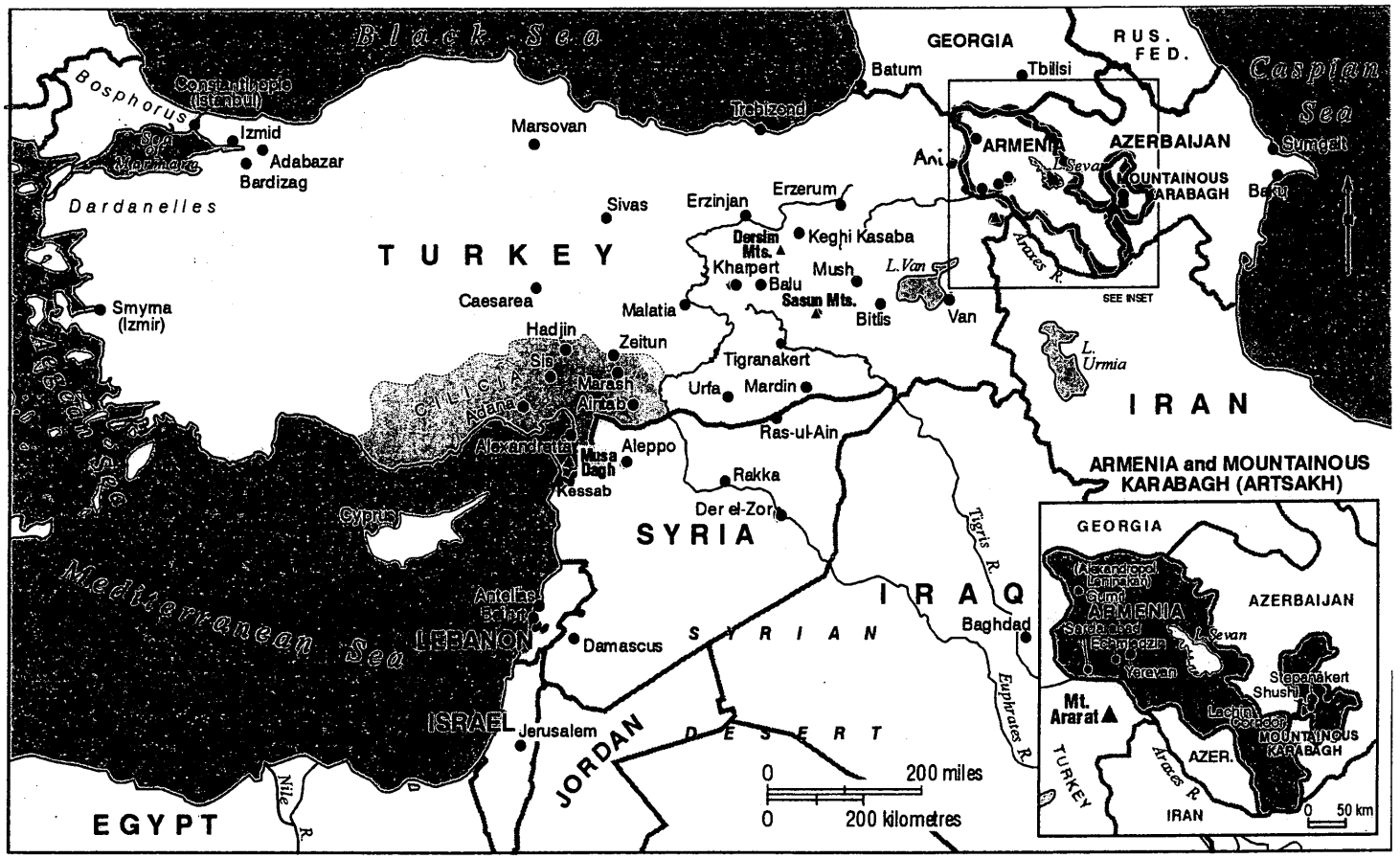

Map of the Old World showing current political boundaries and some centres referred to in the text. Courtesy Department of Geography, University of Toronto. Cartographer, Jane Davie. (From Kaprielian-Churchill, 2005).

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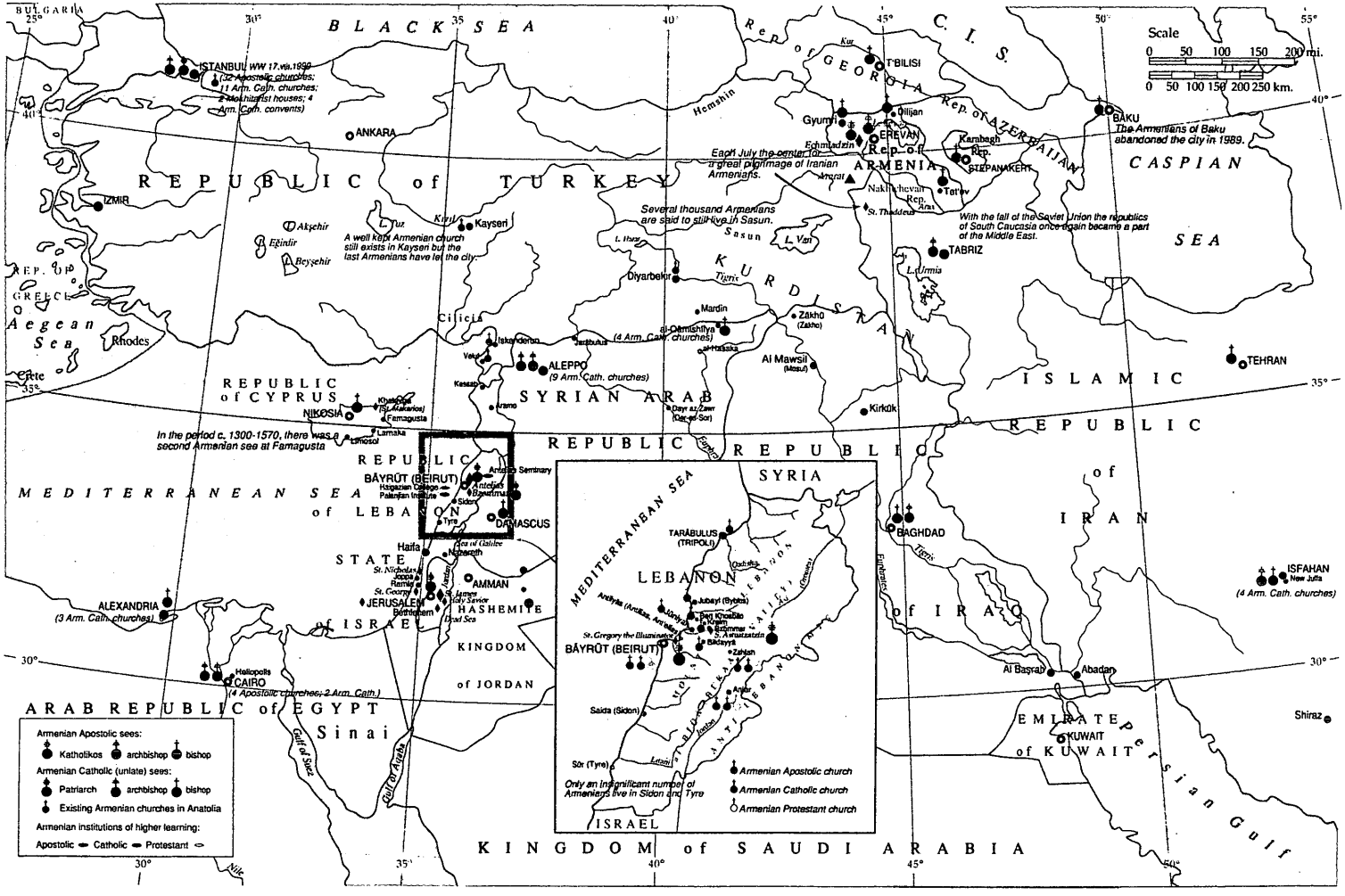

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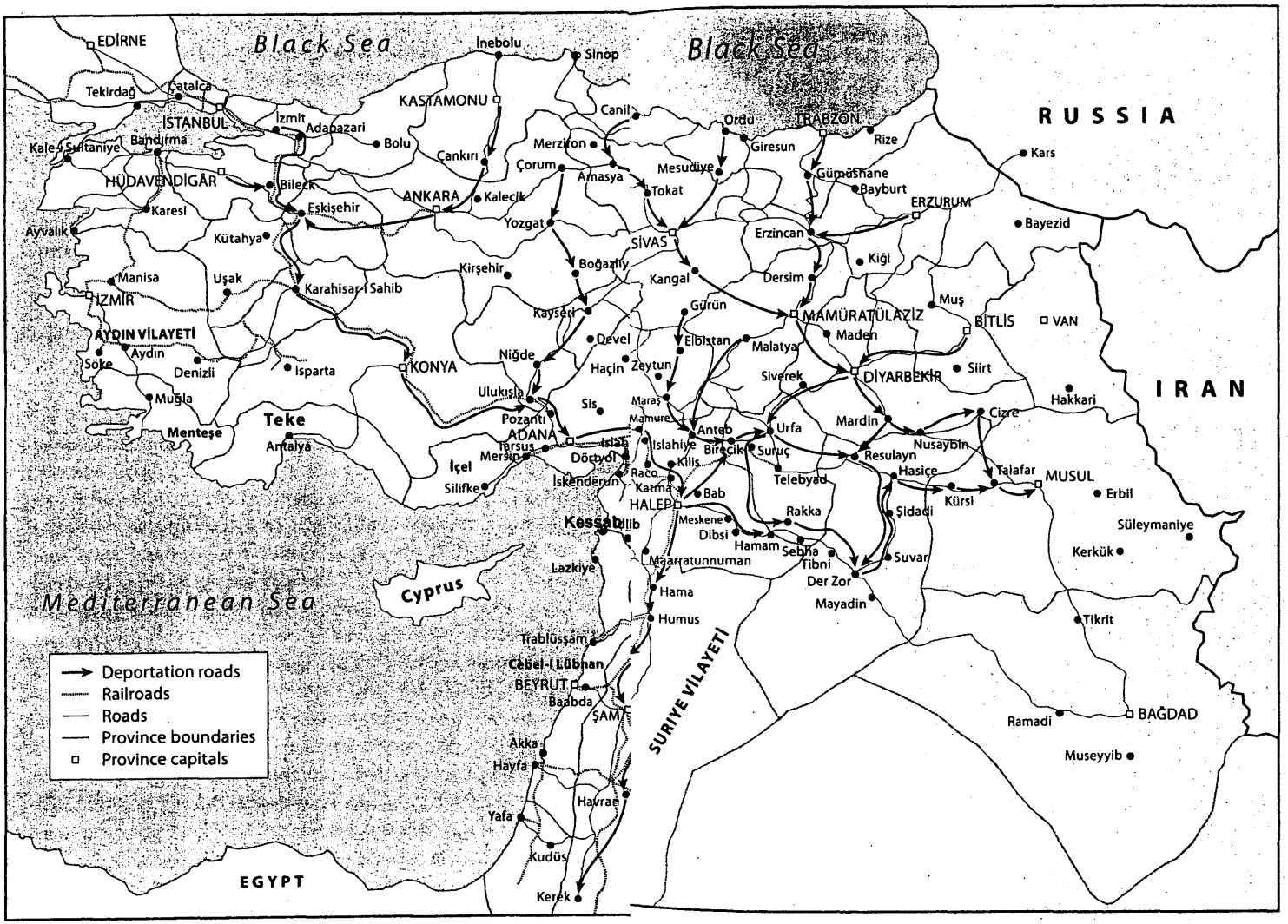

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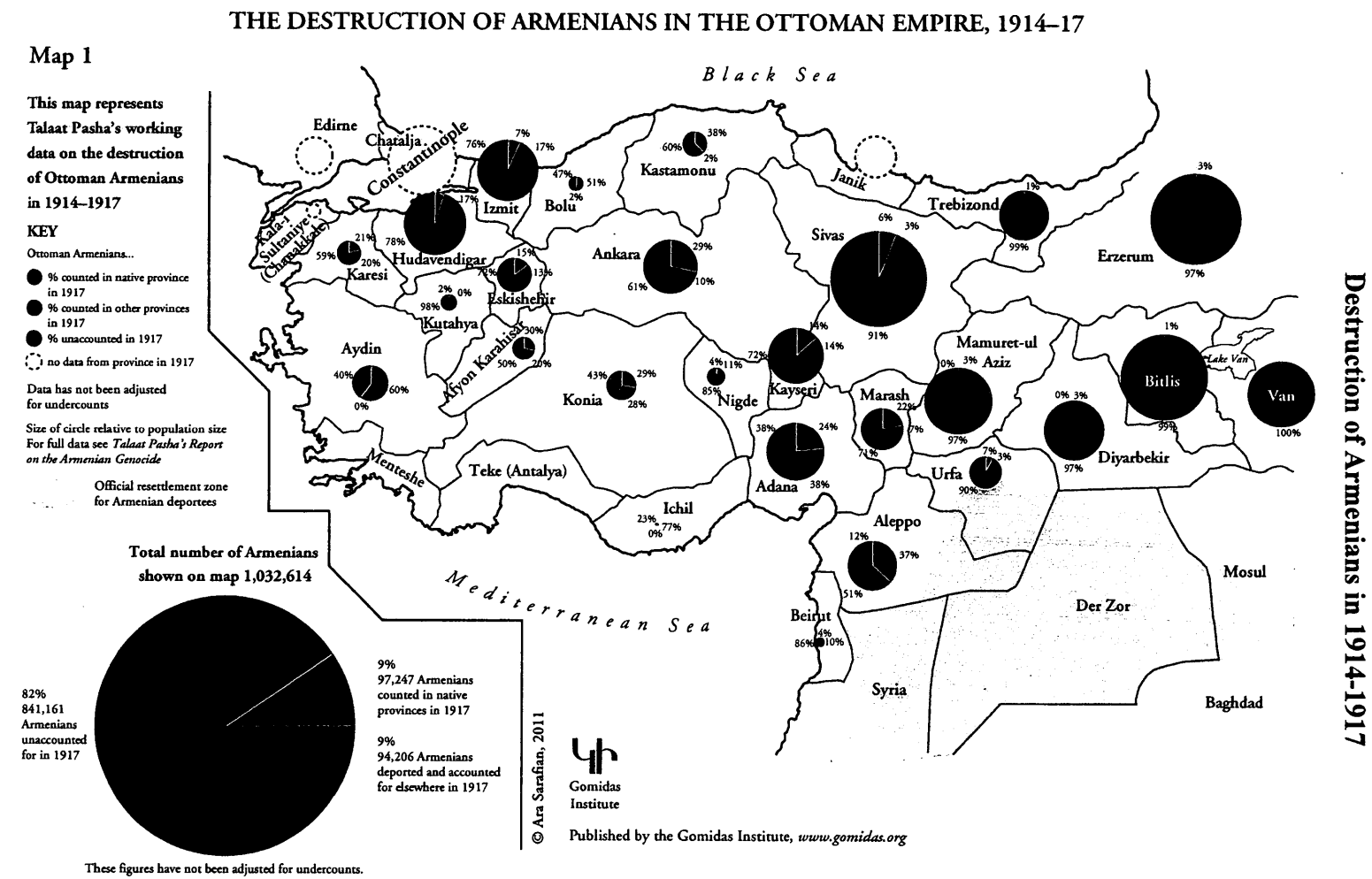

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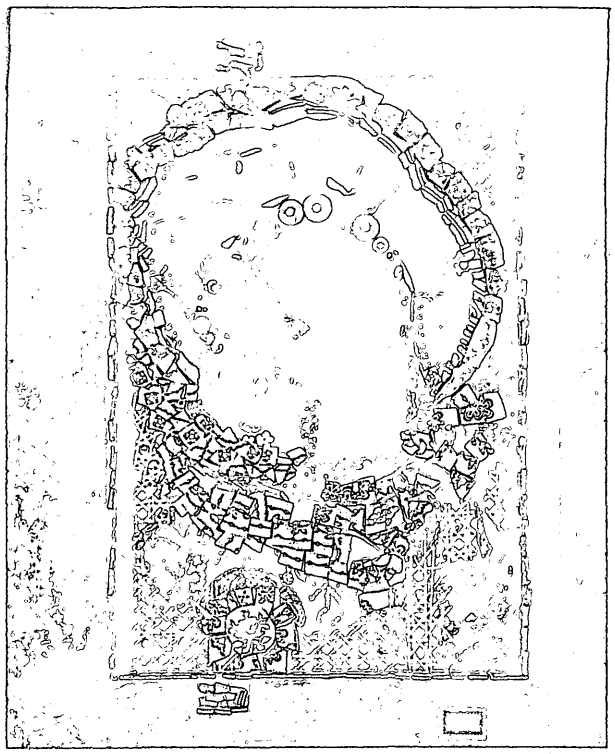

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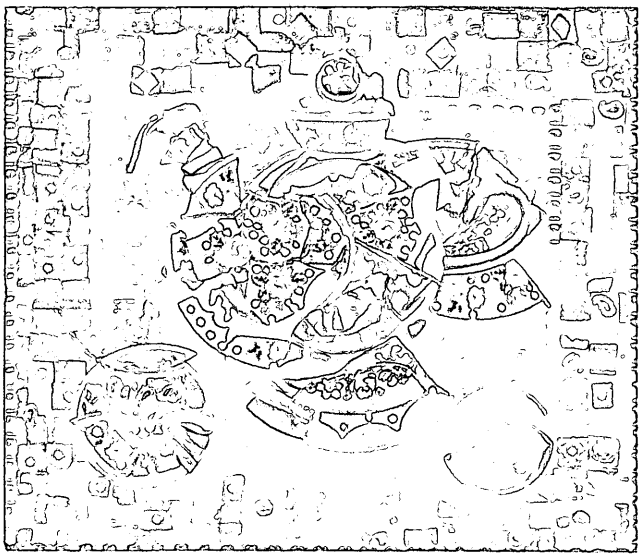

Grandmother's Fig Jam, 1986

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The undiscovered self is an unexpected resource.
(Mary Catherine Bateson, 1989, p. 5)

Aspirations to continue my education were unexpectedly interrupted by civil wars in Lebanon and emigration to Canada in 1976. When in Toronto, in my early twenties, my passion for learning intensified as I realized that in this "land of opportunities," I could pursue higher education even though I was married and was raising a child. In 2006, exactly thirty years later and having obtained several diplomas and degrees, I found myself attending my first Doctoral Seminar in Education at York University. I felt privileged to be there, privileged to start yet another journey of learning. That evening, I realized that not only did I have a story to tell but that I had an audience to tell it to.

The pages of this dissertation are filled with the life history of seven Armenian immigrant women (including myself): Arminé, Hermine, Lori, Nectar, Nrani, Zabel[1], and Arpi. We have struggled to re-establish ourselves in Canada. We have all fled unstable conditions in the Middle East between the 1960s and the 1990s. In our pursuit of finding a new home and a new career, we have maintained our Armenian identity. Against numerous personal and institutional odds, we have been successful in overcoming social and linguistic challenges. We have discovered new possibilities and uncovered our capacities for attaining higher education in Canadian universities and colleges and for working as professionals in our own communities.

[1] Participants' names are pseudonyms in order to protect their identity and to comply with York University's ethics requirements.

This is a narrative about re-directing our lives and re-inventing ourselves in a new diaspora and along the way, negotiating spaces in academe. It is about learning to take detours when facing disruptions, finding solace when displaced, establishing roots when uprooted, connecting with new communities when disconnected from one's own. It is about overcoming challenges, acknowledging failures, and celebrating successes.

Establishing a new life requires being flexible and ready and willing to take detours when faced with interruptions and roadblocks. It entails adapting to a new environment, adopting a new mindset, communicating in a new language, travelling through new landscapes, eating different foods, making new friends, finding continuities in all that is foreign, living with the pain of nostalgia, seeking comfort in change. Education has been the continuity through all the ups and downs of establishing a new life for the participants of this study. It has been the bridge that connected the path they travelled on in their past and the one they found themselves on oceans away from their birthplaces. These are the narratives that I intend to explore in this dissertation in an attempt to find answers to my questions: How have we re-fashioned our lives and crafted new identities? What motivated us to pursue higher education in our mature years? How were we informed by the academic debate and in turn, how did we inform that debate? What were the learning environments in which we improvised and transformed our lives? Did formal learning assist in reconstructing our interrupted lives? What were our roles in our respective communities as Armenian women in Canadian society?

In our remembering and retelling, my participants and I discovered and uncovered new knowledge about ourselves. For example, when examining our life histories, we

found that our past experiences provided a solid grounding for (re)establishing personal identities, family traditions, and community involvement. We also realized that oral histories, passed down from generation to generation, bind us to a family and unite us with a community wherein we are able to explore issues of Armenianness. Each of us hears the voices of our parents and grandparents who repeatedly urged us not to forget that we as Armenians were the first to accept Christianity as a nation, that we have our own distinct language, and that we were the unfortunate people who were the first to endure genocide[2] in the 20th century.[3] Razmik Panossian (2002) observes that these dimensions serve as identity markers for Armenians:

> The Genocide itself, and its subsequent denial by Turkish authorities, became the defining moment – the 'founding symbol' – of contemporary Armenian identity. Post-1915 Armenians, especially in the diaspora, saw themselves as 'the first Christian nation' and 'the first victims of genocide in the twentieth century'. (p. 136)

This history of atrocities and of survival is not only a memory of the past. It is also a history that interrupts and implicates the present—a present that is never free of its past, never unburdened (Simon, 2000).

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[2] The word *Genocide* is capitalized when it refers to the Armenian Genocide. Capitalizing the word assigns importance and reverence to the atrocities.

[3] Historical records have shown that in fact it was the Herero and the Namaqua in German South-West Africa who were the first in the 20th century to suffer genocide. When they rebelled against colonial rule over 10,000 people were pushed into the desert between 1904 and 1907 where they died of thirst. It was only in 1985 when this violence was classified as genocide (Gewald, 1999).

Armenians are historicized, that is, we understand and experience our history collectively and in specific and subjective ways. It would be unthinkable, in particular for those who have assumed the responsibility of being educators, to not include the 1915-1918 Armenian Genocide in our narratives. Genocide for us is not "just history"; it is within each of us, inherited "through blood." It is the point in our history when culture, literature, and arts were interrupted, lives were lost, homes perished, homeland appropriated. It is a history that lurks in our language, culture, tradition, and memory. Like secondhand smoke, it is the suffering we breathe in and out.

Hrag Varjabedian (2009), in his research about Armenian Genocide narratives, found that

> the passing down of Genocide narratives, whether explicitly or implicitly through its suppression, has had a direct effect on identity formation. ... [N]arratives of memory and history become a unique process through which individuals perceive and experience themselves in relationship to their larger community. (p. 94)

During my conversations with participants, Genocide was mentioned very early in our discussions even though I had not asked any direct questions to prompt the subject. But when I asked the open-ended question "who is Arminé, or Hermine, or Lori, ...?" for example, all my participants mentioned that Genocide *has* an immense impact on their family history and their personal identification with that history.

How does this inherited history of trauma influence our building of a new life in a multicultural society in Canada? How do we interpret these stories? What moral values do these stories ingrain in us? Margaret Manoogian (2008) points out that stories told by

women in families that are "affected by disruption and loss, exert special significance in maintaining family culture and continuity over time" (p. 143). In her research, Manoogian found that family stories reveal particular family identities such as perseverance and resilience. Do we then draw strength from our collective and family histories or do they burden us?

For me, family history is a source of grounding. I live far away from our ancestral land, but I often find myself traveling to Kessab, Syria[4] in spirit where I find comfort and reassurance that I am not "homeless," and that I have roots in a real and tangible place I call a *fatherland*, especially when my "belonging" is questioned in Canada. Kessab has remained an Armenian region since the ninth-century (Mavian, 1999-2000). The stubbornness of the Kessabtsis to cling on to their land is as stubborn as its rugged terrain. In my moments of ambivalence about my identity, I gaze at a display of tangled roots mounted on a pedestal that I have in my living room. Years ago, my father brought with him these few pieces of root from his beloved laurel tree under which he had spent much of his childhood. The roots are a symbol of my heritage and grounding. But they also are a reminder of my displacement; I am physically deracinated[5] from my fatherland, and when my memories of that landscape eventually fade, my spirit will also be deracinated and thus, I will be permanently uprooted from Kessab.

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[4] Kessab is a rural and mountainous area in Syria (1700m above sea level) located on the Mediterranean coast, bordering with South East Turkey. Kessabtsis are considered to have been the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Cilicia, 1080-1375 (Mavian, 1999-2000). See Appendix B-2 for short historical facts.

[5] I use the word "deracination" when I refer to complete uprootedness, that is when roots are torn up and there is no hope for being rooted again. I address this concept in Chapter 4, pp. 150-154.

I am conditioned and convinced to have faith in my Armenianness and believe that I am resilient and will survive because I have been exposed to jingoistic patriotism, a blinding patriotism, an undisputed loyalty. I have come to understand that that loyalty is an indelible part of my identity. The words of Armenian-American writer/poet, William Saroyan (1948) reassure me:

> The word in Armenian, the brace, the gesture, the smile, and through these things the swift rebirth of the race, timeless and again strong, though years have passed, though cities have been destroyed, fathers and brothers and sons killed, places forgotten, dreams violated, living hearts blackened with hate. . . . I should like to see any power of the world destroy this race, this small tribe of unimportant people, whose wars have all been fought and lost, whose structures have crumbled, literature is unread, music is unheard, and prayers are no more answered. Go ahead, destroy Armenia. See if you can do it. Send them into the desert without bread or water. Burn their homes and churches. Then see if they will not laugh, sing and pray again. For when two of them meet anywhere in the world, see if they will not create a New Armenia. (*The Armenian and the Armenian*, p. 128)

What Saroyan believed is that the Armenian myth is resilient because Armenians trust in their longevity. In the past, prose like the above angered me when I heard it from my grandmother and then later from my father. This mental "monumentalization" of a history and of a people creates an official past that involves not only remembering but also forgetting parts of history that undermine or challenge the official history, such as

personal hardships, internal conflicts and divisions that arise in diverse diasporas (Varjabedian, 2009, p. 49). However, I always tried to listen respectfully and understand that my elders had to pass on their history, their afflicted and inflicted history. To my surprise, here I am repeating all that I dreaded, that is, being engulfed by the collective history. But now, as I write these pages, I must admit that my collective history is part of my identity, part of who I am or conditioned to be: a resilient and a persistent diasporan Armenian woman.

I am intrigued by the notion of persistence in women and I want to discover how family stories and the telling of these stories compose new narratives within which they forge their identities (Manoogian, 2008; Attarian, 2009). I admired intellectual women in my community and wanted to explore the ways in which they honed that characteristic. When I first met Zabel, not only did I aspire to learn from her life experiences, but I also wanted to tell her story to the world in the hope that her narratives could be moments of learning for all who read them. To my relief, I felt the same way about all my participants!

My participants are persistent women who faced life-altering choices and who, in Carolyn Heilbrun's (2002) words, were "brave enough to have made one" (p. 59). They chose the "educational life" that propelled them on an exhilarating journey whereby they refashioned their lives and charted new futures for themselves. With Heilbrun they could announce: "We live our lives through texts. They … come to us like the murmurings of our mothers, telling us what conventions demand. Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us all; they are what we must use to make new fictions, new

narratives" (p. 128). Indeed, my participants found new possibilities and created their own narratives, often by rejecting the discourses or the conventional roles they had inherited and were offered. My participants "accepted life as a work in progress" in learning and renegotiating their roles and assuming new identities (Hayes & Flannery, 2002, p. xv).

Throughout this dissertation, I use personal stories to engage in a dialogical process in order to unravel meanings from my lived stories. In each chapter, I insert journal entries in order to express my thoughts and feelings in a range of writing styles. This is also in an effort to create an open-ended dissertation where interpretations are not always needed.

Herein are synopses of subsequent chapters. In Chapter 2, I discuss two theoretical perspectives: feminist pedagogy in the context of learning/teaching and diaspora issues in relation to identity construction. Post-structural feminist thought provides the background knowledge to examine the life histories of participants and observe the challenges they face and the successes they enjoy in their careers in education. Reviewing complexities of the language of diaspora as a framework provides insight into identifying and articulating the nuances of personal experiences of diasporan Armenian women in Canada. I point out how significant historical events and shared myths, symbols, and ethnopatriotism have become identity markers for diasporic Armenians.

Chapter 3 is about interconnections with participants and engagement with data. I first introduce my participants and then discuss research methodology perspectives. With

examples, I demonstrate that autoethnography, oral history, interviews, group discussions, and reflective/responsive writing are effective methods in life history research when examining narratives from cultural, social, and political perspectives that shape and continue to influence historicized and socialized diasporic situations in Canada. In the last section, I address the assumptions and the limitations of my study.

In Chapter 4, I provide a detailed analysis of data in the context of the dynamics of the Armenian diaspora in Montréal and Toronto. I address topics such as exile, otherness, fragmented identities, (up)rootedness, and deracination. I examine the impact of historicized selves and discuss how feeling burdened by an inherited history of trauma is a source of pride and shame, content and anguish, discoveries and frustrations. And then I explore the concepts of home and the myth of a homeland.

In Chapter 5, I describe participants' educational lives where they faced interruptions but found creative ways to continue their education in Canada. The themes I explore are: education for personal interest, professional growth, and community development.

In Chapters 1, 3, 4, and 5, I insert dialogic engagements and/or journal entries in three voices: autoethnographic voice, participant voice, and observer voice. My journal entries are in italic font so that there is a clear distinction between different voices in my writing.

In Chapter 6, I offer final discussion and remarks. Here I avoid providing conclusive findings but rather offer suggestions that participants discussed as well as my own interpretation of data. I realize that my participants and I do not speak in a single

voice, but we share experiences of burdened selves, fragmented lives, interrupted lives, guilty souls, renegotiated identities, and a ruptured history. Our lives are uprooted but continue to be refashioned in new landscapes; our spirits are displaced but not deracinated from our heritage and language.

Throughout the chapters, I use transliterated Armenian words when appropriate and necessary, especially when their direct translation into English does not accurately convey their meaning or when the same words have varied connotations in the two languages (see Appendix A for a transliteration table).

As an introduction to subsequent chapters, I end this chapter with a poem that speaks to feelings that diasporan Armenian women share:

DIASPORA

I am the tourist
who looks just like
the native girl
who greets me, salt
and bread on her tray.

We have the same eyes,
the same smile and stride
but different tongues
with which to say.

I am the stranger
in my father's land,
the traveler to the country
I can neither leave
nor stay,
a foreigner in the place,
where millenniums ago
my kind was bred.

I am no one

without these trees, these stones
and streets. But their shadows
have grown short and tall without my weight.

I am the tourist
from far away
where I left the tables of plenty
thirsty and unfed.

(Diana Der-Hovanessian, 1994, p. 11)

CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXT, FRAME, AND TEXT – PERSPECTIVES ON NARRATIVE INTERPRETATIONS

In this life history research, I examined the everyday lives of diasporan Armenian women with a focus on finding meaning not only in their narratives but also in the ways in which they recalled and reconstructed their stories within group discussions and in their autoethnographic writing. I navigated through my research data using a feminist approach believing that "women can reflexively construct their own identities through processes of self-narration" (Chappell, et al., 2003, p. 47). While unraveling participants' narratives, the questions driving my analysis were: 1) How do Armenian women negotiate their identities in their respective communities, in particular, in academe? 2) How does personal and collective history influence identity construction?

Anna De Fina (2003) points out that "by analyzing narratives we analyze not only individual stories and experiences, but also collective social representations and ideologies" (p. 7). Our stories are indisputably written with and within the social discourses they stem from, the context in which they are composed, and the conditions of when and where they are remembered and forgotten. It was in this light that I examined the spaces my participants spoke from and about, the communities they represented, the ideologies they promoted, and the silences they protected.

In the following section, I discuss theoretical frameworks that can help elucidate the complexity of Armenian women's narratives—their learning, their being, and their telling. The two general themes that emerged from this research are: education for change and the diaspora conditions. I therefore review concepts of feminist pedagogy in

the context of learning and teaching, as well as diaspora issues in relation to the construction of personal and collective identities.

Lived stories are unique to individuals and therefore are a rich source of text that when reflected upon, provide a valuable source of knowledge that guides us in paving new learning paths. In this study, my particular interest was in the personal stories of formal learning in higher education and experiences in working/volunteering in Armenian communities in Montréal and Toronto. I was not only interested in participants' stories of learning but also how these narratives articulated their educational lives. Feminist educators offer insight as to how to conduct feminist research (Heilbrun, 1979; hooks, 2000; J. I. Miller, 2005; Neilson, 1998; Weiler, 1988; 2001). Their work provides the background knowledge to explore life histories of seven women for the purpose of identifying the intricacies of Armenian diasporan life in Canada while uncovering what was ignored, articulating what was silenced, and echoing what was told before (see Chapter 3). Lorri Neilsen (1998) argues that women's work is "to continually make explicit all the silences, the voices, the differences, and the shared assumptions" (p. 272). She insists that we learn through our words, our actions, and the retelling of our daily life. Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (1993) encourage women to "unmake the web of oppression and reweave the web of life" (p. 4). Kathleen Weiler (1988) suggests that by exposing the everyday lives of women, feminist scholarship informs social realities that were neglected or overlooked "in studies of public life" (p. 62). Barbara DuBois (1983) reminds us that "feminist scholars are engaged in . . . discovering and uncovering the

actual facts of women's lives and experiences, facts that have been hidden, inaccessible, suppressed, distorted, misunderstood, ignored" (p. 109).

Discussions in my interviews and group sessions centered around challenging situations in the Armenian school systems in Montréal and Toronto; therefore, I examined life history research of educators who had set precedents in feminist research. For example, Kathleen Wheiler's (1998) work, *Country schoolwomen: Teaching in rural California, 1850-1950*, examines how women composed and narrated their lives; Elisabeth Hayes and Daniele Flannery's (2002), *Women as learners: The significance of gender in adult learning*, emphasizes the importance of examining women's learning in the context of their socio-political and economic spaces they occupy in their respective communities; Bronwyn Davies and Susanne Gannon's (2006), *Doing collective biography*, illustrates the effectiveness of embodied writing in their memory-work with women (I cite the above mentioned works where appropriate in Chapters 3 and 5). I took advice from the work of Janet Miller (2005) and thus tried to break some of the "unnatural silences" (p. 6) by "critiquing institutional and social-cultural spaces that would . . . delimit, normalize or devalue ourselves and our practices" (p. 63). I remain convinced that when women share their experiences, their lived stories serve as learning models for paving new learning paths and for forging new identities (Bateson, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). Hourig Attarian (2009), in her *Lifelines: Matrilineal narratives, memory and identity*, writes: "The re/membering carries with it not only a sense of recreating the past but also, consciously and unconsciously, creating a new past in the present" (p. 31). It was in these moments of remembering and reconstructing our

past experiences that my participants and I understood, or thought that we understood, our private and public positions in our respective communities (see Chapter 4). These were also moments of renegotiating our identities as learners and teachers (see Chapter 5).

Feminist Pedagogy

Feminist pedagogy challenges dominant teaching practices and values the perspective of diverse learners. Weiler (2001) writes:

> Feminist pedagogy emphasizes the importance of consciousness raising, the existence of an oppressive social structure and the need to change it, and the possibility of social transformation. . . . What distinguishes feminist pedagogy . . . is its attempts to develop an education appropriate for women. (p. 68)

However, internal and external forces that guide or promote learning are different for each individual. Elizabeth Tisdell (2002) asserts that feminist pedagogy is about women's stories but that "critical reflection on [stories] and the context of the experience are often what promote learning and change" (p. 183). Accordingly, I reflect on the narratives and, in my capacity, respond to them with a non-judgmental attitude whenever possible; however, as an insider and participant, all that I could do is to be aware of and be sensitive in my subjective interpretations (see Chapter 3).

Not only are there differences within the political strata of feminism but also within its philosophies. Structural feminists tend to focus on the social structure of oppression such as race, class, and sexuality, while overlooking individual differences, uniqueness of situation, and political/religious beliefs (Tisdell, 1998). Poststructural feminists, on the

other hand, "deconstruct the category woman" and insist that the positionality—personal experience and epistemology—of women, create a different kind of feminist discourse which is subject to constant change and shifting identities (Tisdell, 1998, p. 144). Poststructural feminism views women as both diverse and unique beings whose personal experiences are not only valued but are considered the source of their ways of knowing (Belenky, et al., 1997). This knowledge is not a mere production of personal narratives but "account[s] for competing subjective realities" that engender various discourses and power relations (Weedon, 1997, p. 8). The feminist poststructural approach offers a useful theoretical framework for my research to help understand "mechanisms of power in our society," that is, power imbalance between genders, communities, and institutions (Weedon, 1997, p. 10). For example, immigrant women are exposed to socio-economic forces, patriarchal oppression, class elitism, ethnic marginalization, and institutional discrimination. Feminist poststructuralism explains the fluid and shifting relations between the personal and the social, between subordination and power, between language and culture, between gender and class, between subjectivity and objectivity.

Poststructural feminism speaks to situations imposed upon immigrant women, who often endure discriminations based on their gender, class, and race. Therefore, to survive hardships, immigrant women adopt new ways of thinking, observing, learning, performing, struggling, changing, and being. Women improvise and adapt while struggling to make sense of their interrupted and displaced lives.

Tisdell (1998) states that "feminist resistance is concerned about and uses education to work for social change for women and other marginalized groups" (p. 143).

Poststructural feminist educators aim to create learning spaces for all women. They acknowledge differences and introduce diversity in their curricula, recognize power relations between and within genders in their classrooms, and thus do not overlook the "competing discourses" in their diverse student population (black, white, white immigrant, minority immigrant, gay and lesbian, working class or otherwise) (Weiler, 2001, p. 67). Poststructural feminist educators respect all voices and acknowledge "the danger of . . . speaking for silent others who have been historically forbidden to speak or whose speech has been unheard or discounted" (p. 73). Poststructural feminist education theory continues to give voice to women in order to recognize and articulate their life experiences (Neilsen, 1998).

Lisa Delpit (2006) suggests that "we see the world as others see it," that is, "learning to interpret across cultures reflecting on our own experiences [and] analyzing our own culture" (p. 151). Not only do I acknowledge differences between cultures but I am also aware of differences within ethnic groups as well as the uniqueness of each individual. In Delpit's words, I continue to allow myself "to be affected by these alternative voices" from diverse locales and perspectives (p. 46). My listening is "a very special kind of listening, listening that requires not only open eyes and ears, but open hearts and minds" (Delpit, 2006, p. 46). Furthermore, DuBois (1983) urges researchers to "first, quite literally, learn to *see*. To see what is *there*; not what we've been taught is there, not even what we might wish to find, but what is. We literally *cannot see women* through traditional science and theory" (pp. 109-110). DuBois suggests that this seeing is not only an individual's task but also "a communal" activity (p. 110). As identity

construction occurs within a social context, I now turn to theoretical literature that helps me in the "seeing" and in the understanding of my participants' narratives.

Voices of the Collective: Armenians in Diaspora

In the following pages, I review published academic peer reviewed works written by Armenians and about Armenians in North America in order to establish a framework through which to understand participants' experiences and upon which I build my arguments concerning identities of diasporan Armenians (Kaprielian-Churchill, 2005; Panossian, 2006; Shirinian, 2000; Tölölyan, 2007). The general question I address is: Who is the diasporan Armenian woman?

Diasporan Identity Markers

Literature on the Armenian diaspora expands my understanding of the multilayered issues of diaspora as a constructed entity, an entity that is subjective and political, local and global, dynamic and shifting. There is a paucity of life histories of Armenian women, but the few in circulation pave the way for exploring this terrain. Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill (2005), an Armenian-Canadian social historian, provides extensive information about Armenian communities in her *Mountains: A history of Armenians in Canada*, in which she documents history rather than life histories of individuals. Kaprielian-Churchill writes about Armenian women's involvement in community building such as teaching in Armenian schools, organizing intellectual events, fundraising, and social gatherings. Kaprielian-Churchill addresses four major themes in relation to the identity of Armenians in Canada: ethnopatriotism, ethnoversion, the

Armenian Genocide, and commitment to Canada. *Ethnopatriotism* refers to Armenians' sentiment about and loyalties to the motherland (Republic of Armenia) or lost territories in present day Turkey.[1] She points out that "one of the principle characteristics of the Armenians in Canada has been their attachment to the homeland . . . [as] a consistent and enduring force, regardless of political or religious affiliation" (p. 416). In turn, Aida Boudjikanian (1995) observes:

> Armenia is in need of the diaspora, and the diaspora is certainly being changed by an [independent] Armenia. Structural changes are occurring in the diaspora where new commercial, medical, academic, and even political associations are appearing. . . . This redirection is perhaps to rebuild large parts of Armenia . . . and in part motivated by a desire to help the homeland progress. (p. 164)

Armenians are almost always responsive to the humanitarian needs of their "homeland(s)", as was the case when a major earthquake struck Armenia in 1988, during the civil war in Lebanon, conflicts in Karabagh, and now as a result of the violence against Christians in Syria (Tölölyan, 2007).

Ethnoversion is the desire to retain an ethnic identity within the larger Canadian society. This diasporan mentality among Armenians stems from the "powerful desire not to lose their language, religion, culture, and history" (Kaprielian-Churchill, 2005, p. 479). A great deal of effort goes into running Saturday programs as well as all-day schools

[1] More than two-thirds of Historic Armenia was lost to the Ottoman Empire, the rest came under the Persian and Russian empires. Armenia gained its full independence in 1991 (Adalian, 2002).

where teaching Armenian language and history is of utmost importance. These private schools are fully funded by the local Armenian communities.

The theme of *commitment to Canada* raises the issue of multiple loyalties and civic and private identities. However, Kaprielian-Churchill (2005) found that "transformations and reinventions inevitably occurred. . . . As a diaspora, the Armenian community . . . was built on the foundations of the old-country world, moulded in the Canadian milieu and maintained for over one hundred years" (p. 481).

Kaprielian-Churchill (2005) asserts that "one cannot understand Armenians outside the scope of the *Armenian genocide* and its enduring legacy" as collective memory of trauma shapes the identity of the community (p. 479). Tragic events during WWI united various generations of immigrants as the "genocide experience wrapped survivors in a shroud of fatalism and defeatism" (p. 454). Therefore, struggling to rise above this "genocide complex" compels us to reinvent ourselves and to restructure our community (p. 456).

Interpretation of history is an essential part of formulating one's identity. Often major events disturb both personal and collective identity construction and thus the process of reformulation begins. Landscape markers are also points of references for a collective Armenian identity. For example, Mount Ararat is where Noah's Ark landed according to the Bible and therefore the myth is that human civilization began at the base of Ararat: in historic Armenia (Baliozian, 1975).

Razmik Panossian (2002) identifies three contributing factors to the (re)creation and maintenance of national identity: 1) "The myths and symbols of the nation, including

invented traditions" such as its history and traditions; 2) "people's imagination of themselves as part of the same national community" when, for example, a tragedy unites them; 3) "structural realities which impact ideological processes," such as cherishing a distinct language (pp. 123-124). One of the significant markers of Armenian identity is the legend of Armenia becoming the first Christian nation in 301-315. Panossian states that before the 1915 Genocide, "[Christianity] was the cornerstone of what it meant to be Armenian: a member of St Gregory's church" (p. 126).

Invention of a unique Armenian alphabet by the monk Mesrop Mashtots in 405 AD, at the threshold of the "Golden Era" of Armenian literature, contributed to the upholding of a distinct identity. Margaret Bedrossian (1991), in her interpretation of the Armenian poet Siamanto's (1878-1915) "The Glory of Invention," writes: "Like a massive rock, the language receives and empowers the meanings that cascade through the millennia":

> You, who with vision, invention and ardor,
> freed the Armenian offspring
> from the clever Greeks and
> fire-worshiping Persians.
> And from the world-conquering Romans.
> You kept them intact with the ruby
> cornerstone of your language.
> Mesrob! You stand an unshatterable
> diamond rock against time,
> against the Armenian centuries. (p. 13)

Finally, the Genocide fundamentally shaped the twentieth-century identity of Armenians. These three events, becoming the first Christian nation, the development of a unique alphabet, and the Genocide, reinforce the distinct national identity of Armenians.

Genocide as Identity Marker

The theme of Genocide, in particular, is prevalent in the writing of North American diasporan authors. Margaret Manoogian (2008) and her colleagues, Leslie Richards and Alexis Walker have conducted exploratory research and interviewed 30 mature Armenian-American women within two generations of immigration who live in California. Manoogian et al. collected family stories that reveal how "families are influenced by historical events, even when they occur in prior generations," and that "stories of loss and survival are shaped for subsequent generations" (pp. 147, 162). The authors found that some family stories of survival illustrate "strong themes of unity, strength, and endurance" while other stories were narrated "to bolster family morale and encourage ethnic pride when faced with discrimination" (p. 146). Furthermore, they observed that "the women expressed cultural generativity in particular as they sought to preserve and pass on cultural symbols to family members" (p. 163). Manoogian et al. conclude that their study "highlights the importance of family stories as vehicles to understanding how families maintain continuity and change over time and understand family identity and culture" (p. 163) and that "family stories allowed for children and grandchildren to experience symbolic ethnicity" (p. 162).

Armenianness is not experienced in the same way by second- or third-generation Armenians in Canada. A first generation immigrant carries with her or him an ethnic identity that is not always shared by or desirable to second and third generations. Anny Bakalian (1994) observes that for "later-generation descendants, Armenianness becomes voluntary, conscious, rationalistic, segmental, transitory, sporadic, that is, symbolic" (p. 431). For example, my children who are second-generation immigrants identify themselves as Canadian-Armenians whereas I identify myself as Armenian-Canadian. For them, the immigrant experience is inherited rather than first hand; therefore their Armenian ethnicity is often a symbolic one. Lorne Shirinian (2000), whose father arrived in Canada in the early 1920s[2], describes his ambivalence:

> I have lived with the weight of an ancient tradition in a new land. At times this has been a blessing of riches; at other times, it has felt like an unbearable burden. . . . Growing up, I was never able to forget that I was the product of two heritages: Armenian and Canadian. . . . I had drifted into some nether zone that appeared to exist between two cultures, not belonging to one or the other. It was not a comfortable place. (pp. i, ii)

Like Shirinian, I feel the "burden" of an inherited history that is fraught with struggles, suffering, and survival. A burden because it is a second-hand experience, one that my grandparents entrusted me with, urging me to never forget. I must not forget their history,

[2] Shirinian's father was one of the one hundred Armenian orphan boys sponsored jointly by the Canadian government and the small Armenian community in Ontario between 1923 and 1929 (Kurdian, 1998). Thirty-nine young girls were also sponsored and most were placed as domestic maids (Aghjayan, 2013).

a history of loss and suffering in politically difficult climates. I must not forget The Past—a past that is distant from my own, yet present in its inherited memories. I am not able to fully embrace this history nor am I able to ignore it; and therefore, it lurks and it pains (see Chapter 4).

I am, at minimum, a fourth-generation diasporan Armenian. This deduction is based on my family's oral history and a documented family tree. My ancestors lived in the very south of Western Armenia (also known as Cilicia and Historic Armenia. See p. ix-xiii for maps) and not in Eastern Armenia, which became an independent republic in 1991. Eastern Armenia fell under Russian domination in 1828 and then became part of the Soviet Union in 1920. Historic Armenia had lost its western regions to the Ottoman Empire in the 1400s (see Appendix B-1 for a time-line history of Armenians). In the late 1800s, the Young Turks regime emerged within the declining Ottoman Empire, and devised and initiated a systematic plan for "ethnoreligious homogenization of Anatolia [also referred to as the Ottoman Empire and Asia Minor]" (Akçam, 2012, p. 29). Taner Akçam (2012), a German-Turkish historian, explains:

> The primary goal of this project . . . was a conscious reshaping of the region's demographic character on the basis of its Muslim Turkish population. The two main pillars of the policy . . . were as follows: the first entailed the 'cleansing' of Anatolia's non-Muslim (which basically meant Christian) population . . .; the second was the assimilation (Turkification) of all of Anatolia's non-Turkish Muslim communities. (p. 29)

Recently, Akçam discovered official documents dated 15 November 1913 illustrating the systematic plan to annihilate the Armenians from Anatolia. He explains:

> One of the main considerations of the government's population and settlement policy was to ensure that the number of people of any group being resettled in a given area not exceed 5 to 10 percent of the total population (p. 48).
>
> In some western provinces the Armenians were redistributed within the same province so as not to exceed 5 percent of the population. As for the Armenians who were to be resettled in the Syrian and Iraqi deserts, strict orders were given to distribute Armenian arrivals among the Muslims so as not to exceed 10 percent of the population. This regulation can be taken as a clear sign of the genocidal policy of the Ottoman authorities. (pp. 49-50)

The tragic consequences of the "5 to 10 percent policy" were starvation and massacre when Armenians were forced to march deeper into the deserts and where their presence became almost 100 percent—a painful historic reality (see map on p. xii). According to Akçam, 1.8 million Armenians lived in the Ottoman Empire, of whom 1.3 perished from 1915 to 1922 (pp. 258-263). Genocide survivors found refuge in neighbouring countries in the Middle East and small numbers emigrated to European, Asian, and North and South American countries.

Western and Eastern Armenians

In the last ninety years, Armenians have dispersed throughout the world. According to the 2006 Census of Canada 50,500 Armenians who have emigrated from

Middle Eastern countries such as Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria live in Canada.[3] These are Armenians who have lived in the western provinces of Historic Armenia in Asia Minor, hence the identification as *Western Armenians* (Adalian, 2002). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, an increasing number of Armenians have emigrated from Armenia who, in the Armenian communities, are referred to as *Eastern Armenians*.[4] This distinction between East and West is only a reference to geography and language variation[5]; it is definitely not a reference to class or civilization. Armenians who have emigrated from Western Armenian diasporas share a history of trauma under Ottoman rule. A majority of Eastern Armenians share a history of hardships under the communist Soviet regime. Therefore, the migration experience is quite different between the two groups: Western Armenians are diasporans who have lived in various host countries, but Eastern Armenians are trans-national migrants, as they emigrated from their homeland to a hostland voluntarily, albeit compelled by economic hardships in Armenia, for personal reasons such as joining family members abroad, or by the pull of Western socio-political freedoms. Tölölyan (2007) expands on the diaspora condition:

> "diaspora" denote[s] the melancholy situation of a dispersed, dislocated, uprooted minority that live[s] in an enclave hierarchically encapsulated within the large host

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[3] According to the 2006 Census of Canada, 21,765 Armenians live in Québec, 23,685 in Ontario (16,310 in Toronto), 1,915 in British Columbia.

[4] Armenians who live in Persia/Iran and India, Burma, East Indies are also considered Eastern Armenians because they too speak Eastern Armenian, but they do not share the same history as Armenians in Armenia.

[5] Variations between Eastern and Western Armenian languages lies in the conjugation of verbs, spelling of certain words, pronunciation of certain letters, and borrowed words whether from Turkish, Arabic, Russian, or other languages. I further discuss this topic in the pages below and in Chapter 4.

> society or state. . . . Within many states, members of diasporas . . . were viewed both by others and by themselves as marginalized remnants of a nation that was, a nation to be, or a nation elsewhere, linked by nostalgia to an old homeland or, in the absence of a homeland, to some territory or region. Sustained by shared language, memory, religion, rituals and institutionalized practices, struggling to maintain and to reproduce their social formation and collective identity under the threat of anything from massacre to assimilation. (p. 217)

The above definition describes Western Armenian migrants who have mobilized in their hostland and formed a collective identity rooted in a shared history and language; they have created a diaspora. Diasporan Armenians are nostalgia-ridden for a homeland that is lost or impossible to return to. To comfort their homesickness, they maintain a link with an actual or an imaginary landscape they call *homeland, fatherland,* or *motherland* (see Chapter 4).

My history locates me with those who share my diaspora and consequently excludes me from those who do not. What I mean is that because Eastern Armenians have lived primarily under Russian rule and Western Armenians under Ottoman rule, and subsequently emigrated from different diasporas, they do not share collectively a common history since the Byzantine invasions in 1045 AD and in particular since WWI. Therefore, some Armenians do not identify with my experiences, and thus their historical past does not affect them with a similar intensity.

It is estimated that there are established Armenian diasporas in over 50 countries and more Armenians live in diasporas than in Armenia (Panossian, 2003). Each

community can be identified as unique to its locale and the time period it was established. For example, Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill (2005) found that over the past 100 years, "different cohorts of Armenians had settled in different parts of Canada at different times" and therefore those who settled in St. Catharines in 1925 and those in Montréal and Toronto in the 1980s are different communities who "created their own new world with their own dynamism" (p. xxv). But at the same time, all three communities can claim a shared history and language. Furthermore, each cohort is divided into communities by country of birth, by political stance, by religious denomination, and by socioeconomic status (Bakalian, 1994). Boudjikanian (1995) observes that "a rather dynamic spatial/relational system has emerged among [Armenian diasporas] due to changes both in the global system as well as in the Armenians' own 'inner world'" (p. 154). Within each community, individuals think differently about their Armenianness, but this Armenianness is also "sustained by a . . . shared history and a sense of peoplehood with Armenians around the world" (Bakalian, 1994, p. 8).

Even though I have lived in Canada for most of my adult life, I continue to think of myself as an Armenian-Canadian, which means that my loyalty is divided and I fit neither here nor there, neither fully within the Armenian nor within the mainstream community. In fact, not being of British descent, I have become "*ethnic*" (Shirinian, 2000). Yet another ambivalent state of being! Shirinian commiserates:

> Many Armenian friends of my generation in both Canada and America had come to occupy this [ethnic] site, moving back and forth across borders from community to community.

> It became clear that for us, things were rarely simple and one-dimensional. . . . Our parents were Armenians who struggled to make a life in North America. Because of their tragic past, survival in all its dimensions was their guiding principle. However, we did not entirely share their past. (p. ii)

Since the 1980s, Armenian scholars have been debating the diasporic nature of the lives of Armenians in North America. Shirinian insists that out of necessity the Armenian diaspora is in flux and continues to accommodate its local, national, and global needs, because "individuals live their diasporas differently, and all Armenian communities are not alike. Nevertheless, there are commonalities that allow the researcher to speak of the diaspora and its communities as a collective" (p. iv). This collective is bound together by a tragic history, a history that both disrupts and sustains its existence (Panossian, 2006).

The Language of Diaspora

> *I am here*
> *on this white map discoloured*
> *by images dripping*
> *out of memory.*
> *But whispers still come*
> *out of the cracking ice and peeling shore*
> *behind the white eyes staring neutrally*
> *and the taut throats swallowing suspicion*
> *of my language.*
> (Garebian, 2000, p. 81)

For Armenians, diaspora could refer to a geographical place, an ethno-religious community, a political space, a condition of exile, a state of displacement, a set of identities, or simply a worldview. Diaspora could refer to any Armenian community outside the Republic of Armenia (large numbers of settlements were organized

throughout the world, in particular after the Genocide of Armenians from Anatolia). Finally, diaspora could refer to the political mindset of Armenians outside the Republic of Armenia.

Linguistically, "diasporan Armenian" refers to the Western Armenian language. Armenians living in Armenia, Iran, and India speak Eastern Armenian and those living in Turkey, the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas speak Western Armenian. The differences between the two are spelling (Traditional Messrobian and modern Apeghian), conjugation of verbs (placing a suffix in front or at the end of verbs), and borrowing common local vocabulary from Turkish and Arabic instead of Russian or other languages such as Farsi or Urdu. Literature and newspapers are published in both forms of the language and both are circulated in all communities.

Expressions such as diaspora (*սփիւռք*), diasporan Armenian (*սփիւռքահայ*), diaspora condition (*սփիւռքավիճակ*), and Western Armenian (*արեւմտահայ*) have been in my vocabulary for as long as I can remember. These expressions reveal my birth place and define my identity as an outsider to Armenia proper and a foreigner in a hostland, therefore locating me in a state of displacement. I am physically detached from a motherland and emotionally forever out of place. This feeling of belonging neither here nor there, often gives rise to insecurities and identity crises. Judith Shuval (2007) observes that people who "feel displaced" and "who maintain, revive or invent a connection with a prior home," use the language of diaspora because "the sense of being a 'people with historic roots' outside the time/space of a host nation, provides a sense of power and legitimacy to claims of oppression or disadvantage" (p. 35). Hence, seeking to

understand diaspora-related issues becomes important as this understanding may provide a sense of comfort, a sense of belonging, and a sense of identity.

Khachig Tölölyan (1996), a diasporan Armenian and founder of *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, after surveying the definitions of the word diaspora and exploring its historic uses, concludes:

> A diaspora is never merely an accident of birth, a clump of individuals living outside their ancestral homeland, each with a hybrid subjectivity, lacking collective practices that underscore (not just) their differences from others, but also their similarity to each other, and their links to the people on the homeland. . . . [D]iasporic individuals must not only have identities that differ from those prescribed by the dominant hostland cultures, but also diaspora-specific social identities that are constructed through interaction with the norms, values, discourses and practices of that diaspora's communal institutions, honouring some and transgressing others. (pp. 29-30)

In accord with the observation above, the Armenian diaspora is part of Canada's multicultural mosaic. There are established communities in almost all provinces that actively promote their ethnic distinction. Each community has at least one Armenian church and a Saturday language and heritage school where the emphasis is preservation of all things Armenian, including fostering ties with other Armenian communities in the diaspora as well as with the Republic of Armenia.

In 1986, Gabriel Sheffer looked at the term "diaspora" from a theoretical perspective when he was writing about the Jewish diaspora. His comparative study

included Armenians, Chinese, Indians, Palestinians, and a few others. Sheffer (1986) offered the following definition: "Modern diasporas are ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin—their homelands" (p. 3). Elaborating on this statement, Razmik Panossian (1998) illustrates a number of characteristics of the Armenian diaspora:

- The reason for leaving ancestral lands—or for leaving one diaspora location for another—is not limited to coercion;
- An emotional . . . and/or a more tangible, more material link is maintained with the homeland, as well as with other [diasporas] throughout the world;
- A diasporic identity is not merely an extension of the homeland. It is, rather (consciously or not), created. . . . The diaspora entity is constructed through the work of intellectuals and organizations;
- A certain amount of communal solidarity is preserved . . . often leading to hybrid identities and dual (political-cultural) loyalties;
- Diasporas have a *cause* to pursue outside . . . the politics of the host country . . . that relates to their *nation*, be it in the *homeland* or elsewhere, and the community mobilizes around it in varying degrees;
- The subjective nature of diaspora identity . . . makes the diaspora community conscious of its existence *as a diaspora* and not merely an ethnic minority group. Furthermore, it acts as the basis of the feeling of connectedness—be it

> real or *imagined*—between diverse parts of the diaspora and between it and the homeland, however defined. (p. 151)

With this explanation, Panossian also demonstrates the complexity of diaspora as concept, but at the same time, he formulates the notion that diaspora as a political and social space affords us the comfort of belonging to a collective identity—an identity that strengthens our personal and collective commitments to both hostland and homeland.

As Armenians relocate for socio-economic reasons or are again forced to uproot from war-torn regions, the radius of dispersion widens and thus the feeling of displacement changes. As settlement takes root in host countries, attachment to the motherland (*Մայր Հայաստան*, Armenia is referred to as Mother Armenia) often weakens; thus, Armenia as "homeland" becomes elusive and problematic.

While refashioning new lives in new hostlands, maintaining an Armenian identity becomes a subjective feat. Panossian (2006) explains that in this process of forging new identities, a hybrid identity emerges in the diaspora and therefore

> the homeland can alternately refer to, or simultaneously be, the *host*-land (the country in which he or she lives), the home-*land* (the ancestral village), the homeland (the current independent republic), or the diaspora condition itself as *home*-land (the idea of cosmopolitan living). (p. 6)

To illustrate, in my consciousness, the physical return to a homeland is non-existent, for I am a diasporan. Kessab in Syria, the birthplace of my grandparents, is more homeland to me than Armenia (see map on p. ix; see Appendix B-2 for a historical overview). Kessab

is my fatherland (Հայրենիք); though I have only been there on three occasions and for very short periods of time. Surprisingly, I feel no connections to the country of my birth (Lebanon), even though I was an active member in that community and lived there the first 25 years of my life. At the same time, I am quite distanced from Armenia, which I have only visited for seven days in 2011. I have spent the past 37 years in Canada wondering where my homeland is. Armenia is my motherland; Kessab is the land of my near past ancestors; Beirut is my birthplace; Canada is where I feel at home. The possibilities are multiple. Regardless of my ambivalence, what I am certain about is that I share a history, a language, and a culture with fellow Armenians and together we strive to maintain our Armenianness in our individual as well as collective ways, an Armenianness that is subjectively refashioned as it evolves with each generation and in each community.

Thankfully, I am not alone in my struggles with the complexities of the diasporan Armenian identity and therefore, I find solace in the experiences of my fellow diasporans. Like Garebian, nostalgia takes over my pen when images of the "elsewhere" flood my memory and the taunting whispers do not stop: I have a colourful language that I live in, a resilient language that survives on Canada's "white" map (see the poem cited as an epigraph to this section).

I will end this section with a journal entry in the form of an annotation that I wrote on the plane coming back from Armenia. I hope that the section below will be a segue to my sentiments and thoughts for the subsequent chapters in this dissertation. In the foreword to the book, *For the House of Torkom*, the author, Hmayyag Shems (1936-1952), is described as a diasporan born in Trabzond (a coastal town on the Black Sea,

Northern Turkey) who believes in the unwavering strength of the Armenian culture that stems from the ongoing struggle for survival of Armenians in diaspora. Shems was "an expatriate, a lone émigré in search of Mt. Ararat and its shade, a man seeking the heart in others, a dreamer who longed to create the song of the heart" (1999, p. 5).

An Annotation

Reflective Journal Entry, September 2011

(All italicized portions are my responses to the quotations I have cited)

The autoethnographer voice: *It was quite odd that I took For The House of Torkom to Armenia with me to read. I never take borrowed books when I go on vacations in case I lose them or the books will not make it back to the library if I don't come back alive. But this time, I decided to take Shems' (1999) book with me to Armenia because it was lightweight and bilingual (Armenian and English). I needed to brush up on my reading Armenian as I had not read an Armenian book for a while. Perhaps also, I had an intuition that I needed moral support from diasporans who have visited Armenia before me and who have experienced delight or unease, or a certain void that needed to be articulated on paper.*

Alien

I realize, still I realize, these are my hands, my feet obey me.

Why, then, this estrangement?

In familiar streets, in plain view, old acquaintances gaze at me in astonishment. Even in my own house I find I am a stranger.

Why don't they recognize me? Am I not one of them?

I call out to myself. I summon me. . . .

With a bittersweet rapture I have readily kindled my heart's flames for all who have encountered me.

Why, then, this icy anonymity, this estrangement? (p. 9)

On the streets of Armenia, I was the stranger. I received not even a soft smile or a welcoming nod acknowledging my presence. In Toronto, when we hear someone speak Armenian on the street, we turn around and start a conversation. In Armenia, I was just another tourist, a potential customer, a potential victim of a casualty of a broken heart in the land of her dreams. I did not find my fellow Armenians who struggle to keep their language, their culture. There is no fear of losing language on that land. Everyone around me speaks the language. There is no fear of losing culture as on each hill stands a church, a monastery, a monument, or a statue honouring a saint, a hero, a martyr. The city centre houses museums, art galleries, artists' gardens, public and private universities, a literature gallery, a modern sports centre, and a manuscript gallery that displays the world's oldest scripts and maps. Armenia is where centuries merge and modernity leaves its damaging marks: construction is everywhere, often with little regard to heritage architecture. People appear thirsty for all that is new and modern. The ancient and the new stand next to each other, estranged. It was unreal for me to experience a place where everything is Armenian yet so alien, so very foreign.

But wait! What anguished voice whispers to me from beyond this black abyss? Listen. "Here I am. Here I am. . . .Wander through familiar streets like a stranger and don't let that bother you," it whispers to me. "In your own

home remain unknown. Don't let them recognize you. Like me, remain the smiling child of the streets . . ."

Oh, I am ill, I am dangerously ill. I ask those around me to save me a place for I am one of them as well—earthly, burgeoning with joy. Vibrant. (p. 9)

At Khor Virab Monastery, I stood over the abyss where, according to the legend scripted on a modern wall mounting, St. Krikor Loussavoritch was imprisoned in that dungeon for seven years because he stood firm in his belief in Christ. I heard the howling of my ancestors, the chanting of the monks. I felt their spirits joined at the foot of Mount Ararat, in this majestically crafted church of ancient times. And then, a sudden wind cleared the grey skies and Mount Ararat stood high inviting its admirers to get a glimpse at its magnificence.

Don't believe those are your hands. Don't believe that your feet obey you. Dear to us you may be, you are nothing but a ghost, a mere trace of memory who mockingly reminds us how fragile even the base of monuments can be. We sense you like a flash of lightning on the horizon, a chance fragrance from afar [from diaspora].

Yet if you want us to acknowledge you, stop wandering aimlessly, stop smiling benignly like such a child. Get going! Strike your feet on the ground, firmly. We will recognize you by the sound of your steps. Start walking! We want to be able to hear you. Start walking! We want to know who you are. (pp. 9-11)

I felt invisible on the streets of Yerevan. But I had to be there. I had to feel the earth under my feet. I had to smell the air that blows mist from the mountains. I had to drink the water from the fountains in Liberty Square. I had to stand in the crowds to celebrate Independence Day.

I must walk. My fingers should do the walking on these pages. I must raise my voice and demand my rights: right to feel at home on the streets of Yerevan. But wait, I live on another continent.

> Cast onto foreign streets far from home . . . a voice, the voice of ancestral wisdom, echoed gently in my ear: "Arise! Armens never die merely for the sake of dying. They die artfully and for all eternity."
>
> Ah, immortal Armenia . . .
>
> And suddenly, in that same moment, I could feel the pounding of the ages under my feet. I knew I was not just one Armen with the ability to die, eternity stirred in my slumbering veins (p. 13). Armens are not fearful people. . . . Did they not dash themselves on the rocks of time, all the while smiling in defiance? Did they not germinate the fields of the future with their own bodies? (p. 15)

Survivor orphans rebuilt the Western Armens. At a cost, the cost of being aliens to their homeland.

> Awake from the deathlike slumber now permeating the vast wilderness. Stand up strong and victorious! . . . Learn to embrace the virtues they experience in the lands of their wanderings, bring them back to their own homeland and nurture them there, and, most important, [do] not stop believing that the present is always

> full of wisdom for those who seek it. . . . The Armens have not yet come to realize that pettiness does not suit them. I cannot tolerate small souls, I demand nothing less than greatness. (pp. 15, 17)

I did not see greatness in the people of Yerevan. I witnessed a thirst for materialism and globalization. I heard whining and complaining. I listened to mocking and criticizing of institutions and authorities. Am I not doing the same by being critical of my Armenia in these pages just now? But don't we need the Dervish, as Shems says, to keep us watchful?

> Think of it. Were it not for the dervish, who else would come to cleanse us with the assuaging waters of the ephemeral and futile, dousing our rage? . . . He after all, epitomizes absolute scorn; he is the passive rebel against unfettered poverty and injustice (p. 35). We shall always need the dervish. Who else will mock the ever-spreading penury and hypocrisy around us? Who else will teach us to be contemptuous and then move on? Who else will awaken the eternal echo in our slumbering souls? (p. 37)

The echo is: "Do not forget, you're Armenian," as I have heard my grandmother say. "Good or bad, Armenia is ours. Eastern or Western, we are the descendents of one family," my father repeatedly had said. I wonder if he meant Noah's family in the biblical days?

CHAPTER THREE: LIFE HISTORY RESEARCH WITH A GROUP OF SEVEN

> *I wish to suggest new ways of writing the lives of women, as biographers, autobiographers, or, in the anticipation of living new lives, as the women themselves.* (Carolyn Heilbrun, 2002, p. 18)[1]

This chapter is about my dialogic interconnections with theories, practices, participants, peers, visual images, and landscapes. Here I narrate the process of researching in multiple voices. I am the researcher, the participant, and the observer. Research data and analysis is embedded throughout this chapter. I illustrate various writing styles: I insert autoethnographies, reflective journal entries, interview dialogues, and responsive journaling where appropriate.

I carried out my research project with seven participants (including myself). The methodology I used was life history research (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Norquay, 2008) with a feminist perspective (Hayes & Flannery, 2002; Neilson, 1998; Tisdell, 1998; Weiler, 1998). In addition, existing Armenian diaspora studies guided my thoughts throughout my discussions with participants and when interpreting data (Kaprielian-Churchill, 2005; Manoogian, 2008; Panossian, 2006; Varjabedian, 2009; Tölölyan, 1991, 2002). My data gathering approach was (auto)ethnographic (Bateson, 1989; Behar, 1996; Cole & Knowles, 2001; Ellis, 2004; Norman, 2001) employing methods such as formal open-ended interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2000), group discussions (Davies & Gannon, 2006), and writing for discovery (Luce-Kapler, 2004). My eclectic research approach and

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[1] See Appendix H for a reflective writing regarding the reason why I have numerous Heilbrun epigraphs in this chapter.

variety of writing styles assisted me in "crystallization" rather than "triangulation" (Richardson, 1994; Janesick, 2000). Over the course of ten months in 2011, I conducted two interviews with each participant in Toronto and Montréal and three group sessions with four participants in Montréal, accumulating over 40 hours of tape-recording, 253 pages of transcribed dialogue, and 104 pages of typed journals.

Ethical Care of Participants

> *As long as women are isolated one from the other, not allowed to offer other women the most personal accounts of their lives, they will not be part of any narrative of their own.* (Carolyn Heilbrun, 2002, p. 46)

I follow Carolyn Heilbrun's advice that "women must turn to one another for stories; they must share the stories of their lives and their hopes and their unacceptable fantasies" (p. 44). I tried to compile shared stories with utmost care and respect. I was attuned to body, mind, and soul when working with participants (Neilson, 1998). I did my best to handle their stories with thoughtfulness, sensitivity, and reverence. I recognized similarities and honoured diversities of our narratives (Hayes & Flannery, 2002). I tried to listen without judgment and to interpret without prejudice; though the act of interpretation is a form of judgment as one cannot help but rule in or rule out opinions, translate linguistic and social interactions, and decide how to (re)present them (Karpinski, 2012). I was not interested in analyzing behaviours but rather extracting reasons for articulations. I was attempting to construct meaning for the purpose of unravelling my data and uncovering new knowledge through thoughtful analysis (Bateson, 2004). I fostered a "connected knowing . . . a joining of minds" (Belenky, et al., 1997, p. 55).

Profile of Participants

Walking to my Master's thesis defense in my new summer shoes, I felt that I was beginning rather than ending a journey. I shared my sentiment with those present and ended my presentation by admitting that I had more unanswered questions than answered ones. Impressed with my oral defense, the committee encouraged me to present my thesis at the upcoming Narrative Matters Conference. Before I had the chance to say anything, they began searching the Web for information. I dutifully followed up their instructions and soon found myself at Acadia University in Nova Scotia presenting my research. I was invigorated by the company of intellectuals. I was elated when I met like-minded women, in particular, when I met a young Armenian who utterly impressed me with her enthusiasm for her own research project. Suddenly I realized that my work had to continue and I must do research with Armenian scholars like her. Was I recalling Maya Angelou's words "A bird sings because it has a song"?

Years later, that enthusiastic scholar carried her energy into my project when she became a participant. I was able to solicit two participants from the Armenian community in Toronto where I have established roots, having lived here since 1981. I also found four participants in the Armenian community in Montréal, as this community hosts a number of academics whose work I admire and who have demonstrated diverse approaches in their thinking. Both in Montréal and Toronto, I have attended community gatherings in order to observe and find potential participants. At one of those events, I met Nectar. I had also asked my brother, who lived in Montréal, to introduce me to Armenian women in that community; Zabel and Lori were his acquaintances. Six of the

eight women I approached accepted my invitation to participate. They are Armenian immigrant women:

- who are in their mature years (45+);
- who continued their education and obtained at least one degree or diploma from a Canadian university;
- who identify themselves as Armenian-Canadians;
- who are or have been involved with an Armenian community as teachers, lecturers, administrators, or volunteers.

I am content with leaving participants' profiles in the above general description; I must explain my rationale, however. I do not formally introduce participants in any of the chapters in order to allow participants' voices to speak to their personalities. I also do not take the risk of saying one-too-many words leaving readers with clues as to their identity. Almost always, when I read a dissertation that is based on participant research, I try guessing who the participants are. I suspect that I am not the only curious one. I must guard against revealing too much, especially since I have promised anonymity and confidentiality. All names are pseudonyms chosen by the participants. Wherever necessary and as per participants' request/consents, I do not reveal their specific field of study or profession. Furthermore, without a formal introduction of participants, I hope that this dissertation reads like a narrative rather than a research paper; first, for ease of reading and second, for being true to the flow of my writing inspirations in an embodied way. For example, I was unable to narrate the process of researching before writing

discussion Chapters 4 and 5 because I had not yet unravelled my data and formally given voice to participants on paper.

This research followed York University's ethical guidelines for conducting research with human participants. The consent form (see Appendix C) included the following:

- research intentions
- research methodology
- role of participants
- risks and/or benefits
- right not to answer questions, and/or to terminate participation at any time
- right to anonymity and confidentiality
- provision of no compensation of any kind

Rationale for Choice of Participants

THE DREAM
"Children of massacre,
children of destruction,
children of dispersion,
oh, my diaspora . . ."
someone was calling
in my dream.
Someone was explaining
why Armenian children
are raised with so much
wonder, as if they
might disappear at any moment.
(Diana Der-Hovanessian, 1994, p. 9)

Choosing educated women to participate in my research is my way of responding to a comment that I had received in a graduate class: "Armenian women are not educated, how come you're here" (September 2003)? My investigations had shown that, indeed,

highly educated diasporan Armenian women of generations two and three are in small numbers in diasporas (in the Republic of Armenia, higher education was state sponsored until 1991 and therefore the percentage of university educated women was very high). For example, perhaps there is the token Armenian professor in each university around the world, but that number is not representative of a million or so Armenians outside the Republic of Armenia. Why is that so?

Michael Arlen (1975) answers my question: "We had buried no great men [and women] because we hadn't had time to produce great men [and women], we had been too busy trying to get water into the desert" (cited in Kherdian, 2007, p. 304). Arlen explains: "Armenians are trapped unhealthily and neurotically in the tragedies of the past" (p. 302). During the first five decades after the Genocide, survivors and their children were concerned only for their continued existence. All their efforts were concentrated on rebuilding their lives, their families, and their communities. Western Armenia had lost its intellectuals, politicians, professionals, and educators, as these were the first groups of men who were systematically gathered, imprisoned, and massacred. The survivor generation kept under the radar, skittish, and untrusting. In turn, the survivors raised a generation that was not encouraged to become famous or to be noticed. Their goal was to be "good" diasporan citizens so that they and their children could survive the harshness of host countries, refugee camps, crowded corners of inner cities, always fearing authority and their might, especially of those of Muslim countries, even though most Armenian refugees/survivors found refuge in certain Muslim countries (Genocide was perpetrated in the Muslim Ottoman Empire by the Young Turk regime because Armenians were

minority Christian citizens). Generations one and two had the responsibility to propagate but not assimilate, amass fortune but not fame. They had the immense burden of creating institutions to safeguard the Armenian language and culture when they had become remnants of a weakened nation with crumbled institutions, guilt-ridden survivors, orphaned children, and victimized souls. Widowed women passed down to their daughters a sense of obligation to marry and raise a large family, to protect their offspring, to keep them safe nearby. Survivor mothers did not want their children to shine in the spotlight for fear that destructive forces or evil eyes might take them away just as they took away their husbands, brothers, and fathers. Survivors had to continue surviving (see the poem in the epigraph above). They had to attend to basic necessities; education beyond elementary or high school years was an unaffordable luxury. For example, my grandfather told the eldest of his seven children, when he turned fourteen, that as it did not appear that he was going to be a professor or a doctor and as he had learned how to read and write it was time that he started working with him to support his large family.

Of course, and thankfully so, there were the select few who were exceptional students, who received scholarships from a few Armenian, European, and American institutions, and therefore had the privilege of acquiring higher education.[2] In the 1960s,

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[2] Kessab is also known for its contribution to a proportionately higher number of clergy, doctors, and teachers. Catholicos of All-Armenians Karekin I (1995-1999) was born in Kessab, as was the highest ranking priest in the Armenian Catholic Church in the 1990s. The Evangelical (or Protestant) church has many well-known pastors born in Kessab, now serving in the diaspora (Pattie, 2004). Kessab's Educational Association celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2011; KEA is the oldest educational organization in the diaspora that remains active.

lenient global immigration practices made it possible for hundreds of thousands of Armenians to establish themselves in peaceful countries where they could pursue new possibilities, including higher education. It is only in the last few decades that Western Armenian diasporan generations three and four are recognizing the intellectual and cultural loss they endured and have the opportunity to therefore pursue higher education in the hopes of building the Armenian diasporas for a bright future. These generations have the confidence needed to shed the inherited identities of victim, survivor, and orphan. First, diasporan Armenians are no longer "countryless" because Armenia has been a fully independent country since 1991; second, Armenian diasporas have matured and their members are established and affluent citizens; third, human rights and equity laws support minorities in the Western world; and fourth, diasporans are interconnected globally through cyberspace, which is a vital link providing new socio-political, economic, and even educational possibilities.

Participants Arminé, Hermine, Lori, Nectar, Nrani, Zabel, and I are generation one immigrants in Canada; at the same time, we are generation two or generation three diasporan Armenians who lead active intellectual lives dedicated to education.

Research Perspective

> *I suspect that female narratives will be found where women exchange stories, where they read and talk collectively of ambitions, and possibilities, and accomplishments.* (Carolyn Heilbrun, 2002, p. 46)

Whether quantitative or qualitative, research is interpretive and contextual. It is subjective, as we only observe through our own lenses, and we interpret our observations based on past experiences, as well as theoretical understandings and/or the discourses available to us at a certain time and place. Cole and Knowles (2001) affirm that "any research project is an expression of the elements of a researcher's life history"—a history that is personal, complex, incomplete, and in flux, a history that mirrors the researcher's epistemological and theoretical assumptions, a history that encompasses language, culture, political stance, religious beliefs, and socio-economic status (p. 10).

I cannot claim objectivity or detachment from my research since I am a participant. However, I must recognize my role as author with an "authority" to analyze data, include and exclude materials, and "represent" participants. I am an insider in my group of seven. I share similar experiences with participants: we are all Armenian women; we have continued our formal education in Canada; we are generation one immigrants; we were born in the Middle East; we are children or grandchildren of Genocide survivors; we share the same official history; we are academics sporadically involved with the Armenian community; we have similar concerns for the future of the Armenian diaspora; we are parents (literally or metaphorically as teachers); we are of similar age; we speak at least three languages; and finally, we consider Armenia our imagined or spiritual homeland but Canada our home.

Stories we recall and tell reflect how we perceive the world and how we want the world to perceive us. Therefore, within our family and community settings and within our social structures, we have learned what to tell and what to conceal, we have learned

whom to tell and whom not to tell. For example, when I engaged in a self-discovery writing inquiry, I consciously omitted certain stories surrounding the difficulties of my first marriage, even though these incidents marked the beginning of my current intellectual journey. I knew that the stories could become public thereby causing some discomfort for my family. As Annette Kuhn (1995) says, I had learned to constrain my "outer world of public expression and circulation of memory-stories" (p. 4). We learn to determine "what is worth remembering" and what is worth forgetting for the purpose of safeguarding reputations or sparing feelings, our own and the feelings of those around us (Norquay, 1993, p. 245). Naomi Norquay (1999) points out that "the gaps and silences in people's stories can be intentional or unintentional, conscious or unconscious" (p. 87).

The compiled life histories of participants focus on stories that narrate their efforts to solidify their identities in an historicized and socialized world. Dynamic diaspora approaches such as ethno-nationalism (Sheffer, 2007), transnationalism (Tölölyan, 1996), a place of connection (Berns-McGown, 2008), multi-localism and subjective belonging (Panossian, 2006) guide my understanding of identity negotiation. I interpret participants' experiences with an understanding that women often use education for self-growth and for social change (Hayes & Flannery, 2002; Pipher, 2006). The sharing of stories often creates a space for dialogue where new capacities for voice can emerge and women "become more fully authors of their own lives" (Tisdell, 2002, p. 179).

Elizabeth Tisdell (2002) argues that "feminist pedagogy is about story, especially about women's stories. It is about using stories and examples from real life in educational situations to facilitate both women's development and structural social

change for women" (pp. 181-182). As a feminist researcher, I have the responsibility to be engaged in participants' self-narratives by providing a space wherein stories are shared, by taking into account emotions, positionality, and context, and by recognizing and being mindful of limitations in both telling and attending to stories. Tisdell writes,

> critical reflection on [stories] and the context of the experience are often what promote learning and change. The stories touch our hearts; they embody and put a human face on the abstract world of ideas. They move our spirits. It is through the interaction of our hearts, minds, and spirits that we eventually move to action. It is this interaction that promotes women's learning, at least the learning that is most significant. (2002, p. 183)

Tisdell encourages me to question not only how knowledge has been produced and distributed but also what counts as knowledge and to whom. In the role of a researcher, I therefore make an effort to observe what is articulated and what is not, what is spoken off the record and what is aired out. I examine the external and internal forces that guide or misguide women in their learning and teaching journeys.

Poststructural feminism delineates the nuances between and within categories and the shifting identities of women that are influenced by diverse social forces. Furthermore, as Frances Maher and Mary Kay Tetreault (2007) point out, diversity is a constantly changing construct, and note that in particular situations we give particular meanings to gender, race, class, age, and (dis)abilities. The emphasis is not on differences but rather on how women experience difference in particular ways, and how they live and express their constant and shifting positionalities.

With a feminist perspective, I make public the life histories of Armenian women; I utilize our "experiences as a basis of knowledge" and recognize "recurrent forms of suffering in their specificity . . . in order to avoid reproducing them in the future" (Haug et al., 1999, pp. 34, 44). For Western Armenian women, suffering is both in the shared history of loss—loss of both life and ancestral land during the First World War—as well as in their own deracination from their birth countries during the more recent civil wars in the Middle East. Suffering for Armenian women includes the physical, intellectual, and emotional displacement they experience in diasporas. Together, participants and I make better sense of our stories of displacement and resettlement. We explore the ways in which we have refashioned our positions in a new world. We understand the numerous ways in which we have developed the capacity not only to survive hardships but also to accomplish our academic and professional aspirations.

Informed by Armenian diaspora studies, I use the concepts of historicity (historical consciousness), connectivity (need to tell), and generativity (need to pass down) as my interpretative tools to understand participants' efforts to renegotiate their identities as learners and educators in the Armenian and the mainstream Canadian communities. I am the sole "author" of this dissertation. Here, I use the word "author" not from a place of authority but from a place of choice, as I am not convinced that I have full authority over my work when conducting research with participants. First, as a feminist, I believe in respecting the diversity of women's voices indiscriminately and therefore I insert participants' articulations throughout the chapters, although they appear according to my own discretion. Second, I asked participants to review my

interpretations of data in chapters 4 and 5. Subsequently, I incorporated most of their suggestions and edited the chapters as best I could. Third, ethics guidelines specify that consenting participants may withdraw from a project anytime they wish. For a researcher, the possibility of losing participants creates feelings of indebtedness or gratitude, and guardedness so as not to offend, and thus censorship of expression. Therefore, all participants, including myself, determined what is included and what is excluded in this work.

However, having said all the above, I am explicit about participants' personal histories and I probe the personal with sensitivity, without ignoring the external elements that influence the personal or force a forgetting or a dismissing of family histories and official narratives that were considered disturbing and painful. At the same time, I do not dismiss intimate feelings of loss, failure, and frustration; for example, I probed deep into Lori's concern for her children's deracination from the Armenian community, Nrani's anger about the education system in Armenian schools, Nectar's frustration with unprofessional community members at public art performances, Hermine's fear that her grandchildren are not going to be able to read her Armenian books. At our three group sessions, and in my twelve one-on-one interviews with participants, I was attuned to flag-words and expressions that I thought needed clarification. I made a note when conversations switched into Armenian, or when body language signalled restlessness. I understood that we were comfortable speaking in our mother-tongue and first language. Moreover, I was aware that switching from speaking English to speaking Armenian was a form of self-censorship. We knew that the transcriber does not understand Armenian, and

that I would exercise caution in the translation of these private exchanges. During group discussions, we were comfortable pointing out the shortcomings of our communities and our leaders in our "intimate language" (Attarian, 2009, p. 34). We were airing our "dirty laundry" in private and did not want outsiders to be privy to our community's weaknesses. At these moments, participants often cautioned: "Let's keep this between us" so often that Zabel eventually responded: "Everything between us, what's remaining for Arpi!" (May 2011).

Life history research demands a complex interconnected relationship between the researcher, the participants, and their respective communities where the research is conducted. This research methodology requires a reflexive practice and, at the same time, a responsive engagement with and within the context of the research. Reflexive because this research penetrates into multi-layered lives that have been shaped by and positioned into existing relations not only within personal socializations in the family but also within society at large (Norquay, 1993, 2008). For example, I bring my socialized self into my university classrooms where I work within the contextual framework of York University, which, in general, portrays a certain political stance, scholarly integrity, academic freedom, and historical status that hone my intellect. I follow specific guidelines for conducting research, which affects who participants are, how I conduct my research, who reviews my work, how my data are unravelled, and how my findings are received. Therefore, not only does my research reflect my own interpretations, but it is also influenced by the contexts in which it is conducted and delivered. I respond to my audience and I am sensitive to its needs and demands—my language is self-censored, my

statements comply with participants' expectations, and my writing is in an academic style in which I reference my concepts and theorize my findings in order to validate my work.

Cole and Knowles (2001) observe that "life history inquiry . . . is a representation of human experience that draws viewers or readers into the interpretive process and invites them to make meaning and form judgments based on their own reading of the 'text' as it is viewed through the lenses of their own realities" (pp. 10-11). Life history research is a dynamic process because it changes and grows with new stories, new insights, new tools, new interpretations, and new actors. For example, when I looked closely at my own immigration story that I had explored before involving others, I gleaned new insights about the reasons my family emigrated from Syria to Lebanon and then to Canada. This process inspired me to acquire and utilize additional research tools such as oral history and (auto)ethnography, in order to probe my history/historicity (what that history means to me more deeply). Employing these added research tools allowed me to form new interpretations when I listened for the said and the unsaid and even for the remembered and the forgotten (Norquay, 1998). Most important, I am attuned to my socialized life and to everyday interruptions. Furthermore, I am also attuned to existing contextual forces such as history, landscapes, communities, and global interconnections that occupy a large space in my stories and influence how I have engraved certain events in my memory and how I have pushed aside others. I approach my history with "a mindful attentiveness" (Simon, 2000, p. 3). Actors, such as family, friends, and institutions, enter/exit my story and play specific roles while speaking or acting from

designated spaces: family members assisting in the reconstruction of stories of settlement and resettlement, participants challenging me to consider other possible interpretations, Armenian history and community life forging my diasporic identity, and homeland(s) and hostland(s) providing comfort or perpetuating instabilities and thus forcing migrations.

I asked my father to narrate the events surrounding the emigration of his youngest brother who was the first member of the family to leave "home" in 1965. My father recalled a few details and explained to me the political climate in the Middle East at that time. But then, in his unique way, he responded later with a long nostalgic poem that reflected his and his community's experience of living in a host country, of being citizens without a homeland, displaced yet resigned to the reality of a diasporic life. My father did not talk about the micro-events surrounding my uncle's emigration but rather described the macro-representation of that departure: the homelessness of a nation and the longing for a homeland of its people scattered throughout the world. His interpretation was based on his and his community's history. He chose a "retelling" that was dictated by the "pre-existing story-lines and ways of telling stories" (Passerini, cited in Weiler, 1998, p. 161). As the son of Genocide survivors, he assumed the duty of retelling the story of his parents' appropriated lives under the Ottoman Empire as well as the hardships they survived in Syria. My father had learned what to tell, what not to tell, and how to tell (Kuhn, 1995).

When my brothers and I discussed the circumstances of our emigration, our father's words became clearer: "Remembering stories of family separation arouse feelings of longing for a birthplace, but [remembering] also awakens the feeling of contentment of

having left that place behind" (S. Panossian, 2009, p. 282). My brother reminded me that we left Syria and then Lebanon for political reasons. First, we left for personal safety and second, because we, as Armenians, were only guests in Lebanon. We were issued a lesser-passer[3] stamped NON-RETOUR (No Return). The bureaucratic and political system pushed us out of Lebanon. In our storytelling, particular social, historical, political, and geographical forces filled in gaps and helped to explicate what was hidden and ambiguous. Furthermore, when listening to each other's memories, we re-experienced them in a contemplative way and thus created our own versions whereby we filled in the gaps and the forgotten (Davies & Gannon, 2006). Davies and Gannon alert us that "in work with memories, the evidence of experience is no longer treated as innocent or transparent but is seen to be constituted through language, discourse, and history" (p. 2). My brothers and I constructed the context in which the Panossians emigrated from Syria and Lebanon. In remembering, and retelling reasons for migration, our narrative was enriched by our subsequent lived experiences and the socio-political understanding of events that we have gained. We engaged in a discourse of remembering and making sense of our (up)rooted lives. Our story was no longer of a moment in history but it had become an amalgam of moments in different times and places as we continued to struggle with our changing and unsettled multiple identities in a hostland/homeland away from a motherland/homeland.

[3] A French expression meaning *let pass*. Lesser-Passer is a one-way travel document issued in emergency situations for humanitarian reasons.

Methods in Life History Research

> *I do not believe that new stories will find their way into texts if they do not begin in oral exchanges among women in groups hearing and talking to one another.* (Carolyn Heilbrun, 2002, p. 46)

Life history research has both autobiographical and relational orientations. It is autobiographical when participants and I place ourselves at the centre of the research and focus on self-exploration, self-understanding, and self-representation. As a participant and observer in my research, I am both the voyeur and the subject of my gaze (Hall, 1997). Separating my roles of researcher and participant is nearly impossible because when I am observing I am also a participant with a subjective mindset and meaning-making capacities. I explore my own thoughts as I am listening to participants.

This research project is an examination of the personal narratives of the seven participants as we negotiate identities in our roles as learners and teachers while facing the challenges of interruptions and (dis)continuities, which are part and parcel of being diasporan Armenian women in Canada. It is a self-exploration and not only a self-telling. Therefore, the methodology I engage in is not merely autobiographical, but it is also ethnographic. Barbara Tedlock (2000) points out that ethnography is the production, the transformation, and the output of data that reconstruct "historically, politically, and personally situated accounts, descriptions, interpretations, and representations of human lives" (p. 455). Ruth Behar (1996) asserts that it is nearly impossible to draw a clear line between ethnography and autobiography: "ethnography [is] becoming more autobiographical while autobiography had become more ethnographic" because "the

*ins*cription of a self and *des*cription of an object[/subject]" are inseparable in life history research (pp. 19, 20). This research is an interpretive inquiry into the personal that stems from and is shaped by the personal, the historical, the social, the economic, and the political. Therefore, it is no longer autobiographical but rather auto-ethnographic.

Journal Entry: What's Shifting
(At Reflective Café, September 2011)

***The autoethnographer voice**: The "checking in" is to look at what has been fascinating, interesting, or shifting in my life. I add the word "horrifying" and write: "What's shifting is my role as a researcher to one of an interpreter. I must now "produce" a dissertation after months/years of data gathering. This horrifies me because I'm entrusted with the life experiences of six women that I must do justice to. I must be respectful of their narratives but at the same time expose their personal thoughts and feelings. They trusted me with their stories, but I must use them for my gain and produce a dissertation. Horrifying!"*

Journal Entry: Life Interrupted and Detoured
(At Reflective Café, November 2011)

***The autoethnographer voice**: I wake up with a feeling of excitement because I will go to Reflective Café for a writing session today. Half an hour later, when I'm more or less awake, I feel anxious. Puttering around the house in my dowdy nighty, my hair uncombed, my face unwashed, unkempt both physically and mentally: "What could I write about today?" I fret.*

I have breakfast, read the newspaper headlines. No time to read more than that this morning. I brush, I comb my hair; I put make-up on (face cream and lipstick), I get dressed. Daved comments that the shade of blue of my shirt doesn't match the blue trim on the collar of my jacket. I smile and grab my colourful bracelet and say: "Now it's all coordinated!" We laugh—we're rarely colour coordinated, we don't really care to be. We kiss.

"It looks nice out there today. Are you working from home or going out?" I ask. "Let me check the weather before you go out," he says and walks away telling me that he's staying in and may go computer shopping with his friend. I grab my spring jacket. He comes to the door and tells me that there's no rain today, and a spring jacket is good enough. "There's a lot of leftover food from last night, have that with your friend," I say and leave.

I'm driving, 401 is surprisingly clear of traffic. I zoom through, take Highway 403. All is clear. I'll be at Nelly's 10 minutes early. Great!

What should I write about? Relationships? Yes, I need to talk to my daughter about that. We're on the outs these days. "Relationships are give and take, not take and give," I'll tell her. I've also been contemplating letting go or being let go lately—that's a topic I ought to explore. There's so much that I hold on to or so very little that I let go of. But that's not true, I've let go of a lot:

- aspirations to become a psychiatrist

- marrying at a young age. No, that was different. I was let go by my parents

- I've let go of my country of birth. No, that was also different. I was pushed out by the political system

- I've let go of my first marriage. Yes, I had the courage to do that.

Oops. Third Line? Did I miss Trafalgar Road? This always happens to me, that is, missing exits when lost in thoughts. I wanted a few minutes alone with Nelly. She has been a good writing mentor and a friend. Oh, well, this is how it's supposed to be. Is it really? I've missed so many exits in my life. I could have kissed Haig that day when we were both sent out for time out. That Grade 2 teacher was not pleasant. She never smiled. I smile. I missed the chance to compile my grandmothers' stories. Why did I let go of the opportunity to settle in Montréal? If I had only let my mind guide my life! Oh, these random thoughts drive me crazy. I better not miss the Trafalgar exit again. Dorval is coming up. Traffic is at a standstill. I look up the exits on the map. Dorval is west of Trafalgar. I exit. I arrive at Nelly's 10 minutes late.

Autoethnography: Researcher's Position

Autoethnography locates the self within sociocultural, sociopolitical, and socioeconomic contexts (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Ellis, 2004; Humphreys, 2005; Sparkes, 2002). Carolyn Ellis (2004) describes autoethnography as "research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political. . . . [It is] introspection portrayed in dialogue, scenes, characterization, and plot" (p. xix). In other words, it is the dialogical and reflexive telling of one's life story within

a social context—a multi-layered context that provides insights beyond the personal (Humphreys, 2005). One may control what she/he recalls or narrates, but this recalling is influenced by those we interact with, therefore, the stories we tell are "always created in relation to a particular audience" (Sparkes, 2002, p. 218). According to Sparkes, some of the characteristics of autoethnography are as follows (I have included my own comments and examples in square brackets).

- a concern with moral, ethical, and political consequences [the purpose of telling; my responsibility of ownership of the stories; trepidation about making some of the stories public; self-censoring];
- the inclusion of the researcher's vulnerable self, emotion, body, and spirit [the lasting effect of shared stories; fear of losing my sensitivity for certain comments; the "burden of authorship" (Geertz, 1995)];
- the examination of how human experience is endowed with meaning [interpreting but keeping the integrity of the stories intact; being accountable];
- the featuring and positioning of the multiple voices of the participants [respecting all voices equally; encouraging equal presence in discussions];
- the representation of lived experience using a variety of genres—short stories, poetry, . . . [printed images], personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing [diverse expression, metaphors]. (Sparkes, 2002, p. 210)

Keeping in mind the characteristics above was a challenge, but I read the above list before every encounter with participants. In fact, I had some reminder notes along so that I could glance at them when needed during the discussions.

For Behar (1996), ethnography is "the most fascinating, bizarre, disturbing, and necessary form of witnessing" (p. 5). As a tool of knowing, autoethnography forces the researcher to place herself in the centre of the study rather than at the periphery. Tami Spry (2001) explains that in ethnographic research, "autoethnographic texts express more fully the interactional textures occurring between self, other, and contexts" (p. 708). Therefore, my attempt to interpret my experiences is not a self-narrative but rather a narrative that locates the self as an insider shaped by the influencing contextual forces such as family, community, institution, and state. I am also a participant in this ethnography, and therefore my narrative of self, in this context, crosses the boundaries of personal and social, of self and other, when engaging in reflexive and responsive dialogue and analysis. Spry (2001) observes that "in autoethnographic methods, the researcher is the epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process turns," but at the same time, "purposeful dialogue" is forged between researcher, participants, and audience when stories are shared and their meanings examined (p. 711). For example, when Nrani described the disagreements she had had with certain administrators in the Armenian community about issues of education, I remembered my own experience of not feeling appreciated when I worked with the Armenian school in the past. I was put "in my place": a parent not a teacher. I understood the context of our stories and therefore was able to relate to Nrani's particular feelings of frustration. I was reminded of the fact that ours is a sustainable community only because its members assist with very little expectations. It is a community in which members must roll up their sleeves and work

hard without waiting for permission, or anticipating praise, or challenging internal authority.

My involvement with the Armenian community in Toronto during the past 30 years positions me as an "insider" at some level and allows me to be receptive and sensitive to the stories participants share with me. This positionality may promote an honest telling. But at the same time, it may encourage a cautious concealing because of my status as a fellow Armenian: First, my involvement with the community is not in the same capacity as the involvement of participants. Second, I may be oblivious to certain issues that only an outsider would observe. Third, participants may assume that as an insider I understand certain issues in the community, when in fact I do not, and therefore neglect to explain their thoughts clearly for me. For example, Arminé proudly described her parents as orphans who survived the Genocide and made a life for themselves first in Syria and then in Lebanon. She talked about their humble lifestyle and characterized them as a generous family with dignity. Her comment was not clear to me so I asked what she meant by *dignity*. She explained: "My mother says that they were poor but there was always extra coffee; there was always extra coal even if they didn't have enough to warm themselves. There was always something extra put aside so that if they had guests they would have heat and they would have coffee for the guests" (February 2011). As the granddaughter of a survivor orphan, I should have understood the concept of dignity as *pride* in not revealing the family's modest lifestyle, but I did not. I interpreted the situation as an example of plain generosity until Arminé clarified it for me. Now as I write the story, I realize how important it was for our grandparents to pass down their

everyday life stories orally so that we understand not only their lives but ours that reflect theirs. For example, through remembering stories and behaviours of family members, Arminé observed family characteristics in herself which she identified as: "dedication to family and unconditional giving" both to family and community (February 2011).

Because diasporan Armenians have historicized lives, their experiences are extensions of the socio-political conditions and thus require a "hermeneutic" understanding in which meaning is derived from interpretative conclusions (van Manen, 1997). I use the term here with an understanding that hermeneutics is the art of reading a text with pre-judgments, but also arriving at expanded interpretations, new understanding, and reinterpretations. It is the uncovering of new meanings based on one's own position as well as interpretive capacity and expanded knowledge. Hermeneutic interpretation involves both author and audience; one must recognize why the text is written and who the targeted readers are because interpretation cannot be an isolated practice. Clark Moustakas (1994) explains that the process of reflective interpretation "includes not only a description of the experience as it appears in consciousness but also an analysis and astute interpretation of the underlying conditions, historically and aesthetically, that account for the experience" (p. 10). It is in this light that I employ autoethnography as a research method in order to examine new possibilities of interpretations and to probe into the essence of situated/conditioned/historicized lives of seven Armenian-Canadian diasporan women. Autoethnography offers contextual interpretations of life histories.

Oral History: Production of Memory

Kathleen Weiler's capacity to tease out theory and practice from her own feminist research guides my understanding of conducting research in education. Weiler's (1998) *Country Schoolwomen: Teaching in Rural California, 1850-1950* is based on material from historical archives and her interviews with retired women teachers. Her own mother, a teacher in a rural area who was quite fulfilled in her profession, continued teaching even after getting married. I am reminded of my own mother's teaching experience in a rural setting in the 1940s in Kessab. Upon graduating from the highest grade of the local school, which at the time was Grade 9, my mother started teaching in the same school and playing the piano at Sunday church services. She remembers fondly her few years of teaching, and how sad she was when she was unable to continue teaching or playing the piano publically after getting married at age twenty. Moreover, my mother married into a large family that was eclectic in religious conviction, unlike her pious paternal home, which was Evangelical. In fact, her grandfather opposed her marriage saying that she would be living amongst infidels. The Panossians were not considered believers: stories of grandfather "Onbashi" were public knowledge and the subject of community gossip (the word Onbashi was an honorific nick-name meaning troop leader. It originated in Turkish but was adopted by the language of the Kessabtsis). My grandfather had inherited the name from his father who allegedly organized groups of men to work in neighbouring towns and villages and then also assumed some responsibility to guard and protect the village against thieves and invaders. When grandfather returned from Boston, U.S.A. in 1918, where he was soujourning, and found

devastation in Kessab brought on by the deportations and forced marches into deserts in 1915, he fired his gun into the skies cursing the God who had witnessed such atrocities and not protected the innocent victims. Another strain of community gossip concerned my grandmother who did not go to church because she could not forgive God for taking away her family from her during the Genocide. Furthermore, one of my uncles had converted from Armenian Orthodox to Armenian Catholic in order to attend the Armenian Mekhitarist Monastery (founded in 1717) on the island of San Lazzaro near Venice, Italy.

Let me come back to Weiler after my digression into a snippet of my own oral history. Unlike my mother's experience, the women Weiler (1998) interviewed described teaching as a means to autonomy and financial independence at a time when it was one of the few professions open to women. She explains that women "held positions of power at the state level, . . . supported one another, and . . . defined an alternative and positive meaning for the woman teacher" (p. 4). Even though the public sphere was not a space designated to women, in rural areas, where the need for educators was high, some women were able to remain in the public domain even after they were married and raising families. When Weiler began her project in 1987, she held an "unexamined belief," an assumption that women were subjugated to state regulations such as "women teachers' bar," which meant that when married, female teachers would have to stop working. In some locales, not only did married women continue teaching, but they also held leadership positions in their schools such as in rural California where there was a greater need for teachers and administrators (1999, p. 43).

Weiler describes her research with retired rural women teachers as an oral history even though it carries some of the characteristics of autoethnography such as self-dialogue and representation, interviews and observations, field work and ethnography. She explains: "I excavate a past world I know through my own memories and the memories of others, shaped by my own feminist concerns in the present" (p. 3). The oral stories of her participants are reconstructions and representations of their memories. Weiler's subsequent retelling of these stories as an author establishes an authoritative interpretation that adds yet another layer, another reconstruction of "competing meanings" where "memories are deeply affected by the ways in which the past is represented in ... dominant memory" (p. 159). Our memory is often the product of dominant events in the world as well as influenced by the recollections of these events by others. A dominant memory provides (or imposes) a language wherein people frame their past and their present. Accordingly, in my own research, to tell, to forget to tell, and to intentionally omit to tell is the prerogative of participants—it is our story, after all. Our own meaning-making determines how we interpret our experiences but not how others interpret these same stories even though often our capacity for interpretations is influenced by our socialized identities.

The language we use is our choice. On the other hand, "language itself is not transparent" (Weiler, 1998, p. 6). Language is almost always open to numerous interpretations, but at the same time it is limited by the speaker's own knowledge, a knowledge influenced by particular life histories as well as by unique ways of telling or the "avoidance of a single shape that tells the tale" (Hoffman, 1989, p. 164).

Oral history is an important part of our Armenianness. Participants' parents and grandparents passed on family stories orally. Before we could read for ourselves, we already knew some historical details about World War I and about the sufferings our ancestors endured during that time. Researchers Miller and Touryan-Miller (1991) have reported on intergenerational conversations of Genocide stories and examined how the memory of these stories affect the identity construction of both parents and their children. Similarly, working with Armenian families, Margaret Manoogian and her colleagues, Leslie Richards and Alexis Walker, (2008) conducted intergenerational research with thirty Armenian mothers whose ages ranged from 59 and 91 and who lived in northern California. Three of the participants were born in Turkey, the others were American born to parents who were forced to emigrate from their homeland because of deportations and Genocide. Interviews revealed that "family experiences during the time of the Genocide created a framework for the creation of stories of family survival and immigration. . . . [P]articipants described their mothers' Genocide experiences" (p. 150). Manoogian, Richards, and Walker found that oral stories "express family identity, underscore family cultural and ethnic roots, and encourage family cohesiveness" (p. 144). Furthermore, stories have become "vehicles for participants to express family identity and resilience" (p. 160). Genocide stories that were told by family members were dramatic and thus created both a sense of tragedy and reality etching them forever in the minds of the listeners. Similarly, in my research, I found that participants' inherited stories of Genocide have created an inextricable bind between generations and with our history.

Lori cannot forget the story her grandfather told: "He was four years old when the Turks came into their house, slaughtered the rest of the family in front of his eyes. The only reason he was spared was because his father fell on top of him when he was killed" (February 2011). Nectar still remembers a photograph from her childhood years illustrating massacres in Adana in 1909. Nrani remembers the empty field her father and she stood in Tel al-Zaatar, Lebanon where once 60,000 Palestinians had taken refuge after losing their lands to Israel in the 1950s and 1960s. For Nrani the empty camp reminded her of the stories she was told about the deportations of Armenians and the emptying of Armenian villages in Turkey in 1915, including the one where her grandparents were born. In 1976, during the early years of the Lebanese civil war, the refugee camp was targeted as a threat to national security and after days of armed resistance, it was seized and later dismantled but not before approximately 3,000 Palestinians lost their lives (Badr, 2008). "The parallel with the Armenian Genocide" was stunningly real for Nrani (February 2011). When participants and I told each other our own stories we caught glimpses of each other's memories, and then re-experienced them in a reflective way and thus were able to "create our own documentary materials" whereby we searched not only for what was evident but also what was unclear, what was forgotten, or what was suppressed (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 5).

When I asked participants for personal introductions at our first interview, they all mentioned the Genocide within minutes, identifying themselves as a daughter or a granddaughter of survivors and then provided at least one story of struggle and survival of their parents or grandparents. I should mention here that the scope of my research does

not include the analysis of stories of trauma but rather how participants construct their identities against their remembered stories. The dominant experience that is central in our family histories is our memories of oral history, a haunting history.

Hrag Varjabedian (2009), in his ethnography of diasporan Armenians in Lebanon, United States, Canada, and Armenia, observes that "the oral dimension of history constituted the hallmark of Armenian social memory. Oral history was more immediate, emanating from the personal experiences of the teller" (p. 173). Varjabedian looks at how Genocide narratives played out in the lives of his participants and how their personal narratives of memory and history helped the production of their identities. He affirms that "[t]here is an intricate link between history, memory, and narration. Historiography and historical representations entail the creation of narratives, and attempt [to] incorporat[e] historical events . . . into the continuity of history itself" (p. 26). Oral histories rely on memory for their production. Memories are produced around social and political events, actual and imagined places, and within individual and group settings. We remember stories not only in relation to our own experiences but also in the context of our environment, be it actual, imagined, or anticipated. Cultural and social configurations organize and then shape memories, which are then remembered as official or social memories (public knowledge transmitted orally or through books and promoted in institutions), that is, cultural attitudes give meaning to particular events, accurate or not, which are interpreted and reinterpreted by individuals and then experienced and understood both at the individual and collective levels. Varjabedian (2009) explains that

> the interplay between history and memory on one hand, and subjectivity and historicity on the other, become instrumental in the construction of both individual and collective identities, and at the same time, it is the construction of identities that perpetuates and sustains the narrative of Genocide. (pp. 29-30)

Stories of Genocide have been trans-generational for Armenians. More significantly, the dissemination of these stories has contributed to constancy in identity negotiation as Armenians (Varjabedian, 2009).

Particular Discourses That Shape My Oral History

Our oral stories are populated not only by other people but also by the discourses that influence and shape the temporal and special circumstances (Bakhtin, 1981) as emotions and physical surroundings dictate what we tell and what we conceal. Particular social, historical, political, and geographical forces fill in gaps and help to explicate what is hidden and ambiguous. Stories are shaped in dynamic environments fuelled by socioeconomic and geopolitical events and composed for particular audiences. The audience in turn interprets the stories based on their own socialized and politicized selves, retaining what is worthwhile to them. Thus when retelling, they include and/or omit what they think is important or unimportant. Oral history is then interactive between teller and listener, as well as situational between the social and the private. To illustrate, I will revisit part of my family's oral history of immigration in the context of family, community, state, and global dynamic discourses.

Family: Close ties were important to each Panossian family member and according to my parents we worked well as a unit when faced with hardships both in Syria and Lebanon. My three aunts and three uncles lived in the same neighbourhood. In the local community, we had a respectable social standing as my father and older uncle were members of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and were active in the affairs of the political party; Mom and Aunt Zaro volunteered in the Women's Club; Uncle Vasco was in the regional cycling team and Uncle Solomon in the regional soccer team. Those were the social activities that bound our family members together and grounded the family in the community. But at the same time, traveling and exploring were the traditions that contributed to our relocation.

Having higher education eased the relocation of some family members. For example, Aunt Armen found work in France as a nurse. Uncle Vasco Varoujean, a journalist, was sent to Montréal to report on Expo 67. He then worked at Radio Canada in Montréal and later published three novels and completed a fourth just before his untimely passing.[4] Aunt Arek and her husband, who both worked for Air France in Beirut and were fluent in English and French, were readily accepted as immigrants by Canada in 1969 when the dust settled following the 1967 Six-Day Arab-Israeli War.

The Armenian community: The community was one of the few minorities in Lebanon. It was a well-functioning diaspora with community centres, day schools, a university, churches, and successful businesses (Boudjikanian, 2009). It was self-

[4] *Le moulin du diable*, Montréal, Le Cercle du livre de France, 1972; *Les raisins verts*, Montréal, Le Cercle du livre de France, 1975; *Les pâturages de la rancœur*, Montréal, Le Cercle du livre de France, 1977.

sustaining; we did not have to leave central Beirut, nor did we want to as our language and religion were different from the mainstream. We were Christian Armenians living within the Maronite and Muslim Arab populations. Our desire not to assimilate was unyielding. Therefore, different religious beliefs and languages created a barrier between Armenians and Arabs. As a result, the pull from Western diasporas finally prevailed and caused a massive exodus of Armenians from the war-torn Middle East. Within eleven years, thirteen of our extended family members had immigrated to Western countries such as Australia, the United States, and Canada, where Armenian communities were expanding in the 1960s and 1970s.

The state: Lebanon was not our homeland even though my parents and their siblings lived there for over twenty years, had established businesses, and raised families. We were not granted Lebanese citizenship as we were not Arabs. It was easy to leave Lebanon because we felt no attachment to the land. We owned a house but it was not an ancestral home. We were guests in Lebanon. As "outsiders," our nationalism had shifted towards Armenia, a small country that we could still call a homeland even if it was part of the USSR until 1991. The political climate in the Middle East pushed us towards more peaceful countries. We left one diaspora location for another.

The global presence: The ease of global communications and travels facilitated frequent uprooting and relocation. New technologies in the West enticed the Panossians. My grandfather sailed the Atlantic at the turn of the 20th century because traveling was available, affordable, and alluring. My aunts received Sears catalogues from which they occasionally ordered fashionable items. My father was mesmerized by the new electric

and electronic "gadgets" coming out of Europe such as tools and home entertainment devices. These appear to be trivial reasons for uprooting but nevertheless considerable when compounded with fears of another civil war. The Middle East was no longer a comfortable or a safe place to live for the Panossians. At the same time, North America was the "new world" that enticed us with its vast land, open borders, economic possibilities, peaceful political climate, and opportunities for higher education. The push from the Middle East was unbearable, and the pull from the West irresistible.

It is estimated that the Armenian community in Lebanon was reduced from 280,000 to 70,000 by 1990 because of emigration (Kaprielian-Churchill, 2005). Furthermore, Armenians were classified as Asiatic and thus were not allowed entry to Canada until "the 1960s when there was a shift in Canadian immigration policy: ethnic origin was dropped as a criterion, and the decision for admission came to be based on socio-economic variables," at which time large numbers of Armenians immigrated to Canada (Boudjikanian, 1995, p. 158).

Collective Memory in Group Discussions

Collective memory is a social phenomenon, that is, memory is constructed in a social context and thus events are remembered within those social settings (Varjabedian, 2009). Maurice Halbwachs, who developed the concept of collective memory in 1925, explains that individuals belong to social groups where their personal experiences "interpenetrate" the collective memory keeping their stories alive (1980, p. 55). Introducing collective memory, he says: "In addition to written history, there is a living

history that perpetuates and renews itself through time and permits the recovery of many old currents that have seemingly disappeared" (p. 64). According to Halbwachs, we remember our past not only through personal memories but also through collective memory.

Participants and I share a common mother-tongue, history, and culture. We were born and raised in the Middle East (Lebanon, Syria). We are first generation immigrants in Canada and maintain close ties with our respective Armenian communities. Because of the above similarities, it seemed likely that we would also share a collective memory, hence my assumption that we could relate to each other's family histories and assist in remembering certain events. Therefore, trusting in the seeming power of collective memory, I introduced the concept in my group discussions.

Prior to our sessions, participants and I discussed possible conversation topics via email. This practice was not innocent nor without motive, as I was trying to enable reflective engagement in remembering personal experiences and thus initiating a specific language of thought and dialogue. For example, I shared with participants materials that I had been reading and invited them to contemplate the topics. They had received my dissertation proposal abstract, a copy of Bateson's *Composing a Life*, a few pages of Miller and Paola's (2004b) *Telling it Slant* (pp. 50-65), and for those who were interested, sections of my proposal. I encouraged them to reflect on what was palatable for them, to respond in writing and perhaps to share these thoughts during subsequent visits. My intent was to prepare them to engage in story-writing both prior to and during our group sessions. I believe that purposeful writing enhances the understanding of collective

memory and personal experiences. See Appendix D for examples of email correspondence before group sessions.

Email communications with participants provided insights as I prepared for the group sessions. We established a specific dialogical language before every group discussion. I made an effort to generate meaningful discussion as well as to trigger personal stories. I was hoping that we would write individually in the group setting in order to prompt memory and to write for discovery (I will discuss this method of writing in subsequent sections). My plan was to implement what I had learned from existing research as well as from my hands-on experience at Nelly's Reflective Café, which I had been attending for the previous five years. At Nelly's, five women came together once a month to write and respond to each other's work for the purpose of reflective practice.

However, participants were not enthusiastic about impromptu writing; I was unable to motivate them and to facilitate this aspect of my research method. Reflecting on it, I now think that we bounced ideas without the pressure of writing something concrete. Perhaps we did not want to focus on writing during our group sessions because we had found a safe space where we could raise our voices and raise our concerns while trying to make sense of what we were presently witnessing in our Armenian community: a sense of indifference towards and even despair in the threatening loss of Western Armenian language and culture. Most likely, we wanted to concentrate on the present and not on the past. I'm certain that each of us had felt the responsibility of educating the community in things Armenian at one point or another and felt that we had not been successful. It also appears that we were consumed with our meta-narrative of

diasporization and resistance against assimilation and our own struggle not to lose our mother-tongue and, therefore, we neglected or we were conditioned to discount our micro-narratives, that is, our personal everyday life stories; and hence we focused on and enjoyed sharing collective memories.

Reflexive, Reflective, Responsive Rewriting: Writing for Discovery

> *We live our lives through texts. They may be read, or chanted, or experienced electronically, or come to us like the murmurings of our mothers, telling us what conventions demand. Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us all; they are what we must use to make new fictions, new narratives.*
> (Carolyn Heilbrun, 2002, p. 37)

Writing for discovery is the process of writing while attending to the particular, the mundane, and the transcendent in order to unravel thoughts, to untangle feelings, and to express ideas. Rebecca Luce-Kapler (2004) observes: "Writing attunes us to our possible selves as we contribute to our emerging pattern of experience" (p. 46). Writing connects us to our inner selves where murmurings and thunders of our past enliven us to discover new possibilities. Writing illuminates our footsteps into the future as our past and present experiences merge into a narrative of knowing and telling.

I write to tell my stories and to capture my observations reflexively. I write reflectively to acquire new knowledge and to discover new interpretations. I write to respond to my senses and to articulate what surrounds me. I write and rewrite in different styles in order to continue unravelling new meanings and refining my expressions. Borrowing from Anaïs Nin (1974), I write to experience life twice and to broaden my intellect. Nin explains this phenomenon,

> We also write to heighten our own awareness of life, we write to lure and enchant and console others . . . We write to taste life twice, in the moment, and in retrospection. . . . We write to be able to transcend our life, to reach beyond it. We write to teach ourselves to speak with others, to record the journey into the labyrinth. We write to expand our world, when we feel strangled, constricted, lonely. (pp. 149-150)

As beautiful and convincing as Nin's words are, the process of writing was not always easy as I struggled with articulating my thoughts and overcoming procrastination when writing this dissertation.

Journal Entry: What's Not Articulated
(At Reflective Café, October 2011)

***The autoethnographic voice**: "Why must I write today: Writing helps with thinking, sorting, understanding, creating, deconstructing, and rearticulating my thoughts. But doesn't talking also provide all the above? I often come up with a new idea when I hear myself talk. But, I don't like talking; I don't like the sound of my voice. Silence is good, but silence is boring and dull. So, let me write," I say and sit down in front of a blank screen. I type a title. My chair is not very comfortable. I get up for a pillow. Since I'm up let me refresh my tea, I think. Downstairs I go. I make tea and start fiddling around in the kitchen, put dirty dishes in the dishwasher or empty the dishwasher. Tea is ready. I start going up the stairs. It's now noon.*

Might as well eat something . . . An hour later, I'm in front of the computer. I type a few lines. I'm reminded of so and so saying something similar. Where was that? I open and shut books, binders, journals. Oh this is very nice, I should read it again. I sit in my reading chair. I'm consumed by new thoughts, new information. It's three o'clock, what did I write today? I might as well continue reading. Maybe I'll find inspiration in these pages. I find new thoughts, new expressions. I should annotate this book. I open a new document and type away a few quotes. I write my opinions.

I'm off track, on a tangent, at a new place in topic and thoughts. How did I get here, It's 5:30 p.m. I feel hungry. I should start dinner. Let me finish reading this chapter. I'm in my reading chair again.

"Arpinés, I'm home," I hear. "Are you writing? Sorry I shouldn't have yelled from down here." "It's okay, I was just reading," I respond. I get up and go down. It's 6 p.m. I start cooking.

Well, I've done some writing, perhaps it's not "real" writing, but this writing brings me closer to "official" writing. Doesn't it? It will be done when it's done, I console myself. Tomorrow is another day. Yes, there's always a tomorrow. I recall the sign in a store window in Beirut where Mom shopped for European materials for clothing. "Cash today or debit tomorrow." There's always a tomorrow. I should stop saying that.

Reflexive writing weaves my feelings and thoughts onto paper. I see my words and am able to engage with them visually, emotionally, and intellectually. Subsequently, I remember past events in more detail and gain new perspectives. Max van Manen (1997) explains: "As we commit ourselves to paper, we see ourselves mirrored in this text" (p. 127). This is not just a mirrored reflection but rather a penetration into my layered life. I look deep within and write reflexively while listening, smelling, feeling, reflecting. Reflective writing informs my epistemology: what I know, how I know, why I know the way I know, and what I believe is worth knowing. Laurel Richardson (1994) describes writing as a "dynamic, creative process," as well as a "method of inquiry," and "discovery" (p. 517).

Brenda Miller and Susan Paola (2004b) suggest writing is an embodied and tactile experience: "We experience the world through our senses; we must translate the experience into the language of the senses . . . yielding to the body and all the secrets it harbors as well" (p. 55). They suggest asking: "What kind of stories can [the] body tell? How does [the] body bear witness to the events of life? How has it been wounded? Or healed? How does [the] body connect [us] to the past and to the future?" (p. 55).

In my efforts to interest participants in writing for discovery and to trigger memory, I gave them a photocopy of Miller and Paola's (2004b) chapter, "Body of Memory" at our first visit. I had explained the process of using smell, taste, hearing, touch, and sight to promote remembering past events. I also encouraged participants to follow Tristine Rainer's (1998) suggestion to think about major stepping-stones of our lives when we think of our lives as story. Rainer explains: "The ability to find story in

your life depends upon cutting it into pieces, and the nature of the stories you find depends on how you slice them" (p. 49). What Rainer describes is dividing a lifespan into chunks of decades and recording the significant events, which I had tried. The exercise prompted unexpected details to arise, filling my memory gaps; I shared this experience with participants. I also gave participants a copy of Mary Bateson's *Composing a Life*—an autoethnography about five women—and described the ethnographic nature of the book and how it had inspired me to conduct my own research in a similar style. I had thought that the sources above could highlight my research aspirations and at the same time may inspire participants to begin thinking and writing about their own life experiences in education.

Journal Entry: A Dialogue
(February 2011)

The autoethnographer voice:

Arpi: *I believe that through writing we find ourselves or we find meaning in our stories. I was at a book display at a conference. One of the publishers there was interested in my work, "As soon as you finish your thesis, come and see me," he had said. On his counter, he had a pile of beautiful notebooks. I asked if I could have one. He said, "You can have more than one." I took seven thinking how nice it would be if I give notebooks to my participants and tell them the story of where they came from. I'm hoping that the notebooks will inspire writing.*

Lori: *Thank you. This is a wonderful gift.*

Arpi: My pleasure. Well, you can start writing by simply saying, I'm the daughter of. . . I'm the granddaughter of. Or you can say I'm the mother of. . . That would be another story. I'm the sister of. . . . That's another story. Earlier you mentioned that memory for you is related to learning. So maybe that could be a start—remembering life events and how you got here from where you were, and then you can do some kind of analysis of it or just leave it at that.

Lori: I agree with you. You know what? As interesting as it might sound, I find myself very boring. And I'm saying this because probably that's why there are so many interruptions in my life or maybe I don't want to go deeper. I don't know why, but I think I will follow your advice, really. I love the way you structured this—"I'm the sister or the daughter or the granddaughter of someone." Absolutely, which puts into question the self, the image of the self.

At each of the group sessions, Lori had her notebook with her. She continued taking notes and referring to her notebook when participating in conversations. I distributed the rest of the notebooks at our first group session and hoped to engage in writing during that session, but the conversations were lively and we ran out of time. However, I did remind participants to write at their own leisure and bring their work with them to our next session.

In our third group session, after our break, I suggested that we resume our session with ten minutes of writing. I first read a passage from Hoda Barakat (1998) and explained the importance of writing to me and my motivation to write:

> I write for myself and against myself, against my tribe and my memory, against my grandfather and my father so that I can bury them and remember them well. I write for the void, for forgetfulness, because I have chosen the proof of memory. I write because I am free, because I can never be free. Sometimes I write against what my eyes witness. And I write against my hand. (pp. 46-47)

After discussing the passage, I then narrated two of my own stories as examples:

> I told my son that the first thing I want to do in Armenia is to attend mass in an old church. His response was: "I'm not going to church. That's the last thing I want to do." Hearing those words, I felt a loss: I was experiencing his loss that he's losing part of his Armenianness (perhaps he never had it in the first place) and my loss that I wasn't able to keep him interested in that Armenianness.
>
> Second story: I recently was invited to attend a ceremony at a cemetery. A Black community had found its roots in Owen Sound, Ontario and had finally built a cemetery for those who lived and died in the area. During the ceremony, I suddenly felt very sad that I couldn't visit my ancestors' cemetery in Kessab, Syria. That's a huge loss for me. (September 2011)

After a few clarifications, I suggested that we write for ten minutes. I put extra papers and pens on the table. When I read disagreement on Nectar's face who was sitting across me, I said that I must try the method of writing for discovery with them because I had

proposed it in my research proposal and therefore I would like us to engage in it at least once. All were in agreement and so we wrote. We each wrote short segments and took turns describing what we had written and how we felt about writing. Here is a dialogue:

Nrani: Writing for me is a very solitary journey, but it's also a very reflective journey.

Lori: Writing is a little frightening for me, because it means that I have to organize my ideas . . . It's very therapeutic for me. Also, writing deepens my ideas . . .

Zabel: I don't have the habit of writing about myself or my feelings or my private thoughts. I write papers. I write articles, so it's completely different. . . . I started to write about something: *I regret that I didn't have the time or I didn't even feel the importance of speaking with my father one-on-one about his life, about what had happened in his life before I was born . . .*

Nectar: The loss that I felt is so complex . . . (September 2011).

Nectar had resisted writing at first and she had even said "No, no, I'm not going to" but when she had pushed herself, she was able to write non-stop. Nectar found that writing helped her remember details that otherwise were not going to be articulated. She told the group her story in great detail and read some passages from her writing. In retrospect, I regret not insisting on writing together at our two previous group sessions. I could now imagine all the things Zabel would have written about her relationship, or lack of it, with her father; all the details she could have remembered, filling in the gaps of memory that she repeatedly admitted to have experienced; all the "murmur" she could have heard that "runs below the surface" of her life (Miller & Paola, 2004b, p. 197). Frigga Haug (1999) advises: "Writing is a transgression of boundaries, and exploration of

new territory. It involves making public the events of our lives" (p. 36); "story-writing . . . allows the author to arrive at a perception of self capable of understanding lived femininity" (p. 43) when beginning to "disentangle the knots . . . we learn to recall and to reassess history" (p. 47).

I am convinced that through writing we can discover new ways of knowing, observing, and expressing. It was through writing that I was able to filter out the themes I explored in this dissertation: education, family, perseverance, nostalgia and food, loss and return, otherness, diaspora and exile, home and homeland, fragmented and displaced, Genocide and burden of history and connectivity. I created a spreadsheet where I inserted dialogues from my data under appropriate columns for each participant and each theme including dates and page numbers. Subsequently, I read my annotations again and selected quotations to validate my points for each theme and started writing segments. I listed words that were often used in discussions and wrote short notes and contemplations in order to unravel their meanings and/or the reasons for their repeated use. I revisited these sections of writings and reflected on my own interpretations and choice of words in the paragraphs. When reviewing my writing reflectively, I came to new understandings and to alternative forms of expression.

Reflective Journal Entry, 12 February 2011

***The observer voice**: Armine used the word "orphan" numerous times. When I asked her why she immigrated, she said "It was not that I wanted to come to Canada. I had established myself as a (if I can call it that) respected educator both in the Armenian*

community and the Lebanese University. But in this case, it was a choice made for families, for relations. Well, mind you, . . . both my parents were orphans of the Genocide, so we don't have uncles, cousins etc. We are the only people in the family from both sides, so finally I agreed to take the step." Arminé's brother and sister had immigrated to Canada before she had decided to join them. Having orphaned parents had united the family unconditionally. I think they appreciate the love and the support they receive from each other and they don't want to create an orphaned situation. Perhaps her parents' stories of living in orphanages and the hardships of making a life for themselves with no family support has left an indelible mark on Arminé's psyche.

The following are synonyms that I wrote down when unpacking the meaning of the word "orphan" after reading and rereading the transcribed interviews with Arminé:

Orphan = deprived, abandoned, rejected, survivor, strong family bond

Reflective Journal Entry, 25 May 2011

***The observer voice**: Hermine revealed to me that her father's side of the family had perished during the Genocide and that he had no relatives other than his wife's. On her mother's side, only women and girls survived because the men and the boys had been taken away and killed. She described herself as "a very cautious person" always trying to prevent bad things from happening. She says "I don't take big risks. . . . My parents always had the fears . . . We lived in Syria, a Muslim country. . . . Poor survivors, they had that fear, the fear of being separated." Like Arminé, Hermine also feels a bond with family members and like her parents, she is always cautious and doesn't take unnecessary risks. I'll add another synonym to describe "orphan": cautious.*

Orphan = deprived, abandoned, rejected, survivor, strong family bond, cautious

The awareness of listening and the "conscious attention" enhance my sense of perception and style of articulation (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 8). I respond not only to my own and to my participants' writing but to what informs that writing. Responsive writing creates a "dialogic relationship" with my data, that is, when I interpret and respond to my data through my own writing, I gain new insight (Luce-Kapler, 2002, p. 291). Luce-Kapler explains that we write to promote a "conversational relationship" and an "interpretive practice" with text (p. 296). Responsive writing facilitates the interaction and the intertextuality through reflexive-reflective writing and rewriting.

Reflective Journal Entry, 28 May 2011

The participant voice: *My Aunt Zaro would have been 86 today. I think about how alone she was for many years in Canada when her family was still living in Beirut. She immigrated in 1969 leaving behind parents and six siblings and nine nieces/nephews. The word "orphan" pops into my head! I think of my Grandmother Nouritza and how she must of felt having seven children and fifteen grandchildren but dying surrounded by only two children and five grandchildren as the rest lived oceans away. She must have felt abandoned, rejected, orphaned. In fact, she too was orphaned at age eight. All that was left of her family was her younger sister. She cried whenever she told us her story of*

surviving her mother and two older brothers. At the time of their deportation, her father was a sojourner in the United States who did not return until after WWI. "My brothers should have survived and not only my little sister and I," she would say. "My brothers would have rebuilt our house. They were strong and handsome. I would have had sisters-in-law, lots of nieces and nephews." My grandmother felt guilty for surviving the marches of death.

Orphan = deprived, abandoned, rejected, survivor, strong family bond, cautious, guilt ridden

I recall van Manen's (1997) words and understand that "responsive-reflective writing is the very activity of doing" research because it is through writing and re-writing that we uncover the essence of a phenomenon (p. 132). Richardson (1994) notes: "By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it" (p. 516). Rewriting helps unravel not only an experience but also the underlying reasons for examining that experience. My interpretations of the stories above grew out of reflective moments and reflexive engagements of writing and rewriting. A year later, as I am now writing this methodology section, I revisit the concept of "orphan."

Reflexive Responsive Rewriting

The autoethnographer voice: *Reading my interview transcripts again when trying to find dialogue about alienation, I come across Arminé's words when she described how she felt*

in her new community in Canada: "I felt a sort of cultural and intellectual bareness, emptiness around me" (February 2011). I sense that Arminé was feeling orphaned from her community because she is no longer as heavily involved as she was at one time. I reflect. I add another definition to my list:

Orphan = deprived, abandoned, rejected, survivor, strong family bond, cautious, guilt ridden, alien

I understood Arminé's feelings when I recalled my own experience of alienation. I felt orphaned at a conference when I was abandoned by colleagues as no one came to my presentation. I felt deprived of the support I needed from them. When we passed each other in the hallway, I was not asked how I was doing or what I was presenting. My so called "soft" life history research did not interest them. I was an orphan surrounded by "friends." Had I been silenced once again? Here's another synonym I could add to my list:

Orphan = deprived, abandoned, rejected, survivor, strong family bond, cautious, guilt ridden, alien, silenced

This was a silence that I had learned in a community that imposes a variety of censorships upon its members, such as to have politically correct language, to favour hard research (quantitative; psychoanalysis) over soft (qualitative; narrative). Judith Butler (1990) asserts that behaviour is "compelled by social sanction . . . through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time" (pp. 271, 274).

With Luce-Kapler (2004) I believe that "writing calls us to pay attention to the details, to the rhythms, and the shape of our living. We learn to notice the threads and hear the cadence in attending to the biological and phenomenological. Writing attunes us to our possible selves as we contribute to our emerging pattern of experience" (p. 46). Writing for discovery is writing reflexively from personal perspective and lived experience. It is writing reflectively and responsively while engaging in mindful observations, attentive listening, engaged interpretations, and multi-genre rewriting. It is the attuned reliving and the careful retelling of the details, the beats, and the shapes of experiences—an embodied writing.

Challenges in Writing

Interruptions arising out of my multiple roles as daughter, sister, wife, mother, and educator challenged the flow of my writing as I had to take time off to attend to my responsibilities. There were times when I could only keep journals, when I could only write short segments, and when I could not write at all. I often had reasons for not writing but I magnified these reasons into excuses for avoiding writing. I continued to convince myself that I was not ready, that ideas had not percolated long enough, that I was not focused, that I should read a few more pages. I procrastinated. I moved a few bookshelves out of my office thinking that the clutter of books was causing too much stimulation in front of my eyes and too much chatter in my brain. I organized the remaining books into categories and then sorted them into themes that emerged from my data. I took notes, made notes, annotated, engaged in self-dialogue and dialogical writing, composed paragraphs in my head, wrote autoethnographic sections. I

experimented with writing in various styles: autoethnographies, reflective journaling, free writing, essay writing, even poetry. I continued reading but reading with only one focus even when reading the newspaper: developing my dissertation topic. I surrounded myself with my brother Raffi's paintings that portray being an immigrant: men, women, and children wearing dull and dark rags, puzzled faces, heads turned away from onlookers, women standing together but walking away from each other in different directions. I discussed one of the paintings entitled "Immigrants" with Raffi. He explained that the three groups of people all going in one direction represent the three generations of Panossians who marched out of their homeland: grandparents during the Genocide, parents moving from Syria to Lebanon trying to find a peaceful country to rebuild a life, and us running from another war in the Middle East. "We're walking to a destination unknown hoping to find a settled and settling space," he philosophized.

The undulation of writing continued. I finally acknowledged my own process of writing when I remembered Neilsen's (1998) experience and found solace in her words:

> My love affair with words, like any love affair, is fraught with tension and passion. To begin writing, I do a dance I have . . . : I read, I tidy the house, I ponder, flirt with an approach and then, with a shrug, abandon it, pore over books and papers and leave them open on the floor, the desk, the bed. . . . I move across many floors of understanding, shadow-dancing with many theories, until the gestures, the nuances of these ideas become part of me, part of how my mind moves into words and the life they carry. . . . To write, I must wade into a textual ocean and disappear in order to appear. (pp. 180, 181)

From the moment I woke up until the moment when I finally fell asleep, I was consumed and embodied with the thought of my dissertation: cogitating, contemplating, unpacking, unravelling, analyzing, writing, rewriting. Rosemarie Anderson (2001) explains that "embodied writing brings the finely textured experience of the body to the art of writing [when] relaying human experience *from the inside out* and entwining in words our senses with the senses of the world" attuned to the living body and its habitat (p. 85). Embodied writers are attentive to and engaged with their environment; they remain present, observant, pensive, and reflective in their writing lives; they are aware of their "embodied knowing" (Luce-Kapler, 2004, p. 35); they listen to their intuitive bodies engaging mind, body, and soul. As an embodied writer, I was composing in harmony, finally aware of my own processes of writing. I was listening.

Writing autobiographically means writing reflectively with self-consciousness and awareness that personal experiences are actively reconstructed with multiple layers of the self being created, and that these re-articulated selves continue to be in constant flux with every telling and re-telling. Therefore, I come to my research with a mindset of not only searching for information but also locating myself in that information and expecting that what I find will change my outlook on my past, present, and future, as I expand and realign my interpretation, I experience a hermeneutic understanding—an expansive understanding. I did not research *about* but rather *with* participants: I was engaged with the topic and was responsive to new outcomes, always learning, always evolving. I did my best to honour life experiences and not just use them for my gain, recalling Professor Alice Schutz's repeated advice: "Honour rather than use."

Data Collection: Where and How

> *To put it simply, we must begin to tell the truth, in groups, to one another. Modern feminism began that way, and we have lost, through shame or fear of ridicule, that important collective phenomenon.* (Carolyn Heilbrun, 2002, p. 45)

Data collection took place from January to December 2011. The first set of interviews with each participant was conducted face-to-face and one-on-one, in their homes, offices, or in a café. Each was approximately three hours long. After the formalities of explaining my research focus and obtaining their consent for participation, I collected background information about their individual interests, immigration history, and general outlook on education and diasporan identity. I handed them the list of topics and questions that I had prepared, waited for them to read and then gave them the choice to begin with any of the themes (see Appendix E). After each interview, I left feeling encouraged and confident that I was embarking on an interesting journey.

Based on the personal information I had gathered during the first set of interviews, I decided that pairing the participants would be beneficial in gathering information more efficiently. In addition, I felt that participants would probably be able to assist each other in remembering past experiences. In my consent letter, I had mentioned that group work was part of my research design, and therefore I assumed that participants would not object to working together. In addition, they were acquainted with each other, whether from attending functions at Armenian centres or reading each other's published works. I paired Zabel and Nectar because they are more or less in the same age group, they volunteer in the same Armenian community in Montréal, though in different projects, and

they both have daughters who have been involved with Armenian youth. I was certain that they would have insights into the affairs of the Armenian community, which I was interested in knowing more about. At the same time, I hoped that pairing those with different educational backgrounds would generate interesting discussions, as Nectar is an artist and Zabel is a scholar. Finally, I was attempting to balance the group sizes because in Toronto, I had only two participants. Unfortunately, I was unable to arrange a group session with participants in Toronto because of their personal time scheduling and health challenges. Instead, I met them separately, each twice. Both participants shared with me their published works, which I use where appropriate in Chapters Two and Five (to maintain confidentiality, I cannot reference their work here).

My first group session was with Zabel and Nectar at Zabel's house in Montréal. The conversation was lively and I was content that I had tape-recorded nearly four hours of discussion. That evening I received an email from Nectar saying she wanted to opt for personal writing instead of participating in the second group discussion because she "found it difficult to complete any one of [my] questions" during the first group session (email correspondence, February 25, 2011). Nectar was not refusing to participate but wanted to contribute on her own terms: writing alone in order to give herself time to make sense of her feelings and her thoughts in an environment where she would be in full control. I am grateful for Nectar's substantial autoethnographic writing because it gave me a chance to explore the notion of writing for discovery. Furthermore, because of her thoughtful and lengthy responses, I had a better understanding of her life history, which in

turn contributed to exploring some of the details that I might have otherwise missed in our face-to-face conversations.

Within a few days of our correspondence, Nectar responded in writing to my list of questions and topics for discussions that I had left with her when I first interviewed her. In turn, I shared my stories and asked for a few clarifications about hers, which she promptly provided. Our written communication consisted of the telling and the retelling of stories which unlocked our memories and helped us unravel what was not yet articulated or had been forgotten or suppressed. Attentive and responsive writing assisted us in "excavating what was buried, amazing ourselves with what we [found] in our own and each others' memories" (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 10). Perhaps, the caveat here was the self-censoring or the "moral judgment over the 'I' . . . [that is] dominated by discourses that dictate our lives," such as learned beliefs in our socio-political environment (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 105). I wonder if we were mindful of the increased possibility of censoring our stories and performing for our audience in our written and on-demand communications. But after our correspondence, Nectar and I recognized the potential of reflective and responsive writing to help unravel our thoughts and discover fresh interpretations of our experiences and newly surfaced memories.

The second group session was again at Zabel's but this time Lori and Nrani joined us. Because I was not going to have another session with just Nectar and Zabel, I decided to experience the dynamic of a larger group, which in this case was a group of four. The dynamic worked well; we were at ease with each other and spoke candidly for about four hours. However, we did not engage in writing during the session. Our discussion

focused on our collective history rather than on personal memories, that is, we told Genocide-related inherited family stories, which required respectful listening. Not finding an appropriate moment to interrupt the flow of the spirited conversation, I decided to forgo my plan to write together at that session. The third session was with all participants in Montréal and was held at Nectar's house. Being the last group session, we feasted both intellectually and at the table. We talked, socialized, and ate together for about five hours. In addition, we also wrote for a short while and then discussed our responses (see above pp. 82-84).

In a group discussion, interpretations and judgments are inevitable and, therefore, the telling of particular stories may be in response or in reaction to a comment, in validation and in contradiction to an opinion, in confirmation or in discomfort of a feeling. When listening to and/or reading our stories, I reminded myself to attend to and be present for participants rather than being concerned about hearing what I thought was important for my research. I listened with openness to what was uttered and also to "the background and the half muted" (Back, 2007, p. 7), the unspoken; which is a self-censorship that our communities expect from us or a sensitivity to what can and cannot be discussed in public. I still remain sceptical and wonder if it was possible for me to be fully present when I was all consumed with producing a dissertation; when I was inhibited in the presence of accomplished women; when I feared that I was inhibiting as an observer; when I was conditioned and socialized to self-censor; when I had promised anonymity and confidentiality.

Listening to participants without spontaneously interpreting the discussion was a challenge but I reminded myself of Kathryn Anderson and Dana Jack's (1991) suggestions about being attentive to the story from the storyteller's point of view and listening to the "moral language" (p. 19), (judgments passed based on personal understanding and sensitivities), "meta statement[s]" (p. 21), (expressions such as "we failed our young generation" or "our leaders are clueless and administration is rudderless"), and "the logic of the narrative" (p. 22) (assumptions and interpretations on the researcher's part). An example here for my falling short on being attentive is Nectar's opting out of the second group discussion. Perhaps she was remembering events that were suppressed but did not feel this was a safe place to express them freely; perhaps when her storytelling was interrupted by responses from Zabel and me, she felt judged; perhaps she was into personal memories while Zabel and I were in the collective memory zone. Zabel had mentioned that her academic life involved quantitative research and her writing was never about her personal life; therefore exposing her personal life was new to her. Reflecting on what had happened, I should have paid attention to the narrator (Nectar) and been mindful of the ways in which she answered questions in order to gauge when to pry, when to respect privacy, and when to not interrupt, rather than interpreting her stories. At the time during the group discussion, I thought I was listening attentively, probing with sensitivity in order, first not to offend, second to make sense of both the stories and the telling of the stories. I was mostly mindful of what was absent or contradictory, what needed to be clarified or retold. I made notes to follow up on these issues.

Journal Entry, 25 February 2011

The observer voice: *Returning from Montréal after group discussion one: I arrive in the VIA Lounge one hour early. I get comfortable on the low back couch and start journaling. I'm concerned about Nectar's email last night that she does not think she had the chance to express herself fully and so, she was uncomfortable in the group.*

At ten o'clock, a large group of businessmen come in. I also notice a young couple with a child in a stroller. I imagine the noise in the train, which I'm told is sold out, so no chance of changing seats. For now, the men are loud; the child is quiet.

At 10:50 we board; 10:55 the train moves forward as scheduled. The group of businessmen is not in this coach. The child is not here either. I'm in luck.

I'm sitting next to a large person. He helps me put my bag in the overhead bin. Nice! He asks my destination, confirms his to be Toronto. I say I'm a quiet passenger; he claims to be quiet also and puts on his headset that's already hanging around his neck. I take my notebook out and start writing.

It's snowing. Both ground and air are shimmering in white stardust powder under the streetlights. We're zooming ahead—city, rail tracks, suburbs, new housing developments (does cousin René live in one of those?)—bare trees, wasteland, electrical poles. We're detached; we're connected; we're in our small worlds sharing space.

I think about Nectar's email and her request to continue participating through writing. I recall my first reaction last night when I read the email: "Great, someone

wants to write!" Now, I'm concerned. What did I do wrong? Why is she feeling uncomfortable in the group? I read the email again. She finds group "meetings" not useful. I wonder why the word "meetings" is in quotes?—indicating disapproval, perhaps! Meeting each other half-way! I should be more concerned about her feelings that "we're judging, assuming, interrupting and comparing each other's stories." I must listen to the tape very carefully. I wish I had video-recorded the session so that I could see if I had missed something in our body language. I had assumed that participants would either not be very sensitive towards one another's idiosyncrasies or just the opposite, be intrigued by their diversity. I had selected participants in Montréal particularly because they were exceptional individuals with diverse political and educational backgrounds: two scholars, one artist, one community activist, who are affiliated with the two major Armenian institutions, ARS and AGBU. [5]

Data Analysis: Interviews, Group Discussions, and Writing

Interviews, group discussions, and writing for discovery are methods I employed in my research (see Appendix F for a detailed plan). I tape-recorded all sessions and had them transcribed verbatim by a professional. I listened to the interviews twice and made

[5] Armenian Relief Society was founded in 1910 in New York. It started as a Red Cross organization/affiliate but evolved into a socio-political organization. ARS is linked to Western Armenian organizations and the Cilician Orthodox Church headquartered in Beirut; Armenian General Benevolent Union was established in 1906 in Cairo, moved to Paris in 1921, and then to New York in 1942. AGBU promotes educational and cultural projects. It is linked to the Echmiadzin Orthodox Armenian Church in Armenia, which has the status of The Church of all Armenians (Amenahayotz Yegueghetsi or *Մայր Տաճար Սուրբ Էջմիածին*).

the necessary adjustments to the transcripts to correct unclear words that were foreign to the transcriber. I then translated almost all segments that were uttered in the Armenian language. When unravelling the transcriptions, following the advice of Anderson and Jack (1991), I teased out particular details that I had not closely observed during the interviews and group sessions:

> The spontaneous exchange within an interview offers possibilities of freedom and flexibility for researchers and narrators alike; . . . taped interviews preserve a living interchange for present and future use; we can rummage through interviews as we do through an old attic—probing, comparing, checking insights, finding new treasures the third time through, then arranging and carefully documenting our results. (p. 11)

I kept in mind the approach of Davies and Gannon (2006) to successful collective memory workshops, where they discovered that "collective biography, as a research practice, . . . enables us to begin to unravel collectively . . . our ways of understanding lived experiences . . . and to imagine how they might be constituted otherwise" (p. 15). In our group discussions, we encouraged each other in remembering; we engaged in lively and deep discussions; and we also had a period of writing for discovery. One-on-one interviews and group sessions took three to five hours each, during which time we selected specific themes to discuss from the list I had prepared, and/or commented on short passages from a range of authors I had read out at the beginning of the sessions, and/or referred to the communication we had prior to the sessions. Throughout, we all probed for details when necessary.

The interview techniques, which I had written on the cover of my notebook in order to remind myself during the conversations, were as follows:

- Listen attentively
- Note the flag expressions and trigger words
- Be attuned to what's absent
- Go with the flow and follow the lead when necessary
- Have a list of questions to fall back on
- Be alert in reading between the lines, recognize gaps and contradictions

I had not intended to pay attention to culinary activities. But at each of our sessions, except when I met Arminé at a public library, food was part of our socializing. In retrospect, food provided an added comfort and created a safe sharing space.

Journal Entry, 11 May 2011

The observer voice: *I dressed in navy blue pants, a royal blue top and a navy/yellow patterned shirt. Looked in the mirror and thought: why in blues? No I don't have the blues. I cannot have the blues today, I decided . . . wore the necklace with Armenian ornamental motif that I had purchased in Montréal last summer from an Armenian merchant on the street. Need the extra Armenianness today. This could be my good-luck charm, I laughed thinking that I don't believe in superstitions. Don't I?*

At 10:20 my brother Razmik, with whom I stayed whenever I was in Montréal, drove me to Zabel's. Razmik carried one of my bags in and as we entered, he placed it by

the door and said: "Research delivery." We laughed. Razmik left promising to pick me up when we were done. Zabel and I sat in the living room for about a half hour until Nrani and Lori arrived (Nectar could not join us this time).

Zabel guided us to the dining room and offered tea and juice. I asked for water. She insisted that I sit at the head of the oval table. I did but I moved the chair slightly to the right so that I wasn't at the head of the table. I felt that I shouldn't come across as one who's taking control or intends to lead the group, even though I was and to my relief, Zabel accommodated me. I was trying to create a comfortable/safe space by appearing modest. I was also feeling that I was the inexperienced one in the presence of seasoned researchers who between them had already completed three dissertations and numerous research projects in the arts and the social sciences. When my computer was ready, I said that we could begin. Nrani suggested that I test a recording. "I almost was going to bring my recorder with me," she confessed. I thanked her for her thoughtfulness and concern and assured her that I have an extra recorder in my bag. I recorded 30 seconds of conversations, tested it and then reset for recording: "Ready," I said, "Please be gentle with the transcriber; I hope that we'll talk mainly in English." "Some things can only be said in Armenian," Nrani said. In agreement, we all laughed.

Zabel was reading what appeared to be my e-mail that I had sent a week prior, suggesting some discussion themes that had emerged from reading the previous interviews and the first group session. She started the conversation by reading the first theme: Memory: official, national, family, individual, and newly awakened. She picked

family memory and introduced herself as being the fifth child and the daughter of an uneducated mother.

We broke for lunch at around 1 pm. Zabel had a fridge full of Middle Eastern finger foods and tabouleh salad. "A trip to Adonis?" someone said. "Yeah!" She offered to open the wine bottle that Nrani and Lori had brought, but no one wanted to drink. We drank sparkling water. For dessert, there were grapes and marzipan. Zabel poured all of Razmik's nicely layered jar of nuts and dried fruits that I had brought on a tray and left it in the centre of the table so that we nibble throughout the rest of the afternoon. Food for thought! Communal eating, sharing food the old fashioned way with a gracious and generous host; at the same time, sharing thoughts, intimate thoughts. During lunch, we had lighter conversations and also caught up on community gossip. I regret not tape-recording the lunch break but made a mental note to do so next time.

"Ethnic food" brings diasporan people together. It defines and represents them as different from the mainstream. "Ethnic food" is a symbol of both what is lost and what is gained: a homeland left behind, a hostland providing comfort. David Sutton (2001) claims that "food is about identity creation and maintenance . . . Food is central to the generation of social and sensual memories" (pp. 5, 65). Hilary Funnell (2004) confirms that "food as a language . . . is governed by a collective or a group of people who follow its rules, taboos, and traditions. Consumption of food is a personal choice that is influenced by a connection to a culture and a group of people. It is a means of articulating

identities" (p. 232). Diasporans connect through "ethnic food" and speak a mother-tongue through food. For example, in an ethnic food store, without interlocution, we speak the language of *home*, while pushing our carts and filling them with expensive imported products from the Middle East. There, we come together as a community because we understand, or claim to understand, each other's need to be in that particular space where the display of products, the smell of baked bread, and shelves of familiar foods take us to an imaginary trip *back home*, wherever that may be. We befriend the shopkeeper because we respect him/her for understanding our need to resist assimilation, even if it is for a short time, and for offering us a memory, a taste, a corner from *home*, thus easing our nostalgia. We talk to total strangers as if they are friends but we give scolding looks to those who do not speak the mother-tongue. An ethnic food store offers the best of the two worlds we live in: a simulation of a home lost in the comfort of a home gained. Funnell confirms: "Food serves as both a route back to the old culture and a means of reinventing oneself in the new. . . . Eventually, exiles and their food assume a hybrid identity that is both more exotic than the host culture and less 'authentic' than the original" (p. 241).

Food brings us closer to our "roots" and often connects us to our heritage and unites us with our parents/grandparents. Here are a few excerpts from the writings of Armenian women for whom food is a declaration of their culture:

> In its shadow two thousand years ago, a woman prepared for the New Year, which was then celebrated in the spring, by gathering the fruits of the four seasons: wheat, which she boiled in plenty of water; apricots and raisins, which she added

> toward the end of the long hours of preparation; and finally almonds or pomegranates, with which she made a mandala over the surface of her sweet, thick pudding. This she took, along with the other women who had all made the same *anoushabour* [Armenian Christmas pudding. See Appendix G for a recipe], to the great communal feast. She taught her daughter how to make the pudding, who taught her daughter, who taught hers, and so on down the ages until my mother taught me. (Anais Salibian, 1997, p. 299)

The following is a section of a poem by Arlene Vosky Avakian:

> CONNECTIONS II
> I leaf through the splattered pages of my Armenian cookbook
> looking for something special.
> Reading the transliterated recipe titles in the words of my first language,
> I hear my grandmother's voice say the words I now barely understand.
> I mouth the words and my heart pounds. (Cited in D. Kherdian, 2007, p. 451)

On the other hand food could also be a point of tension when it is associated with feelings of nostalgia, pain, and loss—loss of human life, loss of a "home/homeland." Arpine Konyalian Grenier (1992) writes,

> APRIL IS MAD
> The children of Priam weep
> real soldiers have crawled away
> the best man rattles in the street
> snatches my throat
> I run away
> crowds run me silently

I kick Armenian hands
preparing food I eat
hurriedly and hate

Zabel's and Nectar's hospitality and reciprocal generosity of providing food for the group is witness to the concept that food is about identity creation, renegotiation, maintenance, as well as rejection (Avakian, 1997). Zabel and Nectar have created a space where they defined their identities as diasporan Armenians, a space where they confirmed their willingness and capacity to continue maintaining that identity as best as they can, a space where they demonstrated the continuity of the culture of food and of inherited nurturing characteristics of grandmothers and mothers, even if they have personalized or modified some of the traditional recipes because of taste or availability of ingredients.

Moreover, lunches during our group discussions were part of engaging in collective memory. We compared tastes and textures of foods from our ethnic ancestral backgrounds that varied based on the geographical locales our grandparents came from: Adana, Kessab, Kharpert, Khasgal, Marash, Palu, Yosghat, all in historic Western Armenia. As we ate, we felt closer to each other, our eyes hungry and our taste buds enticed. We recalled when and where we had had similar foods. We exchanged recipes (see Appendix G). For a short time, we ignored the world outside and the pressing issues we had discussed earlier. Together we were in an oasis filled with sustenance. Our sense of smell, sight, and taste created a synesthesia that fed our memory and quenched our nostalgia. Pieces of a homeland always remain not only in the immigrant's heart but also in her kitchen cupboard.

Assumptions and Limitations

There is no doubt that as I collected data, I had certain expectations and assumptions. Because I was conducting life history research, I expected to hear extensive stories about life in *exile*, discomforts of being an *other* in the Canadian mainstream, *struggles* with multiple identities, *resistance* to interruptions and life changes. To my surprise, participants embraced challenges and self-directed our lives through positive attitudes and with great courage. Interruptions did not deter us but rather offered us the possibility of redirecting our lives and striving to achieve new goals and to fulfill new dreams.

I assumed that participants would welcome the chance of writing for discovery at our group sessions; instead, they preferred oral discussions. However, all participants contributed with their written work: Nectar's autoethnographic written responses and Hermine's short story that she had written before we met, were an important part of my data (see "I am ING" in Chapter 5). I also utilized the published works of Arminé, Nrani, and Zabel as supplementary resources in sections where I discuss diaspora issues (to maintain confidentiality, I cannot reference their work here). I believe that using written works made available to me by participants contributed to the organic growth of my data, or what Lorri Neilsen (1998) calls the "naturalistic inquiries [that] focus upon the multiple realities, like the layers of an onion, nest within or complement one another. Each layer provides a different perspective of reality, . . . diverge into many forms, multiple truths" (p. 55). In other words, I welcomed the open-ended process of my research which steered our thoughts into new directions. For example, my plan was to

compile stories mainly about education, as I had intended to explore the ways in which higher education had shaped participants' identity. But the bulk of our conversations centred around our collective history and how Genocide continues to shape our identity as diasporan Armenian women, which I discuss in Chapter 4.

Self-censoring was a limitation in this research. As semi-public figures, we are concerned about maintaining a certain image; we are politically correct, culturally sensitive, and linguistically eloquent. I am certain that intentionally or unintentionally we took the necessary measures not to become the next victims of community gossip. Participants in Montréal were acquaintances, so were participants in Toronto. Therefore, there may have been a guardedness not to disappoint and/or offend one another. Perhaps self-censorship was one of the main reasons that we did not engage in impromptu writing knowing that what was in print could not be easily retracted. Within the Armenian community, we are vigilant about how we communicate, as we do not want to appear vociferous critics of the national Armenian cause—lobbying against Genocide denial—or to be labelled as disturbers of community cohesion. But rather, most of us prefer being model diasporan Armenian women who support our leaders and encourage our youth to do so as well.

Even though interviews and group discussions are vital research tools, I must acknowledge that self-censorship in autobiographical writing can be a limiting factor (Lewis, 1993; Randall & Kenyon, 2001; Sharkey, 2004). Participants were open and frank in discussing topics that are commonly talked about in the community but, within the group, they were cautious about revealing personal and intimate stories of their

everyday life. For example, after our first group session, Zabel shared a very personal story with me that had given her strength to persevere and succeed in life. I was honoured by her trust in me but also concerned about discussing a story that she had not shared and did not want to share with other group members at that time. In group sessions, we exercised caution in revealing details of our personal lives. But at the same time, we drew strength from each other while exposing certain deficiencies in our communities such as what we perceived to be the "odd" or "inconceivable" (discussed in Chapter 4 and 5); perhaps it was safe for us to verbalize collective complaints in the hopes of instigating change.

Another possible limitation was the way I introduced discussion topics. At our first one-on-one visit, I gave each participant a list of topics and open-ended questions that I was interested in exploring. Also, before group sessions, I communicated possible topics of discussions. These were approaches to stimulate deep thinking and responses. In so doing, I risked influencing their choices of topics. Furthermore, asking direct questions implied that there should be answers to my questions and that my topics were worth exploring. Was I imposing my voice? Perhaps I was. After all, I was both the researcher and a participant. On the other hand, I tried to be mindful not to exercise control over the group discussions but to let the others steer conversations.

A more personal limitation I experienced when working on my own was health and age related. For the better part of my life, I have worked behind a desk reading and computing. Therefore, I suffer from wrist, lower back, and neck pains. I can no longer sit and work more than a half hour at a time. This meant that I had to interrupt my

writing, stand up, and walk around, and when distracted, attend to house chores. I cannot help but wonder about the effects of these distractions on my thinking and productivity. Then again, I forget the complexity of trying to maintain a harmonious life. I join Neilsen (1998) and say: "And in the middle is life" (p. 168).

Additional Remarks

The process of gathering data, transcribing, listening to tape-recorded interviews and group sessions, unraveling autoethnographic text, narrating theory and practice was arduous but gratifying. During the writing period of this dissertation, I faced countless interruptions and challenges that I feel was able to overcome with determination and persistence, characteristics that are shared by all seven women in this research.

Diasporan life is an improvised life whereby interruptions lead to detours and detours to new vistas, new possibilities, new identities. Together, participants engaged in a discourse of remembering and making sense of our (up)rooted lives. Our life narratives highlighted our multiple, shifting, and renegotiated identities.

Writing and rewriting transformed our lived experiences into textual expressions, and the text became a reflexive reliving and a responsive meaning-making in subjective ways. It was through critical reflection that I unravelled my data and captured the essence of life as diasporan Armenians in Canada. Using life history research as methodology and open-ended discussions and a variety of writing styles as methods, I tried to make sense of participants' historicized and socialized identities that continue to be in flux.

Participants' voices are audible in this dissertation, as I have quoted their dialogue verbatim, even though I reconstructed and interpreted the stories for the purpose of using them where appropriate in this research project. This autoethnography is Arminé's, Hermine's, Lori's, Nectar's, Nrani's, Zabel's, and Arpi's stories lived and stories told.

I will end this chapter with two poems as a segue to my next chapter that explores diaspora issues:

Even if we put things in the best lights, —
We are tourists in our own country,
Guests in our own homes.
A river over which we rule one bank,
A mountain which appears only from a distance,
An unpeopled land,
A landless people
Who like scattered beads cannot be reassembled.
(Gevorg Emin (1918-1998), *Akh, Ays Masise,* in Bobelian, 2009, p. 86)

EXILE
Once more an exile, an exile for all living memory.
Stuck to my genes, this state of mind,
Like colour of hair, skin, mode and manner.
forms and integral part of my being. . . other.
No civil wars, deportation, forceful displacements for me
Handed down through generations, not racial though generic.
This innate property is my dowry at birth.
I am a *native* exile.
(Nora Armani, in Ara Sarafian, 2005, p. 87)

CHAPTER FOUR: LIVES INTERRUPTED, (UP)ROOTED, (RE)NEGOTIATED

Uprooted from our birthplaces
Displaced from our Middle Eastern cultures
Disconnected from our homelands
Drifting in diaspora—an unsettled state of belonging; an unsettling feeling of being.
One history, two cultures, three languages.
Four train trips, five group sessions, six one-to-one meetings.
Seven participants, seven narratives, and seven ways of telling.
Seven Armenian women
Seven life histories
Steady and strong
Steadfast and stubborn.
Unrelenting, unwavering, determined, empowered.
(Journal Entry, February 2011)

This chapter is about participants' narratives of their diasporic positions, concerns for community, and contribution to research. The themes I address here are: the complexities of diasporan life, feelings of exile and displacement, frustrations with loss and interruptions, fear of deracination and disconnectedness, experiences of fragmented and burdened lives.

Our identity as diasporan Armenians is what my participants and I have in common. We are *spyourkahye* (diasporan Armenian) by birth: we were born outside the Republic of Armenia to parents who were survivors or children of survivors of the 1915 Genocide. In our first conversation, we all identified ourselves as such. We, in turn, are the survivors of recent wars in the Middle East (1967-1990). Therefore, it is safe to say that the point of reference of our identity is our history—history of trauma, catastrophe, deportation, uprootednes, displacement, immigration. We reflect on the traumatic

experiences of our grandparents and parents and tell their/our stories once again, reconstructing memory and history in our attempt to find meaning as we infuse inherited stories with those of our own, for we too witnessed the violence of war. We take comfort in talking about the past and draw strength from sharing our family histories. We find parallels in our stories and live and relive each other's pain. As diasporan Armenian, we share a discourse, a vision, an imagined life in historic Armenia. We visualize our ancestors around Mount Ararat that stands majestic but distant, real but unreachable, hidden behind political mist and clouds, deep in our imagination and psyche.

In the following pages, I will explore reasons why my participants self-identify as historicized, ethnicized, marginalized, fragmented, othered, and nostalgia ridden; burdened but also liberated, uprooted as well as rooted, unsettled but also settled, multilingual and multilocal, that is, diasporized. It is this complexity of our diasporan identity that challenges us and therefore fuels our strength and our courage to persist in continuing to negotiate new spaces in our respective communities. We believe in *surgite*, (Latin for *push on*). *Haratch*! we command (Armenian for *onward*).

***The autoethnographer voice**: I start a new page. Write the outline of Chapter 4. I lean back in my chair and contemplate. Outside, the maple trees are bare of their colourful fall leaves. I return my gaze to the blank screen. I position my fingers over my keyboard and wait. Where should I start? What should I write? I'm overwhelmed. I have binders and binders of transcripts and annotations spread out on my tables. I've been contemplating nine themes to write about; they are sorted and ready to be transferred*

onto my screen. But which one do I start with? I look around my room for inspiration. I stare at my wall of art—human figures, both colourful and monochrome, in abstract and in clear form. Faceless; they are all faceless or their faces are turned away from the viewer. The only clear face I see is that of Saraswati, goddess of knowledge and wisdom, on a postcard I received years ago from someone in India. Help! I implore the goddess. Like the faceless women on the wall of my study, I feel as if I lack facial features to express my ambivalence of living a hybrid life, of being disconnected from an imagined homeland, of experiencing displacement in a newly adopted environment. I am often uncertain and unclear about my identity. I drift, I face interruptions, I take detours, I renegotiate my identity, I survive. I live with the hope that one day my "facial features" will appear clearly; in other words, I will understand and reconcile with the ambivalence of my identity.

Dynamics of Diaspora

> *On an empowered day, I describe myself as a diaspora(s) daughter with multiple migratory and ancestral reference points. . . . On a disempowered day, I am a nationless nomad who wanders from destination to destination in search of a singular site to name as home.* (Jayne Ifekwunigwe, 2003, p. 196)

Identities are socially constructed and as such are always in flux. Place, time, and personal experiences change and create new discourses that we live by. However, we do feel the need to return to or arrive at a space of comfort and of safety, real or imaginary, that we can call "home." Diaspora is the home away from "home," a homeland outside the lost "homeland."

I use the concept of *diaspora* as a framework to understand and theorize participants' stories of historicity, ethnicity, uprootedness, and multilocality. Although scholars have not yet agreed on a "diaspora theory," they do refer to "diaspora" as an approach, a conceptual model, a sociological category, a phenomenon, conditions, or categories. Razmik Panossian explains:

> Diaspora is not a theory *per se*. The idea is too wide, varied and multidimensional to have the tightness or coherence of one theory. The postmoderns have one approach to diaspora; traditionalists have another, etc. [Professor] Khachig Tölölyan steadfastly refuses to define it, saying it is impossible to come up with one definition that is acceptable to the various schools and disciplines that use the concept. (Personal conversation, November 2012)

What is diaspora? Deriving from a Greek word *diaspeirein*, diaspora means scattering of seeds, dispersion of people (Tölölyan, 1991). The term refers to the voluntary or forced movement of people from one location to another who maintain actual or imaginary connections with their country of origin (see Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion).

According to Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (2003), "Diaspora . . . speaks to diverse groups of displaced persons and communities moving across the globe" (p. 2). However, the experience of diaspora is not simply a relocation. It is a complex political and social construct with conflicting dynamics and multiple actors. In the last twenty years, diaspora scholars have expanded the term and continue to introduce new ways of understanding it. They all seem to agree that diasporans, as a community, must be actively connected to a minimum of two destinations; they must have a relationship with

an actual or imagined homeland; they must self-identify as diasporans. To this, William Safran (2003) adds that diasporan communities maintain a unique identity in their hostland; Tölölyan (1991, 1996) introduces and elaborates on transnational diasporas; Robin Cohen (1997) illustrates differences between victim diasporas (forced migration), labour diasporas (migration in pursuit of work; slavery), trade diasporas (migration in pursuit of commerce), and cultural diasporas (culture rather than land/country as the focal point of identity); Gabriel Sheffer (2006) elaborates on ethno-national diasporas. Panossian (2006) talks about a space of multi-local and subjective belonging. In the Canadian context, Rima Berns-McGown (2008) insists that diaspora is "a place of connections," in particular, "diaspora is primarily a space of the imagination" (pp. 6-7). She explains:

> A definition of diaspora must allow for change in the identity of the diasporic community and its members—shifts that allow for the blurring of boundaries and for the complexity of multiple senses of "belonging" and of multiple ideas of "home". . . . To be in diaspora is to perceive oneself as *linked to multiple places* and to *hold a complex identity* that balances one's understanding of those places and the way one fits into each of them. . . . Diaspora, then, is best defined as *a space of connections*—connections in two dimensions, to be precise. The first is the tension between elsewhere—let's call it the "mythic" homeland, and here—the adoptive country. The second lies in the connection to the wider—mainstream (emphasis added). (pp. 6-7)

It is in this framework that I understand my participants' identity as diasporan Armenians in Canada: a belonging that is multilocal, complex, and fluid. In our group discussions, we talked about blurred boundaries between cultures, a sense of belonging to multiple or no place at all, the complexity of defining identities, and connections and responsibilities to multiple places. For us, diaspora is a dynamic place where we adapt and resist norms in the mainstream, accommodate and negotiate ways of being. We have established connections with multiple communities in Montréal, Toronto, and Armenia. We have connections with mainstream and Armenian institutions. In addition we keep personal and professional links with institutions in the Republic of Armenia. For example, Hermine, who emigrated from Syria to Canada in the late 1960s, felt the need to connect with other Armenians in order to organize the then very small diaspora in Ontario. She started Armenian summer schools for children and youth in St. Catharines and then in Toronto.[1] She was actively involved in the planning stages of building an Armenian church, a community centre, and a day school in Toronto. In addition, she maintained close connections with organizations and communities in Armenia and arranged guided trips to both present day and historic Armenia in order to sustain the Armenian community's[2] relationship with a "homeland." Hermine talks about her experience of community development:

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[1]Hermine is not concerned that the information in this paragraph may reveal her identity (personal conversation, 21 June 2013).

[2] I use the word *community* in its loose sense: association of people with common interests. It is not my intention to represent the Armenian community as a unified body of people.

> When hundreds and then thousands of people started coming from Lebanon and Syria and Egypt and everywhere else, because of the economic situations and the wars going on in the Middle East, we decided that we should have a community centre, and we opened the community centre. We were involved in everything, it was the same group that was doing everything. We were young, we were energetic, we were determined that we're going to keep our heritage and we were also supported by government policies. . . . We had the churches, we had the schools, we had the community centres back home, we had to build the same here, and we managed to do it. I'm so proud that we have done this, and for the coming generations it will be theirs. (May 2011)

As a diasporan, Hermine has maintained relationships with fellow Armenians and with her homeland and hostland. She is comfortable in her hyphenated identity as an Armenian-Canadian. Hermine's diasporan identity is *ethnopatriotic*, a term used by Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill (2005) that refers to fostering a deep connection with Armenia, maintaining an ethnic identity, and committed to Canada (see Chapter 2). Hermine lives a dual loyalty: Canada is her live-in homeland and Armenia is her spiritual land and fatherland.

Similarly, Lori recognized the need to establish an organization to assist newcomers from the Middle East that would help ease their integration into both the mainstream and Armenian communities. For more than twenty years, she has mobilized community members to help Armenian immigrants establish themselves in Montréal. She says that her involvement in the Armenian community began when she co-founded an

humanitarian agency. As a consultant and a volunteer in several NGOs, Lori's connections and relationships with multiple communities have defined and refined her own identity. With humour she says: "I think I've become a real Canadian—Quebecoise. [hesitation] I feel that I'm more Quebecoise. But at the same time, I feel that I'm not a Quebecoise, but I'm not a Canadian either. I'm all that, and I'm an Armenian. . . . I live in two worlds, two cultures, two realities" (February 2011; May 2011). Lori's formal ties with multiple locations and communities, her need to maintain a relationship with her fellow Armenians, and her ambivalence about her fluid identity make her an active diasporan, one who has multilocal connections and commitments.

Zabel had no hesitation in identifying herself as a diasporan Armenian. When I asked her "Where's your homeland," she replied: "When diasporic you have many homelands, not one homeland" (February 2011). She then explained that culture and art are what keep her Armenian and that she finds comfort and continuity in an old Armenian church. Zabel's relationship with Armenia and her Armenian community in Canada is through the arts, through research in history and geography, through attending cultural events at the Armenian Centre, and through assisting the Armenian school in her intellectual capacity. She points out that expressing "Armenianness is different for everyone" (September 2011).

Nectar too finds her Armenianness in the arts. She asserts that preparing Armenian children's books was her way of contributing to the Armenian community. In this process, she searched for connections that could bridge past and present Armenian art, in particular pre-Genocide art in Western Historic Armenia, much of which was

destroyed or lost through neglect at the hands of non-Armenians. Nectar mourns the loss of the art that could have flourished were it not for the interruption of deportations and Genocide.

For more than thirty years, Nectar has been active in the Armenian community and in university circles in Montréal and has played an important role in the development of the fine arts. She also maintains connections with Armenia, where she studied for a year and continues doing research with colleagues. With an active intellectual life and multiple connections with the Armenian and the mainstream communities, Nectar remains uncertain about her identity. She writes in her reflective response to my question to "Where is homeland?"

> I was a foreigner in Lebanon, and I am a foreigner here in Montréal. . . . I do believe that for a group of people or a nation, the land is of utmost importance for cultural identity or continuance. Without a land the group is like a boat without a shore to anchor. That is probably why we, as Armenians, have no firm grasp of our cultural identity. Here lies my dualism: personal identity vs. communal identity. *Yergou tchap, yergou gshir*! (Two measurements, two scales) . . . Armenia, my spiritual homeland, has been for me a place to learn about my past, identity and culture through research. . . . I feel culturally uprooted and living a detachment from ancestral culture, with no firm foundation. (March 2011)

Like Nectar, Nrani has been very active in her community in Montréal, where she worked in the Armenian school system for a number of years. She studied in Armenia for several

years and maintains ongoing ties with friends and colleagues for her research. In her case, she is frustrated with both of these Armenian communities. Nrani explains:

> I lived in Armenia for three years [1985-1988]. And this is another reality that I have to be very honest about: 99% of my life and my connections in Armenia were with the local people and within the local milieu, but I was a privileged outsider. I did not have a Soviet passport for one. . . . I was a foreign student and a graduate student. . . . I think back about it as an experiment that I plunged myself into to understand myself and my Armenianness, and also seeing and understanding what being Armenian means in Armenia. . . . Being in Armenia was very important . . . for understanding our differences, understanding the difference between a diasporan Western Armenian and an Eastern Armenian, seeing the similarities, but also respecting the differences. (February 2011)

As a Western diasporan, Nrani had learned to admire Armenia before traveling there. Most Armenian diasporans have a projected concept of Armenia as a homeland where everything is "paradise like"; after all, the biblical paradise of Eden is located in Armenia, according to Armenians (Baliozian, 1975). A strong sentiment of returning to or visiting a heavenly homeland mesmerises most Armenian diasporans and that nostalgic tie sustains their struggle in hostlands. Armenia: Diaspora's Eden!

In Nrani's case, the imagined paradise became her real world for three years. She lived with the locals in non-paradise-like conditions; therefore, for her, Armenia is no longer imagined but real, no longer a heavenly but a developing country. Nrani's high expectations were crushed by the "harsh realities" of a state that had crumbled under

more than seventy years of Soviet rule, within which socio-economic and political situations infringed on personal freedoms. When she completed her studies in 1988, she returned to her then home in Beirut. She shared her disappointments with her father who suggested that she break the news softly to her grandfather. He had advised her: "It's important that you're telling me all this, and I understand your rage and your anger but be gentle with your grandfather when you say these things. . . . Don't break his concept of what his homeland means for him. You can't just cut everything from the root" (February 2011). This anecdote is testimony to the strong ties some diasporans forge with their imagined homeland. Can they afford to destroy that bridge, that golden bridge which connects them to their past, to their ancestors, to their lost lands, to their dreams of a "mythical return" (Bhabha, 1990)? Nevertheless, perhaps, Nrani has experienced what Ruth Behar (1996) describes: "the enormous sorrow of having too much country, the enormous rage of having nothing but *patria*, nothing but fatherland" (p. 142). I should point out here that not all diasporan Armenians had aspirations or were allowed to study or even visit Armenia when it was under Soviet rule. Only those who were sympathetic to communism had the chance to go to Armenia. In fact, Soviet Armenia did not issue visas (official invitations) to Armenians who were members or supporters of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnak Party) which vehemently opposed the Soviet regime (Panossian, 2006). Tölölyan (2000) points out that "conscious cultural territorialisation," (p. 108) "power, institutionalization, and the constraints they entail persist in [Armenian] diasporas" (p. 112).

Armenian diasporas are quite diverse. It is believed that "the sun never sets on the Armenian diaspora" and that each diaspora is "distinct and heterogeneous" (Tölölyan, 2000, p. 107). More than half the population of Armenians in the world trace their roots to ancestral lands outside the present Republic of Armenia. Here are some approximate numbers of Armenians in diasporas: 2,000,000 in Russia, 800,000 in the United States, 400,000 in Georgia, 250,000 in France, 150,000 in Ukraine, 105,000 in Lebanon, 100,000 in Iran, 70,000 in Syria, 60,000 in Argentina, 60,000 in Turkey, 40,000 in Canada, 30,000 in Australia; in the rest of the world, Armenian diasporas range from a handful of Armenians to 25,000 (Tölölyan, 2000). Even though each diaspora has developed its own ethno-cultural identity in very diverse host countries and often with contentious or competing leaderships (Mesrobian, 2000), what these diasporas have in common is their highly organized communities that share "multilocal and therefore properly diasporic values, discourses, ideologies, orientations, and practices . . . [that is] the notion of 'the nation-in-exile'" (Tölölyan, 2000, pp. 107-108).

Exiles Exiled in Exile

Nrani self-identifies as a "diasporan exile" because she feels that she now lives in a self-imposed exile. As a noun, the word "exile" can refer to a place of banishment or a condition of feeling banished. It is also used as a verb when one is, or a group of people are, forced to leave or voluntarily leave their homeland. Below are a few definitions of exile from those who are exiles and thus live in the ambivalence of multilocality and hybridity. Fadia Fakir (1998) illustrates her situation:

> In exile, you quickly develop a double vision. . . . You begin looking forward at the country of adoption while always looking back at the country of origin. You check your position at every junction. You adjust your mirrors, your sense of belonging, and drive on exploring a new map. You keep examining and re-examining your loyalties to both the still picture in the mind and the present living landscape. You no longer take things at face value. Doubt, dissent and questioning become part of your life. You become a hybrid, forever assessing, evaluating, accommodating. (p. 53)

André Aciman (1999) says that exiles are "in permanent transience" and that "they see double, feel double" (p. 13). Hilary Funnell (2004) observes: "Exiles can maintain their connection to the *langue* of their cultural community, thus emphasizing their otherness in the host culture and resisting assimilation; on the other hand, they can adopt the *langue* of the host culture in order to communicate within that society and reduce their otherness" (p. 231). Eva Hoffman (1989) adds that being in a situation of exile "involves dislocation, disorientation, self-division . . . uncertainty, displacement, fragmented identity" (p. 44). And finally, Edward Said (1999) writes: "Exile is predicated on the existence of, love for, and a real bond with one's native place; the universal truth of exile is not that one has lost that love or home, but that inherent in each is an unexpected, unwelcome loss" (p. 89), the loss of the possibility of returning to a home that is no longer "home" because physically it no longer exists, perhaps due to war and loss of land; or, home may no longer exist as remembered and imagined.

However, the condition of exile is not only a negative one. One who is exiled often finds comfort in her or his exile because it is where she or he examines new options, discovers new possibilities, and perhaps understands the complexities of the exilic life and the necessity of composing a new identity. Most exiles find creative ways of improving their lifestyle. Julia Kristeva, a Bulgarian living in Paris, says that "writing is impossible without some kind of exile" (cited in Lechte, 1990, p. 80). Reviewing Kristeva's work, John Lechte (1990) explains that along with the "pain of separation from her country of birth," Kristeva found "intellectual vitality and imaginativeness" in exile (p. 79). However, often conditions in exile are harsh, in particular for those who are considered suspect and are targets for discrimination, such as those who are identified as the "other" and thus forced to live on the "margin."

Nrani complicates the concept of exile further. With sadness and anger in her voice, she says that she has moved herself to the margins of the Armenian community:

> I kind of exiled myself from the community, because I do not want to be in the centre as it is [now]. So in that sense there is maybe a voluntary exile as well. Because there are many things that I find I have absolutely nothing in common with, apart from having an ethnic affinity or an ethnic origin that I share. But in terms of either political ideologies or political stances or lack thereof or rigid concepts of what Armenia is and what diaspora and diasporas are, or incredible concepts of what education is and should be, and what identity is and should be. These are things that I do not share. . . . I don't want to be in that centre, so I placed myself at the margin, but that margin is not a marginalized place. I do it

> voluntarily, and I separate myself. Maybe that's an exile as well, but not a negative one. (February 2011)

Nrani explains that her concept of "centre" doesn't coincide with a "traditional *core* or *centre* of what it means to be Armenian," therefore she is compelled to "reject that traditionalist ossified core" and chooses to build her *core,* her *centre* in the margin of the Armenian community (February 2011). She wrote the following to clarify her above comments:

> So it's all about a centralized vs. decentralized conceptualization, if you like, with the margin acting as an alternative space of becoming rather than the static core of being. As I wrote this I also thought of the Armenian word for margin: *lusantsk* which for me signifies exactly what I'm talking about in terms of alternative space of becoming—the roots in the compound word are *luys yev antsk* [light and passage], basically a place, a space where light comes in. So all these "marginal" spaces then become the loci of new sources of light, rejuvenation and becoming. (email correspondence, January 2013)

Completion of her dissertation, her ongoing research in diaspora issues, and publishing confirm that Nrani is indeed in a place of rejuvenation—a positive space of her own creation: a self-imposed exile at the margins of her Armenian community.

Lori is in agreement with Nrani: "Being in exile is a plus for me," she says and explains that working with non-Armenians, she is learning different ways of "being" in non-Armenian communities and she is hoping to implement her new ideas into the Armenian community but that she has not yet found a way (February 2011).

Exile from the Armenian community for Nrani is both imposed upon her and self-imposed. The imposition is that she is expected to think and act in a certain way in her Armenian community where the community leaders and educators follow mandates that they were indoctrinated in more than fifty years ago in Middle Eastern diasporas. As a result, the consensus in the community is that Armenians must work as a united team towards the Armenian Cause, the cause to right the injustices perpetrated upon the nation in the last century and to lobby against deniers of Genocide. Nrani and Lori feel that in the Armenian community there is no space for dialogue and that diverging opinions are discouraged. Personal opinions for change are not welcome if they are not focused on The Cause. Therefore, they choose to exile themselves to the margins of the Armenian community, from where they observe activities and identify needs and work towards them in their own way, from outside, from the mainstream. They are both affiliated with universities and continue doing research and working on community development projects.

A serendipitous moment: As I was finishing the above lines, I received an email announcing a book launch; Nrani was presenting her latest publication at the Armenian AGBU Centre in Montréal! It is a collaborative work with a young artist as well as youth and elders in the community, sponsored by an Armenian organization that Lori supports. The project is a first in its genre and quality! Elated by this news, I recalled Nrani's words at one of our group sessions: "We need to give voices and spaces and create that critical mass where we can have artists. . . . People like us need to open those channels for them [the youth]. Opening up that alternative of what community can mean and what the

heritage can mean" (May 2011). Nrani is convinced that art must be a pedagogical tool in diaspora and that we must think and live through the arts. I am reminded of what Mario Di Paolantonio (2011) conceptualizes in one of his articles and explains that artwork helps us engage our traumatic past rather than suppress our ambiguous memories.

> The potency of associations put in motion through the artwork's refusal to mean only one thing – the artwork's refusal to fill or foreclose ambiguity – allows us to bring to the fore, to externalize, the ambivalences and affective resonances of memories that do not easily settle into any straightforward accounting of familiarity. . . . Amid the elisions, gaps and connotative richness cut open by the work of art we find a point of entry, a moment when we must pause and think otherwise, for bearing with and working through the unruly sensuous perturbations and contradictions that arise when we face a difficult past. (p. 749)

Nrani has put her belief into practice. Finally a wish and a dream are realized in a beautiful book that intertwines narratives of the visual with the textual and brings together the youth and the elders of the Armenian community. It appears that Nrani and Lori have filled a gap, a paucity of literature for and by young Armenians. Sitting at the "periphery" of the Armenian community, they have identified a need, a need that mobilized them and located them in the "centre" of the Armenian community once again.

In its literal sense, "exile" refers to being banished from a homeland, or drifting like a nomad from one country to the other. But Nrani's and Lori's exile condition is a metaphorical one. As immigrants in Canada, they live in exile; as diasporans, they chose

to be exiles. Political situations in their countries of birth pushed them into exile, but also, their Armenian community in Montréal, intentionally or unintentionally, pushed them to live at its margins by not always appreciating or even by rejecting their contributions. In an email correspondence I had initiated with Nrani to ensure that my interpretations of certain transcribed passages were accurate, she elaborated:

> It's not the community that has "pushed" me to live at its margins. Accepting that would mean a lack of agency for me, which I don't accept at all. Nor do I feel in any way victimized. On the contrary, I see a lot of agency in what I have done, in exercising my choice of creating an alternative space for myself. Nor do I want to give the community that "power" of pushing anyone anywhere. It is the same sense that I play around with [with] the concept of exile here. There is of course the initial concept of exile that I do live naturally, ours is an exilic predicament. Yes, those are part of the inherited exile I live (Genocide, etc. etc.) and the second wave of exile having left behind the birthplace home. However, the self-imposed exile that I talk about here, is a different and actually a playful one, in which again I exercise agency. It's like turning the concept on its head and challenging the fact that exile can be only about a negative tension, dispossession, etc. But the "self-imposed" one is an attempt to add a new dimension, to challenge the status quo in the community not to accept traditionalist stances and create that alternative space. (personal correspondence, January 2013)

Nrani's self-imposed exile is a positive space where she is creative and productive, where she is not deprived of intellectual nourishment. It is a place where she is in control of her

needs to teach and to contribute to her community on her own terms. What my participants and I experience as diasporan Armenians is that we are different or even alien in our own Armenian communities. As we shape and reshape our lives, we use our exilic situations in positive and creative ways and our otherness as resistance against stagnation in our own Armenian community.

Others and Outsiders in Their Own Community

Being different, outsider, other, and alien are not the same conditions. One can be *different* but not an *other*; one can be an *other* but not an *alien*, one can be an *outsider* but not an *alien*. The term 'different' has a comparative tone but often not a discriminatory one within the Armenian community. A person who thinks differently and feels different can also be an *outsider* in her/his community but not necessarily be a rejected outsider. She can be one who looks or acts in her own unique way and nevertheless still be respected and accepted by other group members. For example, Nectar considers herself an "odd" person in her own Armenian community because her physical and intellectual dispositions are unlike the Armenians she associates with. Regardless, she is a well respected artist in her community. She expresses her feelings:

> I feel an outsider everywhere with the Armenian community. My wardrobe, my hairdo (or no-hairdo), absence of make-up, my diet . . . all the things that are on the surface are different. And if we talk about the way I think, I am not homophobic; I have students, parents of students, and many colleagues who are gay or lesbian. That is the other world I live in and accept. I work with all races,

> even Turks. All this makes me different ... someone "odd" and an "outsider." (March 2011)

Because of her beliefs, speech, and actions, Nectar considers herself different and even an outsider who behaves unlike women in her Armenian community, one who is an intellectual.

The Armenian community is diverse and even multicultural because Armenians have come to Canada from different diasporas around the world. Identifying with all Armenians in one's community is nearly impossible because Armenians in Canada have been shaped by the various previous diasporas they come from, whether that be Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey or elsewhere, thus carry with them their cultures, including political and social positions, of their previous diasporas. Recognizing the challenges in her leadership role, Arminé says:

> Everybody came from a different background, there was no uniformity as we used to have back in Lebanon. The way of thinking, the way of solving problems, the way of associating with people, so these were things I had to be very careful [about] treading on very delicate grounds sometimes. The thing that I missed a lot during those years were my community activities. . . . I felt a sort of cultural intellectual emptiness around me, because the centre here was not as lively as the centre back in Lebanon. (February 2011)

As a teacher and an administrator, dealing with parents from multiple geographical locales and addressing the needs of a community that was very diverse was a challenge for Arminé. Not only did she face disagreements among Armenians from different

backgrounds, but she also faced her own alienness in relation to those differences. Bernhard Waldenfels (2007) elaborates on the concept of alienness, "What is alien does not simply appear different, rather it arises from elsewhere. . . . Whoever or whatever appears as alien is never completely in place" (p. 7). Paraphrasing Husserl (1929), he further explains that what characterizes the experience of the other is "absence, distance or inaccessibility [that] constitute alienness or otherness" (p. 9). Arminé's community was alien to her because it was very different from the one where she grew up and worked during years past, in her previous diaspora in Beirut. She felt alien but continued her service by concentrating on helping children in an Armenian school. She focused on helping them develop their sense of belonging within a diverse Armenian community and a multicultural Canadian society, as well as understanding that they should respect rather than alienate those who are "different" from themselves.

Regardless of Arminé's efforts to address the complexity of "difference" and "otherness," diasporans in Canada often live at the margins of the mainstream and are categorized as "ethnics" or "minorities." Often, because of complexion and accent, people are considered *other* and looked down upon or admired as exotic others, aliens from away.

***The participant voice**: In a waiting room for a job interview: The coordinator asked me where I was from as soon as I introduced myself. Being used to that sort of reaction, I was not intimidated. I responded that I was an Armenian-Canadian born in Beirut. I was met with curious eyes and was coaxed to talk about the Middle East. Moreover, I had to*

politely endure her gaze as my background intrigued her and it became the object of her desire when repeatedly she said: "Oh, you're so lucky. Lucky you." For a long time, I could not understand the attitude of my seemingly nice job coordinator until finally I realized she was tolerating me as the "other," the exotic other.

Nrani associates being an exile with being an "other." She expresses herself candidly:

> I'm always an "other." I'm an "other" whether I like it or not and there's a burden of exile as well that I carry with me that comes from my grandparents, from my parents. So there is exile that is almost prenatal and then there is exile that has come because of other ways of loss and displacement, and I've found myself here as an immigrant. And when I was in Lebanon I was an "other" because I was part of a minority. When I came . . . I certainly felt an "other" . . . I felt that otherness, for example, very, very forcefully after 9/11 and with the rising Islamophobia. . . . Because of that rising wave of everything Muslim, everything Middle Eastern is suspect, is terrorist, is whatever. . . . That otherness is imposed . . . I feel that otherness. It was very blatant. (May 2011)

Otherness is not only imposed upon by the so called non-other. Othering can also be inflicted upon by one's own community. We can feel othered when community members reject us, do not appreciate our contributions, criticize us for our efforts, exclude us from consultations, or plainly tell us not to get involved in decision making when serving on committees.

At a group discussion, Nectar told us her story about how her children's book project, which took years to complete, was unfavourably received by a few community leaders. She was told the following by a committee member: "Well now, that project is our last concern" (May 2011). We were not surprised by the comment, as we all had our share of similar experiences with a few ignorant members of our community at one time or another. Furthermore, often the particular needs of the Armenian community do not coincide with the agenda of the leaders. The following is the conversation in response to Nectar's story:

Zabel: We [Armenian community] don't have grassroots movements and "they" [Armenian leaders] don't want grassroots.

Nrani: Where things went wrong is that dissident voices, alternative voices were just always shut down and this is the problem.

Lori: In this process there is a part that belongs to the collective effort as a community. . . . I think the person has to be supported but we do not. Collectively, we do not support individuals to change things. . . . In order to develop a community, a culture etc., we need to do that. . . . we need public spaces for discussions.

Zabel: There is no discussion, except in these kinds of very small circles maybe [referring to our group], but if you do it outside these small circles you get no results. . . . They [the leaders] don't even listen. They say: "Where did you come from? What are you talking about? Who are you? Who do you represent?" And that's the end. (May 2011)

Unfortunately, the tone of our conversation was one of frustration. We each were feeling disillusionment and despair with the Armenian community because the need for progress is expressed in the community, in particular within schools, but the courage to implement change is absent. It appears that our voices do not penetrate the thick walls of the old Armenian institutions. We have no choice but to retreat to the margins and to exile ourselves.

Like exile, otherness often is also self-imposed. One can voluntarily other oneself from a situation, from a place, from a group of people, as is the case with some of the participants in this study. Nrani explains:

> I'm an "other" in my community as well. When I was talking a little while ago that I went through this period in my life where I felt a lot of rage and anger, it was because of that. And I still am an "other" because of what I believed in and what I did because of my ideas and because of what was perceived that I should be as a woman and I was not. In other ways (an intended pun, here) even though I was perceived as an "other" by my community, there has come a time now when I choose to be an "other." I choose to be an "other.". . . So it's like a subtle game that you start playing with that otherness as well and you use it as a platform of resistance. And that has become increasingly more fascinating for me to reflect on and to look at. (May 2011)

Imposed otherness led to self-othering in both Nectar's and Nrani's situations. They were othered, and in turn, they othered themselves. However, voluntary othering is more like self-alienation but not only for selfish reasons. Yes, it is true that one has to preserve

oneself in situations of rejection and mistreatment. We distance ourselves knowing that as aliens we do come from elsewhere, metaphorically speaking. We are not just "others" who can be ignored or discriminated against. We are alien to them because we act differently. Perhaps we are privileged and thus feel that our approach is superior to those in typical school staff rooms, committees, and leadership roles. We retreat into exile in order to heal ourselves in the face of dismissal and frustration. We gather knowledge in order to get involved again with more force and determination. We work on mustering courage to face rejections. For example, Nectar went back with renewed energy to teach Armenian art, she also assisted her daughter in her involvement with the youth. Zabel introduced her new book; Nrani introduced her project with the youth and her new book. Lori was promised autonomy to run her agency with the help of an Armenian organization. My hope is to "re-enter" the community armed with a PhD! Zabel's commiseration speaks to our experience,

> I get bored. I see no change. It's always the same discourse, the same people, the same ideas. Sometimes I'm fed up and for a while I don't go in the community, but sometimes I feel the need to go there. And there's always this guilt that you have to be useful to the community, so I try to be useful. . . . Because we're in diaspora we have multiple identities. We're exposed to other cultures. . . . But there is the need to connect and then there is the need also, from time to time, to get out of it. (May 2011)

What participants are feeling is a responsibility to assist the Armenian community in sustaining itself by acquiescing to the needs of the new generation. We feel accountable

to all those who drift or may drift away from the community because they may not identify with the Armenian community in its present state or may not be able to balance multiple cultures. We feel an "intellectual debt," as Ruth Behar (1996) says (p. 162). As conscientious intellectuals and educators, we believe that diaspora can be a space of renewal, a space of rediscovery, a space of becoming. Hourig Attarian (2009) writes, "There is a vital element of responsibility, accountability and loyalty in a diasporan membership" (p. 85). She believes that diasporans often play proactive roles rather than remaining passive in their host countries. The concept here is that diasporans, in particular second and third generations, in their efforts to maintain their language and heritage, often regroup and mobilize. Of course, becoming diasporan is voluntary because immigrants do have the choice to assimilate into the mainstream and cut all ties with their country of birth as well as inherited ethnicity. Those who choose to maintain their heritage and to help others to do so, take responsibilities such as teaching children/youth language and culture, teaching community members how to maintain their Armenianness as well as how to overcome tensions of belonging to multi-places and multi-cultures, working towards healing from displacements, from wounds of traumatic history and from inherited and present exile, and to create art that speaks to and of diasporan conditions. In Tölölyan's (1996) words, this is not just being diasporan but becoming diasporan:

> As being the citizen of a nation-state had a cost (taxes, the draft, obedience to laws), so also membership in a diasporic branch of the transnation must have a cost, a demonstration of loyalty that undertook the responsibility of sacrifice (pp.

> 7-8). . . . The stateless power of diasporas lies in their heightened awareness of both the perils and rewards of multiple belonging, and in their sometimes exemplary grappling with the paradoxes of such belonging (p. 15). A diaspora is never merely an accident at birth. (p. 30)

It is this awakened need to not only survive but to sustain the diaspora as a vital community that compels individuals to take responsibility and to become active in serving the diaspora. As an "other" or an "alien", these positions are then used to resist assimilation, to resist oligarchies in centuries old institutions, to resist otherness itself. With renewed energy and in new and different ways, diasporans take responsibility for their displacement by seizing new moments and creating new ways of belonging albeit in multi-localities, with multi-loyalties.

Fragmented Identities

Social clamour, political turmoil, and Genocide give rise not only to dispersal from homelands but also cause fragmented identities. In new environments, uprooted and displaced people are caught between the different ways of being in their country of origin and in the host country, thus they experience linguistic, cultural, and political foreignness. Braziel and Mannur (2003) speak of diasporas as "shifting political spaces where senses of place are (re)negotiated and identities are (re)constructed" (p. 198), as well as lived experiences of feeling out of place, alienated from familiar landscapes, and fragmented in the permanence of multiple identities. Eva Hoffman (1999) refers to exile as a place/space of "uncertainty, displacement, and fragmented identity" (p. 44). Hoffman

talks about linguistic alienation and displacement that promote feelings of fragmented selves when one must translate oneself into the new world—the exile one lives in. Walter Benjamin draws attention to the fact that translations are often "broken fragments of the greater language" (cited in Bhabha,1990, p. 320). For Julia Kristeva (1991), a person's place of belonging is in her/his language, because it is the "place of language" that changes for an exile when she/he is dislocated from birthplace and mother-tongue (p. 11). Accordingly, one could deduce that diasporans locate themselves in more than one landscape and culture, always oscillating among languages, modes of being, and ways of becoming, fragmented but aware that plurality defines their diasporic identity.

Reflective Journal Entry, September 2011

***The autoethnographer voice**: Sergey Parajanov Museum, Armenia: Parajanov (Sarkis Parachanian, 1924-1990) was a film-maker and an artist. He was Armenian born and lived in Tbilisi, Georgia. The gallery was a quaint old house where his work was elegantly displayed at each and every corner. An excellent montage. Through his art, Parajanov illustrates the complexity of his fragmented identity. He was not a distant-diasporan such as Western Armenians as he kept very close ties with Armenia and even lived there for some time, but he deplored the Soviet Regime and therefore was alien to and in his homeland. There were colourful and intriguing pieces that he had used as props in his films. Hundreds of his art collages covered the walls, all very detail-oriented, meticulous and complicated (see Images section, p. xiv). I loved his multimedia collection of hats that were made of multiple colours and textures, such as lace, silk,*

rope, feathers, pins. The almost faceless Madonna (Diramayre), a multi-media painting, spoke to me because outside the gallery, on the streets of Armenia, I had not yet identified with Armenian women; they were faceless to me just like Parajanov's Madonna and just like the women on my wall of art at home? Faceless!

The tableau of a teapot was made of broken pieces of delicate ceramic, again in multiple colours and designs all mounted on a background made of one inch square pieces of colourful cloth and buttons. The assemblage of small pieces of ceramic and cloth created a unified, or seemingly unified, completeness. Parajanov's work speaks to his complex and fragmented identity: A tormented soul in a broken political and social system. His audience was the then USSR where socialist art was the only approved style. His avant-garde work was controversial and his lifestyle as a gay man was unacceptable, therefore he was persecuted and even imprisoned numerous times.

Parajanov's art delineates the multiplicity of the identity of almost all diasporan Armenians. His style illustrates how we compose ourselves from broken pieces that do not appear to fit together in a sensible, beautiful, or even comprehensible manner—never a complete whole and never absolutely permanent. One can always move the pieces around and display yet another image, another identity, another self.

The concept of fragmented identity surfaced numerous times during my conversations with Nrani when we talked about the multiplicity of our identity:

> The fragmentation no matter what I do it's going to be there because of who I am, because of my life journey, because of the post-memory that I carry, because of

> the burden that I have, and whether I accept it or I don't, that burden is there. The burden of Genocide, of being the descendent of Genocide survivors, of being a third generation person who also feels a lot of responsibility about how to carry the story forward, that I can't battle these fragmentations, and I shouldn't. I should learn to live with them and accept them. (May 2011)

Nrani associates her fragmented identity with the national history of Armenians, in particular, the Genocide of 1915. She has inherited a history, or as she puts it, "fragments of my grandparents' history . . . [that] I have tried to understand and interpret. And then even those fragments are being even more fragmented in my life journey as well, because I'm not in touch with them as they were" (May 2011). It is the responsibility of carrying on history, a history that is entrusted to us to do right by. Nrani is trying to make sense of her own situation in "exile" since the 1970s, her own displacement from Beirut to Cyprus, to Syria, to Armenia, to Canada. All these locales and cultures have shaped her identity as a diasporan, a fragmented diasporan. When Nrani was talking about fragmentation, she began speaking in Armenian, in her "most intimate language," in her most comfortable language of expression (email correspondence, January 2013).

Fragmentation is caused not only by multi-lingualism (mother-tongue, official languages), but also by multi-loyalties (loyalty to history, to communities, to generations to come, to self), by multi-locality (homeland, hostland, diaspora, ancestral land), by multi-cultures (ethnic background, mainstream culture(s), and by historicity (historical consciousness whereby history is meaningful). In the following sections, I will explore these concepts, as they are part of Armenian diasporan identity.

Historicity, Connectivity, Generativity: The Burden

In the pages above, I discussed the tangible aspects of diasporan life such as active relationships with at least two destinations, links with a homeland, and identifying as diasporan. Diaspora as a dynamic condition is discursive as it encompasses physical/political, social/intellectual, and emotional/psychological components. I am reminded of a passage by Judith Shuval (2007) that mirrors my participants' experiences as diasporan Armenians:

> The essence of diaspora is a social construct founded on feeling, consciousness, memory, mythology, history, meaningful narratives, group identity, longings, dreams (p. 2). . . . Diaspora discourse reflects a sense of being part of an ongoing transnational network that includes dispersed people who retain a sense of their collective identity and an interest in their homeland. (p. 4)

Armenian history, in particular the deportations and the massacres just before and during World War I, were extremely important to our grandparents and parents. Overwhelmed with the need to stop the denial of war crimes by the then Young Turk regime and subsequent Turkish governments, survivors have orally transmitted their stories to their descendents. Diaspora literature, film, and art have also concentrated on the first massive genocide of the twentieth century and the ensuing challenges that Armenians have struggled with during the past one hundred years. The relentless need to tell (connectivity) is of utmost importance to Armenians in order to inform the outside world about the Genocide in the hope of pressuring the present Turkish government to admit to its predecessors' violent genocidal act: the annihilation of Armenians from their historic

lands in the Ottoman Empire. Hence, diasporan Armenians have assumed the responsibility of teaching history and passing down national and family stories. The need to educate generations of Armenians (generativity) is then at the centre of the Armenian diasporas' ethos.

In the following sections, I will explore the notions of historicity, connectivity, and generativity that explicate the diasporan conditions of fragmented identities, victimized selves, and burdened souls.

Historicity: The Interpreted and the Articulated Past

During our first interview, my participants mentioned Genocide and deportations by introducing themselves as grandchildren/children of survivors of the Genocide. This was almost as important to their identity as their names. It is impossible to discuss Armenian identity without discussing parts of our history—an inherited history of forced deportations, displacement, and even deracination. Thus it is necessary that I address concepts of history and historicity as modes of interpretation of the past.

Neil Whitehead (2003) informs my thoughts. History, he says, encompasses "culturally constructed texts, visual and aural representations, verbal narratives, and oral and somatic performances that are the discrete tales that make specific *histories*"; historicity is what he explains as "the cultural proclivities that lead to certain kinds of historical consciousness within which such histories are meaningful" (p. xi). For example, every family has experienced catastrophes and made sense of them in their particular way. In turn, Genocide narratives are part of both the national history and

family histories. Thus the history is interpreted in both collective and subjective manners. But what is common is that the historicity of Genocide has become a defining moment of Armenian national and individual identity construction and identity renegotiation. Panossian (2008) elaborates:

> The Genocide itself, and its subsequent denial by Turkish authorities, became the "founding symbol" of contemporary Armenian identity. Post-1915 Armenians, especially in the diaspora, saw themselves as "the first Christian nation" and "the first victims of genocide in the twentieth century". The Genocide was the great "equaliser" of identity. *Everyone* became a victim or was affected by it. Being Armenian, namely in the diaspora, meant being a survivor of genocide, and therefore a member of a community of sufferers. (p. 136)

Historicity, then, is the national discourse of history and the subjective interpretations that articulate that history in a meaningful way. It is how the past is understood and narrated. Hrag Varjabedian (2009) adds, "There is interconnectivity between historical and collective memories in formulating stories (histories) . . . where denial of a given history plays a significant role in the construction of the narratives" (p. 18). In part, it is the denial, the disavowal of Genocide that keeps the history alive in the national/international discourse, as well as fresh in collective and personal memory. Nectar points out,

> Once such a trauma is inherited, it is present in us, in every decision one makes and it manifests itself in such unexpected moments that may even surprise us. . . . Not a day goes by without my being aware of the memories that my father instilled in me, such as that lousy picture of Adana Massacres in a songbook. (March 2011)

Zabel recalls that when she was five years old she had heard her father tell the story of someone dying. When she found out that the person was a Muslim, she said "Let him die, he's Muslim not Christian" (February 2011). She remembers that whenever she had made such comments, adults did not tell her that it was not right to feel that way. Reflecting on the event, and appalled at her reaction, she is now realizing that her attitude at the time could only be attributed to the stories she had heard from her parents who were orphaned during the massacres of 1915. Zabel says,

> The blow of Genocide was so strong and so devastating that until now we have neglected the other parts of our history. Of course, it's important until it's recognized. . . . The collective energy, the collective way of thinking should be focused only on Genocide. Once that is resolved, if it is resolved, then we would become normal. (February 2011)

Both Nectar and Zabel interpret their memories as part of being Armenian and living with an inherited history that dictated and continues to dictate their daily lives, their historicized lives—lives that one day may perhaps become "normal" when Genocide is no longer denied by the descendents of the perpetrators.

Nrani also recalls an event from her teen years when her father took her to visit Tel el-Zaatar, a levelled campground where Palestinians were massacred during the 1976 civil war in Lebanon. While telling the story, she re-storied it by interpreting the meaning of that visit for her father and now for her. She feels that her father was awakening in her a sensitivity to understand the Armenian genocide. She remembers:

> We never talked about it but my interpretation is that it wasn't just taking me there and making me feel and see these things, but it was also probably, I'm thinking, a personal journey for him as well: the parallel with the Armenian Der Zor where Armenians were deported and massacred. And he was also trying to understand the scope of what had happened—the inhumanity of what had happened. (February 2011)

Sure enough, Nrani finds parallels between the two massacres: Tel el Zaatar for Palestinians and Der Zor for Armenians.

Lori also finds parallels among her grandparents', parents', and her own uprootedness caused by violence. Her grandparents were from historic Armenia. They were orphaned and eventually found their way into Lebanon, where, a few decades later, her own family lived through civil war and finally had to flee. She says that "one of the biggest challenges I have is having continuity in what I do," and that her life is full of ruptures and that the past influences the way she acts in the present; for example, not being able to commit to completing her studies while moving from one university to another and changing disciplines (February 2011). Nrani's and Lori's personal narratives are infused with the national narrative of both Armenia and Lebanon. They continue to interpret their history and find meanings that explicate their personal behaviours in the present. Their narratives continue to be historicized.

Hermine commiserates that her parents have seen two World Wars but did not talk about their experiences with their children. Her grandmother, on the other hand, always ended her stories with Genocide narratives. I too recall that my grandmother always

inserted a bit of Genocide talk in her nightly storytelling. Whenever she counselled me, she always said "Do not forget, you're Armenian" and sometimes she would add: "We are survivors, no one can annihilate us." My grandmother was only eight years old when her entire town was deported on foot. While most were beaten, raped, and killed by soldiers along the way of their forced march, she found herself with her younger sister wandering the streets of an unfamiliar village where they were taken by a young Arab man and presented to his new bride as her servants. This was not the only story my grandmother told her family; she had learned to tell stories that she had heard, and later stories she had read. Her narrative repertoire was not only her own but the collective's. Her stories incorporated attitudes of the collective. She spoke of the national narrative, the historicized narrative. Our grandparents and parents perpetuated genocide narratives in order to mourn lives sacrificed to violence, in order to heal the wounds of a lived and an inherited history.

Genocide is the nine hundred pound gorilla in the room, overpowering, disturbing, infuriating. The history of Genocide lurks, taunts, haunts, victimizes, shames, elates. It lurks because it is an inseparable part of our identity. It taunts because its memory surfaces more frequently than we care for. It haunts because memories of violence against our ancestors are indelible. It victimizes because it was an unjust act of violence when children, women, and unarmed men were massacred; and after almost a century, we are still lobbying for Genocide recognition. It shames because over a million people gullibly marched the deserts thinking that they would be spared because they were innocent. To date, only twenty-one countries have passed Parliamentary Resolutions

accepting the Armenian Genocide.[3] However, stories of Genocide survival also elate Armenians because an orphaned generation rose as strong-willed survivors who rebuilt their lives and secured theirs and their children's and grandchildren's futures. In conclusion, "The Genocide for us is not just history. It is within us, alive" (Aram I, Catholicos of the Great

House of Cilicia,[4] cited in Varjabedian, 2009).

Connectivity: The Need to Tell for Continuity

Consumed and even obsessed with the past, Armenians have the need to remember and to tell the world their history. This monumental responsibility fuels the Armenian diaspora and keeps us mobilized. Lorne Shirinian (2004) points out that diasporas also become "a location to discover and retrieve memories. . . . From memory come the narratives, the stories we tell about ourselves. . . . Memory is identity, and how memory is remembered will affect the identity one claims" (p. 35). Talking and writing about Genocide has been part of our diasporan identity. The Genocide debate continues as literature, film, art, and Armenian media concentrate on that theme. This need to tell is part of a connectivity that diasporans have learned to maintain. Their collective memory or the diasporic memory affirm survival both in the past and in the present. The

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[3] Countries that have officially recognized the Armenian genocide: Argentina 2003, Armenia 1988, Belgium 1998, Canada 1996, Chile 2007, Cyprus 1975, France 1998, Germany 2004, Greece 1999, Italy 2000, Lithuania 2005, Lebanon 1997, Netherlands 2004, Poland 2005, Russia 1995, Slovakia 2004, Sweden 2010, Switzerland 2003, Uruguay 1965, Vatican 2000, Venezuela 2005 (Armenian National Institute, Washington, DC; Genocide.am).

[4] Chief Bishop, Aram I, of the Holy See of Cilicia (Western Armenian) Apostolic Church in Lebanon. His Holiness Karekin II is the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church and resides in Etchmiadzin, Armenia.

stories they tell connect them to a group where they commiserate and ease each other's pain, so to speak, form kinships, build trust, create affinities. This is the space where they encourage each other to remember, not to forget, and to learn to tell. Their collective memory, that is the sum of their individual memories, becomes the official memory (Halbwachs, 1980; Safran, 2003).

Mary Chamberlain (2009) explains that connectivity is a need "to pass on to the generations the explanation as to why they are no longer where they could be. . . . This connectivity is implicitly recognized by all across the diaspora" (p. 185). Diasporans are bound together by a history and a memory that both safeguards and sustains the diaspora. Varjabedian (2009) found that even those who are outside the Armenian community and are assimilated (or think they are), position themselves within the Genocide narrative because of family history of survival and for the purpose of maintaining or creating "continuity within their ruptured genealogy and Armenian [historicity]" (p. 15).

As such, connectivity helps maintain a cultural continuity that is sustained by collective memory of which Genocide is the focal point. Therefore, Genocide is debated at all levels of community and from all perspectives. Shirinian (2004) reminds us that

> Our relationship to our past is one of disconnections. However . . . the imposition of the narrative of Genocide that preceded our birth, which to a certain extent displaces our own stories, always looks for connections, and where it is not able to recover the past, it imagines and creates. As agents of postmemory, Armenian artists and scholars give narrative shape to the remaining fragments of the past. (p. 38)

David Eng and David Kazanjian (2003) report that almost all archival history related to massacres and deportations of Armenians was destroyed in the Ottoman Empire. Marc Nichanian (2003) also exposed the reality of lack of archives or publications after the pogroms in Cilicia 1895, Adana in 1909, and throughout Historic Armenia in 1914-1915. There were "calls of justice from outside the Ottoman Empire" by missionaries and journalists who witnessed the events and their aftermath; however, these reports and "campaigns for political recognition" were not publicised widely (Nichanian, 2003, p. 100). What Nichanian also notes is that concealing and denying these pogroms were tactics of eradication of Armenians because the effect was "to delay mourning . . . indefinitely. . . . The Armenians were barred from mourning. Collective murder did more than kill. . . . Collective murder imposed on the collective psyche of the victims a generalized interdiction of mourning" (p. 100). Nichanian analyzes parts of Zabel Yessayan's reports after massacres in Adana, where she was sent as part of the delegations who searched for orphans. Three months later, she returned to Constantinople before the mission ended as "she could no longer hold up against the horror displayed by the survivors" (p. 101). She began to write but struggled with language, with finding words for what she had witnessed. She first called the violence "unnameable," "indefinable," and then "catastrophe." A year and a half later, she published a book titled *Among the Ruins* where she recounts "the horrifying misery of the stricken (this is what she calls the survivors, themselves invaded by horror, incapable of detaching themselves from it)" (cited in Nichanian, 2003, p. 101). To remain true to the original diction, Nichanian uses the word "Catastrophe" instead of "Genocide" which

gained its popular use after Raphael Lemkin[5] coined it in 1944 (Garebian, 2000, p. 125). Nichanian elaborates on his refusal to label the catastrophic events as genocide:

> What makes [Genocide] catastrophic is the fact that it had to be denied, that it is denied in the very moment when it happens. . . . By using the word "Genocide," we survivors are only repeating again and again the denial of the loss. We probably cannot help it. We are doing what the executioner wanted us to do, from the beginning on. We claim all over the world that we have been "genocided"; we relentlessly need to prove our own death. We are still in the claws of the executioner. We still belong to the logic of the executioner, through and through. (p. 127)

However, if we trivialize genocidal acts as "catastrophe" then are we not doing what the executioners wanted us to do: to minimize the horror they caused to generations of Armenians and the precedent they have set for the world? Genocides continue to occur throughout the world![6]

Efforts to retrieve archival history continue and researchers have made progress in filling historical gaps that were intentionally created by the Turkish government when "documents . . . [were] 'cleansed' in a deliberate manner" (Akçam, 2012, p. 1).

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[5] Raphael Lemkin (1900-1959, born in Byelorussia, present day Belarus and died in New York City) was a lawyer known for being the father of Human Rights Law in the United States, for coining the term *genocide,* and for drafting the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bobelian, 2009).

[6] In 1939, Hitler had said : "Who still talks nowadays of the extermination of the Armenians?" This statement suggests that Hitler felt encouraged or justified to carry out his plan to annihilate Jews from Germany "because the world did not punish the Ottoman Turks for their annihilation of Armenians" (Lewy, 2005, p. 265).

Fortunately, we have archives in the United Kingdom, the United States,[7] Germany, and Austria; as well, there are numerous testimonials documented by Armenian and Turkish scholars (Akçam, 2006; Üngör, 2012; Zoryan Institute Oral History Collection; Zoryan Institute publications of memoirs). Recently, a few Turkish researchers have been successful in retrieving official documents in Turkey that prove the existence of Demographic Policies to annihilate Armenians and systematic plans for the ethnic cleansing of the Ottoman Empire between 1912 and 1923. Records show that The Young Turk regime successfully carried out the "homogenization of Anatolia"; consequently, millions of people were displaced, deported and/or massacred (Akçam, 2012, p. 29). Based on his archival research, Akçam reports,

> On the official track, expulsion and forced emigration were implemented either bilaterally within the framework of official "population exchange" agreements as with Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria as expulsion, or unilaterally as internal deportation, as with the Armenians. On the unofficial track, covert, extralegal but state-sponsored acts of terror were committed under the protective umbrella provided by the official state policies. (p. 30)

And so, the debate continues beyond the demand for formal recognition of the Genocide, to the cause, effect, and consequence of its wrath.

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[7] The U.S. Ambassador to Turkey, Henry Morgenthau (1913-1916) reported: "When the Turkish authorities gave the orders for these deportations, they were merely giving the death warrant to a whole race; they understood this well, and in their conversations with me, they made no particular attempt to conceal the fact" (cited in Hovannisian, 2007, p. 14).

I had no intentions of writing about Genocide, but here I am, immersed in it, why? I am not the first diasporan Armenian who finds herself in this predicament, trapped in the web of history. Nichanian (2003) believes that this entrapment is "the interdiction of mourning" and therefore "there is no art without mourning" (p. 99). We have not yet fully mourned or stopped mourning the Genocide because it remains unresolved. The paradox is that to mourn Genocide we need public acknowledgment and apologies; we need a public language, a public space, a public process of negotiations (Eng & Han, 2003). It is crucial that we do not forget our history; but at the same time, we cannot be free of the historicity of Genocide if we continue creating art and literature that is influenced by and are about the horrors of that painful past. We have the *burden* to unburden ourselves.

The Burden: Genocide and Generativity

Nrani describes the *Burden*: "The burden is being the descendant of Genocide survivors, being a third generation person who also feels a lot of responsibility about how to carry the story on forward" (February 2011). For me, the burden is the *becoming* a diasporan-Armenian because it demands that I undertake the responsibility for *being* Armenian and accountability for being an educator.

Maintaining Armenianness is a *burden*. A burden because it carries an essence of performativity that diasporan Armenians adapt in order to pacify learned feelings of guilt, obligation, and pride. Those of us who chose to keep our ethnicity in host-lands feel guilty when we assimilate into the mainstream society, guilty when our children do not

speak Armenian. The participants in this study feel obligated to pass on Armenian language and history—a language that is ancient with its unique alphabet and a history that includes the claim of being the first Christian nation. Pardon the arrogance here, we have not been taught humility; let me explain. James Clifford (1994) says, "The sense of being a people with historic roots outside the time/space of a host nation provides a sense of power and legitimacy to claims of oppression or disadvantage" (cited in Shuval, 2007, p. 35). This sense of power also extends to claims of entitlement and expectations of empathy. The diasporic position as victims, orphans, sufferers; the entitlement that is implicit in such designations as "first people," "First Christian nation," "Armenia: the Garden of Eden"; and a "sacred" alphabet (*Մասունք Սրբազան*, sacred relic), could be exploitative ploys not only to advance socio-political agendas but to also inflate people's sense of pride in their history, true or myth, and therefore raise their feelings of guilt if they were ever to let go of these entitlements. Therefore, we feel obligated to teach the world our heritage, our traumatic history, our genocidal victimhood. The complexity of our Armenian identity must extend beyond language and history; however, the *burden* pressures us to succumb to feelings of guilt and obligation.

After every encounter I have had with participants, I felt the weight of that Armenianness. I also witnessed how as intellectuals and educators we all feel that our identity is a learned one and we carry the obligation to pass that knowledge and identity to the next generation. The burden of transmitting Armenianness is heavy because we have been conditioned to think about Armenianness in particular ways. Our parents modeled an Armenianness that no longer fits but rather creates tensions in today's

hybridized and globalized communities when they insist that "one speaks the language, acknowledges the Apostolic Church, marries another Armenian, . . . [believes] in one concrete homeland" (Pattie, 2005). We are burdened with the weight of not only being *Armenian* but of being *diasporan Armenian* with unacknowledged atrocities to be remembered, articulated, and passed along.

Journal entry, September 2011

The autoethnographic voice: *After every discussion with participants or after every self-dialogue, after every Armenian event (intellectual or entertainment), I felt burdened as an Armenian. I felt a heavy weight as a researcher to carry such a burden.*

How do I release this burden? Can I release it? Must I release it? Is feeling burdened part of my identity? Is this what Armenianness is all about? Do I want the burden?

I'm born in the burden, with the burden, for the burden.

SEVEN BURDENED WOMEN AND SEVENTEEN WAYS OF FEELING BURDENED

traumatic history
identity
language
culture
religion
nationalism
supporting Armenia
supporting diaspora
not having a homeland
being displaced/uprooted
fear of deracination
struggle for survival
connectivity
generativity
assimilation/non-assimilation
guilt of not feeling guilty or burdened

being othered both within and outside the Armenian community

Generativity for generational continuity

Grandparents and parents carry the responsibility of passing on family stories in order to transmit skills, knowledge, tradition, religion, and language. Margaret Manoogian (2008), drawing on Erik Erikson's model of life-span development, describes the concept of generativity: "Adults are culturally generative when they pass on specific meanings and stories from one generation to the next. . . . [I]ndividual narratives are created and passed on to others" (p. 147). In her multigenerational research (discussed in Chapter 5), she observes that family stories are used as vehicles for "understanding how families maintain continuity, change over time, and understand family identity and culture" transmitting their ethnicity, symbolic or otherwise (pp. 162, 163). Diasporans assume the responsibility of passing down their heritage and language.

Connectivity (the need to connect and to tell) and *generativity* (the need for generational continuity) are at work within Armenian families. For example, wherever Armenians settle, the first thing they do is to mobilize as a community and build a church and a school in order to create a connectivity within the community and to assist the young to become active diasporan Armenians. The hope is that they will not assimilate but rather will keep their Armenian identity. The pressure for resisting assimilation comes from hearing repeatedly how our ancestors worked uncompromisingly to survive in harsh conditions, they chose torture over denouncing Christianity, they kept our

language alive even in orphanages run by European missionaries. Keith Garebian (2000) consoles:

> What spirit could be found in these places of great degradation? In my father's case, it was a new Adam learning to raise himself from the dead, to begin again. . . . The brutality of facts cannot afford to go silently into darkness. It is my duty to imagine. (p. 120)

Nectar fondly remembers the evenings when her father gathered his children around him and sang songs of survival, deportation, and repatriation. Margaret Bedrosian (1991) says that "after centuries of social insecurity and torment, the family had become a small fortress" (p. 56). Perhaps telling stories of survival in the sanctuary of a home was when our grandparents and parents could feel victorious and not vanquished even if that home was in a harsh hostland.

The 1915-1918 Genocide orphaned the Armenian nation. Countries such as Britain, France, and Russia, that were expected to prevent the extermination of Armenians by the Ottoman Empire, were engaged in their own wars and were concerned with their own foreign policies (Bobelian, 2009). The rupture of war and deportation left the culture adrift as there was time for survival and nothing more. Armenian historiography was interrupted because the institutional life of Armenians in the Empire was destroyed. Western Armenian language and culture would have perished if survivors had not engaged in the telling and retelling of their personal narratives within their families, within their communities, and within their host countries. Fortunately, in some locales where there was leadership, efforts were made to preserve the Armenian culture.

During her archival research in Armenia, Nrani came across a collection of papers published sporadically in Aleppo, for a few years after 1918, by a local newsletter, *Hay Tsayn* (Armenian Voice). She shared her information:

> What astounded me most were not the editorials and "fire and brimstone" articles (which of course were all interesting) but the small ads at the back of the paper about the cultural events. . . . You would be astounded Arpi that in 1918, 1919, in a city that had all these refugee camps and incredibly difficult living conditions, there were also theatrical plays and concerts . . . (from Shakespearean plays to plays with obvious patriotic themes written at the time). There were even ads for teaching dance! (waltz and other contemporary dances). . . . Not everything is how we imagine it to be. (email communication, January 2013)

Notwithstanding the importance of the above mentioned document, much research must be conducted in order to form a clear vision of the everyday life of Genocide survivors in the early years of settlements throughout the world.

In the meantime, the mourning continues as the ruptures in our history leave us unsettled and disconnected. Arpine Konyalian Grenier (2011) pointedly writes: "Mourning is useless, therefore, when we focus on loss we are frozen in time. We need a new song for Ani," the City of 1001 churches, ancient capital of Armenia (p. 71). In Medieval times, Ani was architecturally the most advanced and the most beautiful city. It fell first to the Byzantines in 1045, to Seljuk Turks in 1064, to Mongols in 1236, and then to the Ottoman Empire in 1579. After earthquakes in 1319, 1832, and 1988, what still stands of Ani are just a few walls. For Western Armenians, Ani remains a symbol of

former greatness, faith, and endurance as well as a landscape for lament, commiseration, and imagined memories. Is it not time to compose "a new song," so to speak, composed by those who with their creativity can find new ways of remembering and not forgetting for the purpose of renewal rather than mourning? But can Armenians march forward if they are trapped in feelings of being orphans and victims?

Generativity and the Armenian language

In diaspora, we are now facing a different type of potential annihilation: loss of the Western Armenian language. As the world becomes ever more interconnected through a cyberspace dominated by a handful of languages, the extinction of languages of minority groups may become a reality (Crystal, 2000). In fact, in 2012, UNESCO placed Western Armenian on its endangered language list. Western Armenian is spoken in the Middle East (except for Iran), in Europe, and in the Americas. This fear of losing the language of Western Armenians, is one of the main motivations for continued efforts in connectivity and generativity. The horror of deracination from our mother-tongue looms large over diasporan Armenians.

Contemplating the severity of the loss of the Western Armenian language and wanting to explore the meaning of the French word *déracination* beyond its translation to *uprootedness* in English, I raised the issue in one of our group discussions:

Arpi: I've been thinking about the difference between uprootedness and deracination. I think uprootednes has a positive connotation to it; it's not only negative. We were

uprooted from Beirut and we started putting roots in Toronto or Montréal. I understand deracination as

Lori: There's a difference between the two?

Arpi: I think that there is a difference.

Nrani: Absolutely, now that you say it. I see a few differences. I'm uprooted but I'm not deracinated at all. I'm uprooted because of circumstances. Uprootedness is not a choice that I had but deracination is a choice that one makes. If you want to lose your roots then you're deracinated. I'm uprooted physically but I'm not deracinated from my identity and what I think and feel is an important part of my identity. On the contrary I'm very well rooted in that identity.

Zabel: One is voluntary and the other is involuntary?

Lori: I don't agree with that.

Nrani: You don't agree with what?

Lori: The fact that it's voluntary.

Nrani: I could say: I'm taking myself out of the community and want no part of it.

Lori: It's not voluntary. Sometimes it might be of course, I agree with you, but I've rarely seen someone who deracinates herself from her own roots.

Those who do that are people who I don't think they are in contact with their roots or they have had problems with their country and whatever. That's why I feel a panic. Now that you're saying what you're saying I don't think I'm uprooted. I might be uprooted but my kids are deracinated.

Arpi: How are your children deracinated?

Lori: They don't know their culture. They can read but they are not interested in reading Armenian . . . poetry. They're not interested in going to an Armenian theatre and enjoying it. They respect us; they go. Sometimes they enjoy it; sometimes they don't, but they don't feel that they belong to that specific culture. They do but rationally . . . the whole mélange. . . . There's no love for that culture. That's deracination for me. What went wrong? Actually I know there's nothing wrong it's just that this is the result. When in Armenia, they didn't feel a connection. *kiden hay en. Or me gue passden tram dalov guam* being successful in something! . . . They know they're Armenian. One day they'll prove it by donating money! But for me that's not being Armenian if you don't know your culture, you cannot recite a few lines from Barouyr Sevag[8]. . . . My children do not read Armenian. . . . Especially if I think about continuity. I don't think they will give up on being Armenian, no. It's just that how are they going to continue being Armenian.

Nrani: It was very interesting what you said because I had not thought about deracination that way. I was just thinking about deracination as a personal choice, and that's very interesting. I think there are people who do make those personal choices: okay I'm cutting everything.

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[8] Barouyr Sevag was an Armenian scholar and poet, born and lived in Soviet Armenia, 1924-1971. He was a literary critic as well as a public activist. He spoke openly against corruption in the USSR. His poems are accessible to all ages.

Arpi: Children are making their own choices, but they are finding themselves in this situation. It is by choice but there are conditions that are forcing them to make that choice.

Nrani: Yeah, It's kind of an imposed deracination.

Zabel: I would like to add that Armenianness is different for everyone. (May 2011)

Deracination for the participants is then voluntary and involuntary, whereby one is completely uprooted with no ties to her/his roots and there is no hope for a return because, metaphorically speaking, the roots have been left out to dry. Pico Iyer (2001) uses the word in the Canadian context: "Canada has been a byword for open space . . . moving towards a kind of 'deracination state,' or state of global floatingness" (p. 50). In this scenario, the deracinated person is a global citizen with no permanent roots to any location. Walter Davis (2001) uses the word in relation to "eradicating every belief, value, and need that stands in the way of taking up one's responsibility to history" (pp. xx-xxi). Said (1999) describes the Palestinians, who lost their state and have no homeland to return to, as deracinated (p. 98). For Hoffman (1989), deracination is almost complete assimilation. Describing immigrants in her community in Vancouver who appear to have been "successful immigrants," Hoffman says: "Probably, in their phase of immigrant life, . . . they've achieved an almost perfect deracination . . .: they move in a weirdly temperate zone, where the valence of cultural vitality is close to neutral" (p. 143). The fear of deracination is an enormous concern to diasporan Armenians. How did we get to this point when for almost a century we have been fighting assimilation by building

churches and day schools, and establishing cultural organizations in every Armenian community?

Perhaps the challenges of our diaspora stems from our continued focus on past history instead of working towards the future with an emphasis on promoting intellectual growth in literature, encouraging the arts, and developing language preservation tactics. Shirinian (2004) sympathizes with the challenges in diasporas:

> There is a burden of both collective and personal memory that weighs on the children of the survivors and their children and others to come because there is a terrible lack of knowledge. All of those who came after are required to imagine what is unimaginable in order to fill the large gaps in both family and national history. (p. 40)

The paucity of documented knowledge about Armenians is large and not just about Genocide. We have ruptures in our traditions, music, literature, and even language that need to be closed through research in order to preserve all things Armenian. Zabel mourns the folk music that was lost between the late 1800s and early 1900s, and the post-Genocide concentration on producing nationalistic and revolutionary music that copied vocal styles from hostlands in the Middle East and from Soviet countries. Arminé bemoans the indifference of Armenians towards community activities in the arts, Nrani laments the non-existence of Armenian teacher education. Lori fears the deracination of youth.

The suffering of our grandparents did not end with the traumatized survivor generation. They were victims who in turn passed down the psyche of victimhood to

their children and grandchildren. That was their way of surviving violence, a violence that they were told had never happened. Because of this denial, they were deprived of the opportunity to heal their wounds. Genocide survivors were concerned primarily with preparing torch bearers to right the wrongs of history, to make loss of life worthwhile, to free their injured souls. We have inherited their suffering and are expected to continue the "fight" to release them from their entrapment as victims.

Fortunately, generations three and four (grandchildren and great grandchildren of survivors), are choosing to return to a positive space, a space of their own creation: understanding history from new perspectives. For example, Talar Chahinian (2008), a young scholar in comparative literature at the University of California, observes that our diaspora is trapped in the past. She writes,

> This grand narrative, which I refer to as the cultural narrative of the Genocide, borrows certain elements from the historical one, and is constructed against the discourse of denial. This Genocide narrative enables memorialization of the Catastrophe for survivors and future generations, however, in so doing, it also endangers the realm of language, literature and the arts, for it demands that all artistic and literary production be used as proof or evidence against denial [of Genocide]. (p. 2)

Chahinian's observation that Armenian literature is saturated with an unhealthy dose of lobbying for Genocide recognition is not an exaggeration. The Armenian Cause exhausts resources and energies that can be allocated to promote language, culture, and the arts, focusing on the future rather than the past. How many more memorial monuments should

we commission, or how many more Genocide documentaries should we fund before we are forever fossilized in the past? Should we not encourage young artists and scholars to be creative in interpreting inherited history in their own way rather than insisting that they regurgitate what they have been taught and conditioned to believe? Should we not stop expecting our youth to carry the burden of a past that continues to "obligate us" or burden us "as something other than an object lesson that we expect and already understand" (Di Paolantonio, 2011, p. 748)?

Roger Kupelian (2011), in collaboration with a few young artists, has published a graphic novel, *War Gods,* which illustrates victims of violence as heroes and thus advocates heroism, empowerment, and new possibilities for interpreting Armenian history.

Rectifying a situation begins with recognizing the challenge and then generating public dialogue. It appears that the Armenian diaspora's future could be in good hands, after all. True, Chahinian, Kupelian, and numerous others of their generation are not writing in the Armenian language, but they are addressing Armenian issues. Their art, their way of becoming diasporans and sustaining Armenianness is just that, their way. Zabel has said: "Armenianness is different for everyone."

Anny Bakalian (1994), in her study of Armenian-Americans found that Armenianness, mainly for the American-born, has become individualistic, quite unlike the more traditional sense of communal understandings. She explains: "Armenianness . . . is tailored to suit personal needs and interests. . . . Armenianness changes from an emphasis on behavioural patterns to mental reconstructions of what individual Armenian-Americans think Armenianness is" (p. 432). For some, Armenianness is affiliation with

church and schools, connection with relatives and Armenian friends, eating Armenian foods, keeping Armenian holidays; for others, it may just mean having feelings of belonging to an ethnic group; for a large number of young scholars, it is studying Armenian-related issues. Bakalian concludes that there is a shift from *being* to *feeling* Armenian and that "symbolic Armenianness is firmly lodged in people's feelings and sentiments" rather than active engagement in Armenian community activities (p. 442).

Is It Home, Homeland, Fatherland, or Motherland?

MOUNT ARARAT

On the ancient peak of Ararat
The centuries have come like seconds,
And passed on.
The swords of innumerable lightnings
Have broken upon its diamond crest,
And passed on.
The eyes of generations dreading death
Have glanced at its luminous summit,
And passed on.
The turn is now yours for a brief while:
You, too, look at its lofty brow,
And pass on!
(Avetik Issahakian 1875-1957, in Kudian, 1975, p. 11)

Being in exile, or without a homeland is "like death but without death's ultimate mercy," writes Edward Said (2000, p. 174). On the other hand, exile can also be a place of resurrection and of new beginnings. Western Armenians have not had a "homeland" for over a century, and therefore, that sense of (home)lessness, (dis)placement, and (up)rootedness, persists, as we look at Mount Ararat with wounded souls but proud spirits, and accomplished lives. Being an exile may not be by choice but feeling an exile

can be a choice. Said points out that because diasporans are uprooted from their ancestral lands, "torn . . . from nourishment of tradition, family, and geography" (p. 174), they have "an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people" (p. 177). That triumphant ideology sustains the diaspora and thus it becomes "home" where complexities of hybridity also become a source of strength to understand the plurality and the ambivalence of identity.

Diasporan Armenians' attachment to "Armenia the homeland" comes from their exposure since childhood to a diasporic dogma and to creatively constructed narratives. They have learned that they belong to a land of paradise, that they are not homeless drifters, and that they have a millennia-old country where Mount Ararat soars, though intangible to them now, but concrete nevertheless in their imagination. With these feelings of pride I asked my participants at the end of every interview: Where is your homeland? I was surprised that there was almost always hesitation in their answers and it almost never was: "Armenia, of course," the answer I had expected.

Journal Entry: In Banff BC, June 2011

The participant voice: *I'm admiring the spectacular mountains. The sky is clear, I see all the peaks this morning covered in snow. I recall a photograph of Mount Ararat in my office. I'm moved by the beauty of Mount Norquay but I don't feel a connection to it. No I don't feel that mountains in Banff are part of my history. No, my ancestors are not buried here. They did not breathe this air, drink this water, pray looking towards these mountains. In a few months I will be in Armenia and stand in front of Mount Ararat. I*

wonder how I will feel looking at its majestic peak always under snow? I'll finally find my connection with that landscape, in the Plains of Ararat, I convince myself. But wait, my family's roots are in Kessab. Shouldn't my heart long for Mount Gassios?

Before I reveal the responses I have received from participants to my question as to where homeland was for each of them, I will now continue telling my story of visiting Armenia in September 2011. It was my first ever visit. My daughter, my son and my brother accompanied me. The purpose of my visit was to experience firsthand what I had been imagining and what I had heard about *Mayre Hayasdan* (Mother Armenia). In particular, I was convinced that once I was in Armenia, my ambivalence about where my homeland was would dissipate. What I was hoping for was to shed my feelings of displacement and embrace feelings of belonging to a landscape that I could call my homeland. I had convinced myself that "returning" would fill the gap of disconnect from my "homeland" where the geographical past occupies the present. I had a romantic notion of solidifying my identity as an Armenian when and where I felt the spirit of ancestors, the energy of a restored country, the pure water of Lake Sevan, and the majestic power of Mount Ararat. Perhaps, in Said's words cited above, as a diasporan, I had the need to reconstitute my unsettled identity and was looking forward to becoming "part of a triumphant ideology of a restored people."

Journal Entry in Yerevan, Armenia, 19 September 2011

The participant voice: *We arrived late at night. The half hour drive from the airport to the first suburb outside the city core, where we had arranged to stay, reminded me of*

Havana, Cuba. New structures next to dilapidated buildings, run-down factories, potholes all over side roads, garbage flying here and there, cars running wild. I noticed poverty.

The first thing I did the next morning was to go out on the balcony and look at Mount Ararat. I yelled excitedly as I had waited a lifetime for this moment: Where is it?

"What are you looking for," asked our host and came running (we stayed with a friend of my father so that we would experience the "authentic" Armenia).

"Ararat," I exclaimed with full of anticipation as well as disappointment for not seeing it the moment I looked up. "I came all the way here to see Ararat."

"Look through the oak tree," she said. She walked to the end of the narrow balcony, extended her head out to her right side and said: "It's behind the clouds today. Maybe the sky will clear this afternoon."

We had decided the night before to go to Mother Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin[9] *for Sunday mass, as that was the second thing I wanted to do in Armenia: stand in an ancient church. By the time we arrived, mass was over. It was a small church. Etchmiadzin is the central cathedral and the oldest state-built church in the world. Because of its grandeur in significance, I had imagined it to be literally grand as well. To my disappointment, I felt no inspiration and no belonging. Perhaps, because we missed mass or because the tourists and those who follow them crowded the church and the grounds.*

Where is Ararat?

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[9] Built in 301-303 over a pagan temple, Etchmiadzin is one of the oldest churches in the world.

We drive to another church 10 minutes away from Etchmiadzin. "Why another church"? I'm thinking. Why were Armenians obsessed with the Christian faith? Etchmiadzin was built upon a pagan temple. Our ancestors could have stayed pagan and perhaps not be uprooted so many times. Perhaps Armenia could have been a powerful state like the surrounding countries, but Armenians always ran towards the West, convinced that they are more European than Asian. Progress is costly. Desiring what's out there and ignoring what one has.

Heripsimé (a church built around 618 AD) is dark, simple, and impressive. Many Khachkars (Cross-stones that were used for tomb stones) on the grounds. My son finds a small stone in the shape of Armenia. We buy a few souvenirs from the vendors. Elderly women pushing their products and complaining about their poverty. A one-legged man not wanting to give change and instead pushing his wares. Matt buys a cross with chain. I buy a small pomegranate pendant and run to the car ignoring other women who were pushing their religious relics.

We drive through Masis, the flat plains on the foot of Ararat. I finally have a peek at Ararat behind a thick haze. Impressive but not awesome as I did not see its entirety.

A policeman stops us on the highway wanting to verify our rental car documents. All is in order. He then claims we were speeding and asks for a bribe. My brother gives in so that we're not hassled—US$30. We're off to Khor Virab Monastery feeling cheated and disillusioned with authority. Corruption just like everywhere in the developing

countries. We're not the gem[10] *as my grandmother believed us to be, we're not special, we don't have better morals as we claim to have, we're as non-Christian as the surrounding Muslims and Zoroastrians. Oh, I'm feeling angry.*

Khor Virab[11] *is located in the Ararat Plain a few hundred metres on the west side of Mount Ararat bordering Turkey. The monastery is a busy place. A baptism is being performed in the small church, which is full of people. Young couples release doves towards Ararat for the hope of who knows what. Ararat is ours to admire and to be inspired by but not to have. I feel its loss to other empires during millennia past and the loss of millions of Armenians who prospered on its skirts, and those who sacrificed their lives to ensure its safety. I take pictures, I sketch the vista, we walk around the monastery, admire its immense structure that stood the test of times. I find a few very small stones to bring home and off we go to visit Dad's distant cousins who repatriated from Kessab in 1947.*

We're welcomed with enthusiasm. There are about twenty people in a small space! Two tables in the middle of the room, food and drinks in abundance. I do not understand all that they say because of socio-linguistic differences, but smile and sit quietly. Everyone appears happy. We part promising to see each other again, but I'm certain that this is the first and would be the last time, as I don't anticipate coming back to Armenia again. I feel sad not because I will not return but because I have not yet

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[10] From a poem by Gevorg Emin (1918-1998). *Small*: Yes, we are small / the smallest pebble/ in a field of stones. / But have you felt the hurtle / of pebbles pitched / from a mountain top? / small, yes / you have compressed us world, / into a diamond (cited in Kaprielian-Churchill, 2005).

[11] A 17th century church and monastery built on the original chapel that dates to 642.

found what I was looking for. I still do not feel that I have roots in this culture and landscape.

Where is Ararat? I look out from the balcony the next morning—must be behind the oak tree, beyond my reach as it has been all my life.

I find whole walnuts on the table in our apartment. I reach for one and manage to open it. It's dry and hollow, just like Armenia appears to be for me—Hollow hopes for finding a grounding here. I'm sad. I'm disappointed. Living far away from here, I'll perhaps find solace in an imagined homeland, one where Ararat would be visible every time I look up!

Journal Entry in Yerevan, Armenia, 23 September 2011

Where is Ararat?

We find our way into the city's Opera complex, all very beautiful. Cafés and art displays. I buy a painting by Satig Vartamian: an unknown artist, the middle-aged-sister of the vendor, I'm told. Keghchgouhiner (Peasant Women) depicts 3 faceless women standing in front of a church which is partially drawn on a 20 x 40cm canvas. I am pleased that there is no cross spoiling the image. The facelessness of the women, for me, represents the faceless people of Yerevan as I feel no spiritual connection with anyone here. The relatives we visited appeared distant. I did not relate to their everyday life stories, mainly because I did not understand all that they said, as I'm not versed in their linguistic and social lingo. My grandmother, my mother, and I don't have a face in

Armenia. We are from Western Historic Armenia where we became diasporans moving from one Middle Eastern country to another. Could diaspora be my homeland?

Journal Entry in Yerevan, Armenia, 23 September 2011

Yerevan, the capital city, is built around a roundabout from which every major intersection has its own roundabout, and thereafter, every crossroad merges and exits through a roundabout. Confusing, maddening, frightening when you are a front seat passenger and do not know which way traffic should go. Finally, out of the car, stomach settled. We are at the State University meeting professors and students. We speak Armenian but I barely understand their speech because of linguistic variety as theirs borrows Russian expressions. They complain about the shortcomings of the institution, the very institution that as a young high school student, I aspired to attend. I cannot contribute to the conversation; alien I feel. A few hours later, we are in the market. I hear yelling and screeching of unrecognizable words; alien I feel. We are at a public open place. Artists painting. Groups of men playing chess in between statues. Who are they; alien I feel. No one greets me, no one smiles; alien I feel, unwelcomed. I am but a tourist with a fanny pack.

YEREVAN
In
around
and out of roundabouts.
In the city centre
yet another roundabout—Liberty Circle.
Trapped in the spiral!
Exit! Exit!
Alien. Alienated.
I am from elsewhere, from away, from far away.

Journal Entry in Yerevan, Armenia, 24 September 2011

Madenadaran, National Archive Building is impressive. I'm proud to be Armenian when I admire the old manuscripts. This is the Armenia I had learned about and how I envisioned it to be: cultured with antiquities, with a history that I'm familiar with.

- *The first printed book in Venice 1512. Armenian was the 10th language in print.*
- *Aristotle was translated in Armenian in the 12th century before it had reached Western countries. The manuscript displayed is the only preserved translation in the world.*
- *The first sentence translated into Armenian by Mesrop Mashtots from a passage in the Bible after his invention of the Armenian alphabet: "To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding."*

In Madenadaran, hung an old wall-to-wall map from the time when Canada's West was not yet on the map. As I located Kessab on the map, the vast distance between Armenia and Syria became so very clear. I suddenly realized that my ancestors never belonged to this part of Armenia. The Panossians were Western Armenians and lived by the Mediterranean Sea at the foot of Mount Gassios and not on the plains of Mount Ararat. The western part of Historic Armenia was conquered by the Ottomans in the 1500s, Eastern Armenia came under Russian control in 1700s. Kessab (in present day Syria) is where my grandparents and their grandparents were born and raised. I'm Kessabtsi (from Kessab) not Hayasdantsi (from Armenia). I am a Western Armenian not an Eastern Armenian. Armenia is the land of my distant ancestors. Since I lived most of

my life in Canada, I'm Canadian with Armenian roots. I have no physical link to this land. I have no family roots in Armenia! Centuries ago I was deracinated from this landscape when the Armenian Kingdom extended to the Mediterranean Sea (95-55 BC). Why then did my grandparents sing the praises of Mount Ararat and not of Mount Gassios? They were diasporans in desperate need to connect with the Motherland.

Journal Entry in Yerevan, Armenia, 25 September 2011

We visited an Armenian scholar and his wife. He came from Ukraine in the 1960s and she from Lebanon in 1978. They both repatriated from Armenian diasporas. When I asked where is homeland for them, they both responded that Armenia is definitely not their homeland but it's been home for the last 33 years. They are Aghper in Armenia, that is outsiders, she explains. The family is welcomed but feels that their way of life is different, that the mentality of Armenians born and raised in Armenia is foreign to them. In addition, scholars have been leaving the country since its independence in 1991 when travel restrictions were lifted. This middle-age couple are concerned about the brain-drain in Armenian and feel trapped in an unhappy situation. But with two daughters studying abroad, they are hopeful that at least their children will have better job opportunities elsewhere.

Where is Ararat? Day seven and it's still hiding behind the oak tree and in haze. Like the people of Armenia, Ararat also does not acknowledge my presence at its feet. It is faceless to me in this landscape, in the East. It is now my turn, as the poet has said, "You too, look at its lofty brow, and pass on" (Issahakian's Mount Ararat).

Back in Toronto: People ask me: "How's Armenia? Did you like it?" I cannot answer yes or no. With hesitation, I've been saying so so, and then feeling guilty for not praising my homeland. I think the concept of "homeland" is far too complex in my situation, a diasporan. Armenia is not my homeland. I must remind myself that the literal meaning of the Armenian word for "Homeland" is "Fatherland" but Armenians refer to Armenia as Motherland. My fatherland is Kessab in Syria. Armenia is the land of distant ancestors: a motherland. I live in diaspora. I'm diasporan. I have put down roots in multiple lands, I have mastered multiple languages, I identify with multiple cultures.

My trip to Armenia was fulfilling: If you ask me where my homeland is, I could now give you an informed but not a complete answer as I continue to find myself in the intricate web of identity construction.

Where is homeland?

Arminé refers to Armenia as her spiritual home. She does not consider Syria, her birth place, and Lebanon, the country she grew up in, to be homeland because she felt she did not belong there because the soil is not ancestral land. Arminé feels at home in Canada, "I'm here, I better get used to it," she says (February 2011).

Hermine is definite about her homeland. She says,

Well, homeland is a place where you're born and/or raised and you're being looked after by the government, by the people. I'm not saying that they feed you but they protect you. That is a homeland for me, Canada is my homeland. My

> motherland where my ancestors have lived for centuries and centuries, where my Armenian history lies, where the Armenian language survives, where the heritage breeds, that's where your motherland is; that's how I take it. (May 2011)

For both Arminé and Hermine, ancestral land and homeland are delineated differently. The first offers spiritual consolation, the latter provides physical comfort. Hermine uses two different expressions: homeland and motherland, and in that order. Again, one looks after physical needs, the other offers spiritual reassurance. Like a mother, Armenia nurtures her Armenian soul.

Nectar also considers Armenia her spiritual homeland and asserts that she is "Canadian with Armenian cultural ties." She then adds: "I do believe that for a group of people or a nation, the land is of utmost importance for cultural identity or continuance. Without a land, the group is like a boat without a shore to anchor. . . . I feel culturally uprooted and living a detachment from ancestral culture, with no firm foundation" (March 2011). For Nectar, ancestral *land* is "a state of mind" more than "a site of belonging" (Chamberlain, 2009, p. 178). Culture is what ties Nectar to Armenia. She is disconnected from the landscape physically because she does not live there, but the landscape remains part of her life as a researcher, only because it nourishes her culture and affords her spiritual renewal through the arts, literature, and music.

Zabel's response to my question was that she could not identify with only one homeland because she has lived in multiple countries. She was born in Beirut and loved Lebanon, but when she no longer had a home to live in after a bomb destroyed it, she

moved to Canada. Her sense of home/homeland was shaken when she immigrated. Shirinian (2004) identifies with this situation:

> when the home is destroyed, that is, when the centre of people's lives is razed and people are forced away, life appears dislocated and inauthentic. . . . The erasure of personal, family, and historical memory follows, and the weakening of the historical connection between a community and its landscape is initiated. Soon, the sources of memory disappear. *Home(land)*, which constitutes the basic elements of identity is lost. (p. 45)

In her attempt to survive and march forward, Zabel put her life in Beirut behind her. She stored away her memories of that landscape as home. She built a new home in Montréal and in that process, has accepted a new reality that diasporans can claim multiple *homelands* as their home and thus refashion their lives and reconstruct new identities. She says: "When you're diasporic, you have many homelands. You don't have one homeland. My ancestral homeland is in historic Armenia. My birth land is Lebanon, and I'm living in Canada. So I cannot choose one and say this is my homeland" (May 2011). When I asked: But how about Armenia? She responded: "Good question. I don't call it my homeland. . . . I don't give it the qualification. I like going there; I like Armenia's churches. I feel my history . . . in a church in Armenia, but I would not like to live there" (May 2011). Armenia is not a live-in-homeland for Zabel. It is a historic and cultural homeland as she appreciates the culture and the architecture of historic landscapes.

Nrani has lived in multiple diasporas. She also lived in Soviet Armenia for three years. With a sad voice, she announces that she does not have a homeland

anymore. She remembers that in Armenia, she felt like a "privileged outsider." "I was a foreign student from Lebanon. . . . We don't know each other and it's painful," she says referring to social, political, linguistic, and even cultural differences between Eastern and Western Armenians. At the end of our conversation, she conveyed that since she finished writing her dissertation, which explored issues of Armenian identity, she is comfortable with her fragmented self and feels that her "home is in the community of thinkers" (May 2011).

At our final group discussion, I asked again: "Where is homeland?" The following was our conversation:

Lori: Have you ever thought about how crazy we are sometimes. All the Armenians I know who go to Armenia come back with this feeling: Armenia is so great, what a country, what a culture! And then I went to Armenia and I wasn't impressed at all. Of course, there are great stuff but no one talks about

Nectar: The problems.

Lori: Yes. And besides that I cannot recognize myself in that country as being my country.

Zabel: Because it's not.

Lori: Because it's not. I just wanted to refer to that point. We are different, I believe. We are not the same Armenians.

Arpi: Yes, we have a different language too.

Lori: Of course we have certain common things. I don't know. I can't see them.

Nectar: That's only natural. It's not just Armenia. You're from Lebanon. I left Lebanon, five years later I went back. I can't think of Lebanon as my country. I've changed. Maybe they've changed but on a slower pace. I have changed because the cultures are quite different between here and Lebanon, let's say. So they noticed my change. We all change.

Zabel: But that's normal.

Lori: I've seen myself as having my roots maybe in Armenia. No, I can't see that. I don't see myself as an Armenian whose roots are in Armenia. I feel much more connected to this place now. I've been living here for 30 years and Lebanon is a memory.

Nrani: One of my favourite plants, and I have quite a few of them at home on my desk, actually to always remind me of that I guess—are little tropical plants that live on air, literally live by osmosis [epiphyte]. They just need moisture. They grow on barks of bigger trees or whatever. They come in different colours. I have mine on a piece of rock. It just sits on a little groove. And so every once in a while I just kind of drop a little bit of water droplets on them and they root. . . . They root and literally live out in the air. So you can have roots but cannot be rooted anywhere, that's my point.

Zabel: I don't feel the need to have roots somewhere. Like Lori said, and I said it yesterday too, I'm good here. I'm fine here, but I'm sorry, but back to Ani,[12]

[12] Ruins of Ani, an Armenian medieval city in Western Historic Armenia (now Turkey).

when I see pictures of Ani, when I see pictures of Kantsassar,[13] I feel my culture. I do identify with that even if I'm not living there [Republic of Armenia]. So that's why I'm a diasporic Armenian who happens to live in Canada.

Lori: The way you present it is very simple and very clear and I recognize myself in that. Why as a community do we dramatize? Why do we have the sense of a loss? (September 2011)

Even though we know that we could stretch our roots into multiple locales, or at least feel that we have extended deep roots in Canada, we continue feeling the loss of what we could have inherited, not only landscapes but also an uninterrupted culture that could have given us eclectic literature, authentic music, generations of artists, educators, and professionals. All these are not in large quantities in our diasporas because, for almost a century, we have been in a survival and not fully in a creative mode. This is a loss.

The autoethnographer voice: *Where is my homeland? On the way back from visiting Armenia, on the plane, reflecting on my seven-day trip, I commiserated with my brother that I no longer feel that I have a homeland in Armenia. I expressed:*

Homeland is a place that we accept as homeland and where we are accepted by the people there. I cannot accept that Armenia is my homeland, as I didn't identify with the landscape or the people. Furthermore, I didn't feel that we were accepted by the Armenians. We are as far apart as two different nations. I'm okay with that because that's the reality. Geographically, we are so far away

[13] Kantsassar is an Armenian monastery in Artsakh, Nagorno-Karabakh Republic.

from Armenia. You and I, our parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, are born by the Mediterranean Sea and not by Lake Sevan. There are thousands of kilometres in between and two time zones. Politically, socially, historically, intellectually, we are alien to each other. Perhaps, in a decade or so, when the old guard is replaced by a new one, we'll understand each other; or not. In some ways, we are at fault also: we haven't approached Armenia with a united front in our efforts to assist, we don't have the deep interest to repatriate. We cannot; we're Western Armenians and we're diasporans. Armenia, as I imagined it, does not exist. In a way, I feel liberated from the burden of searching for a homeland.

My brother's opinion was that diasporans don't need a homeland to maintain their distinctive culture and their identity. The answer to "where is homeland" is complex. We all have a subjective sense of belonging to a homeland. Our father says that Armenia must be above all. But our generation finds that concept to be odd. For us, homeland could be anywhere and everywhere. (Journal entry, September 2011)

Experiences of the participants delineate that we are linked to multiple locales and communities where we have forged a complex identity. However, our connections with these spaces are tenuous to the point of frustration and even voluntary exile. This means that the dynamics of diaspora is subjectively different not only for each group but also for each individual. Connections to a homeland can both be positive and negative, real and

imagined. Belonging to dual or even multiple communities could be both comfortable and unbearable. Therefore, diaspora is a dynamic concept that shifts and changes in complex and subjective ways. James Clifford (1994) says that diasporic cultures are "transnational networks built from multiple attachments, and they encode practices of accommodation with, as well as resistance to, host countries and their norms" (p. 307). Said (1994), an exile himself, explains that an exile creates a disquieting condition,

> a median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, and adept mimic or a secret outcast on another . . . restless, unsettled, you cannot go back to some earlier or perhaps more stable condition of being at home (p. 36). . . . You can never fully arrive, be at one with your new home or situation. (p. 42)

Discussing "Canada as a diasporic society," Rima Berns-McGown (2008) explains that the integration of newcomers in Canada is

> a process . . . of weaving two worldviews together, and over time one's understanding of one's relationship with society and one's religion, or culture, or customs, etc., shifts and changes. This "internal integration" allows for shifts in identity and shifts in senses of connection and belonging over time. (p. 8)

Berns-McGowns' observation is true in terms of shifting identities in attempts to combine cultures and worldviews. Diaspora conditions encompass much more than integration; it also involves resisting displacement and learning to belong, enjoying comforts in a new home rather than feeling homeless, finding happiness away from "ancestral homes."

Diaspora is a dynamic concept that evolves in both collective and subjective ways and involves a sense and a need for groundedness and belonging to multiple places, communities, institutions, languages, and even to concrete buildings, but at the same time it is a space where one can glide among "places" and move in and out of identities feeling comfortable in a state of floatingness rather than groundedness.

Additional Remarks

Diaspora for the participants is a space, a mindset, a lifestyle, a dynamic phenomenon where conditions change, multiple languages emerge, cultures and religions merge, and thus new identities are forged. We are Armenian diasporans who have lived in at least two host countries and we have learned to fashion and refashion our lives and to negotiate and re-negotiate our identities in our subjective as well as collective ways.

Diasporas are socio-political constructs. They are dynamic in the context of the group's needs, wants, and available possibilities. Immigrants and sojourners become diasporan only when they mobilize into a somewhat unified whole and establish viable communities. They establish and sustain connections with homelands and/or birth countries. Within their respective communities in their hostland, they work against assimilation. Their efforts concentrate on maintaining ethnicity with its full agenda of transmitting heritage and mother-tongue.

In our endeavour to sustain our Armenianness, the participants persist in struggling with interruptions, displacement, and uprootedness. We persist in maintaining continuity in order to survive but also to excel in our life journeys. We persist in putting

down new roots in order to avoid deracination. Generativity and connectivity weigh heavily on us because we must transmit, we must tell, we strongly believe we must right the wrongs and injustices of our history, we must make the world sympathize with us. We are burdened with an inherited history, and we feel loss. However, we also recognize our need to re-examine the dynamics of our diaspora and restructure century old institutions, rethink old traditions, and in particular, renegotiate inherited identities. We are exhausted by introducing ourselves as orphans and victims. We strive to start anew and create our own path in becoming woman, immigrant woman, diasporan Armenian woman, diasporan Armenian educated woman. We continue crafting alternative spaces and inventing new roles for ourselves in our communities.

CHAPTER FIVE: EDUCATION FOR IDENTITY NEGOTIATIONS

I had little choice but to follow life where it took me. (Bateson, 1989, p. 32)

In this chapter I explore the role of education and the role of family in participants' efforts to redirect their lives and re-skill their talents while persevering in maintaining their Armenian identity and at the same time negotiating new ways of being Armenian-Canadian in a host country. Throughout the chapter, I narrate our stories in relation to our educational lives, in both private and public spheres. To capture the essence of these narratives, I address women's "epistemological issues," which often are grounded in their experiences as learners and teachers. The research question that this chapter centres around is: how was higher education a force for the participants in negotiating their identities as diasporan Armenian women? I begin by narrating my own journey in education as my choice to conduct this research emerged from my desire to explore my own life history in order to understand how I came to value education, and how it helped me cope with my (up)rootedness and (dis)placement.

My story, of course, is not composed in isolation. I have connections to a family, a community, a society, a city, a country, a history. I am here in this space because I was pushed out of my birthplace by political turmoil, pulled by western winds over the Atlantic and dropped into a foreign yet hospitable land where languages and cultures intermingle and create a new world, a world that both embraces and resents my arrival, a world that both displaces and grounds me.

I emigrated from Beirut to Cambridge, Ontario in 1976. I moved to Toronto in 1981 to send my daughter to the then newly opened Armenian Day School sponsored by the Armenian Relief Society (ARS). To ease my integration into the community, I looked to women who had arrived before me and who appeared to have adjusted successfully. I met those who not only were concerned with daily survival but searched for more than that. They had put down roots in their host country without relinquishing connections to their mother tongue and heritage. I considered them my rescue rafts on the turbulent waters of my new life and so I nurtured these connections. I was thrown from my comfortable existence and was expected to not only survive but also to prove to my grandparents that I could sustain my Armenian identity while living across oceans, far away from ancestral lands and spirits. My grandmother's last goodbye words to me were: "Wherever you are, do not forget who you are. You are Armenian. Do not forget." I saw her piercing, sad eyes today in a photograph in a book called *Kessab and the Kessabtsis* (Apelian, 2011).

According to her family tree, five hundred years of history has kept my grandmother Armenian. She was Kessabtsi. She and her ancestors were born in Kessab, a mountainous town with multiple villages adjoined to it, located north of the ancient Phoenician lands on the Mediterranean Sea, in present-day Syria bordering southeast Turkey. Kessab's history dates back to the 9th century (Mavian, 1999-2000). According to the myth, a number of Cilician Armenians in Historic Armenia, descendants of the Rubinian Kingdom, found refuge in the mountainous area of Kessab when Antioch (Antakya, Turkey) was invaded by Seljuks and then by Crusaders between 1084 and 1098

(Apelian, 1913, pp. 24-28; Cholakian, 1995, p. 22). Before WWI, the population of Kessab was 8,000, of whom about 5,000 were killed in forced deportations in 1915 (Cholakian, 1995).

In 1939, lands on the eastern side of Mount Gassios in Kessab, nearly one third of Kessab, were annexed to Turkey and the rest remained under Syrian rule mandated by France (Mavian, 1999-2000). In the mid 1940s, as part of an aggressive repatriation effort, half of the population of Kessab moved to Armenia enticed by promises of land and prosperity by the then communist regime of Armenia (Pattie, 2004).

Fewer than 2,000 Armenians lived in Kessab in the 1990s (Pattie, 2004). Today, Kessab's population is dwindling because of political turmoil in Syria. Once again, Armenians are caught in the crossfire between Muslim extremists and the ruling military regime. There are media reports that Armenian churches in Aleppo and Der Zor have been vandalized and destroyed.

Kessab continues to have its own dialect, which is a variation of the Armenian language with differences in pronunciation and conjugation and with some vocabulary borrowed from Turkish and Arabic (Cholakian, 1995). Kessab is considered to be an "authentique foyer arménien (*զուտ հայկական օճախ*)" (Mavian, 1999-2000, p. 55).

Coming back to my grandmother's concerns about me losing my Armenian identity, how could I forget who I was, I thought then in 1976. Being Armenian was one of the reasons I was leaving Beirut, my birthplace. I was born to Armenian parents; I was not Arab and the civil war was not mine to fight. Regrettably for them, I was walking in the path of my grandfather and father, who were explorers of new possibilities.

Grandfather had come to Boston before WWI but had returned a few years later to help protect his hometown from Turkish invaders. During WWII, he took the opportunity to work for the British army in Haifa. He ventured out with his teenage son only to be caught in the wartime turmoil between Jews and Arabs. He fled north to Lebanon and then returned to Kessab. My father had liked living in cities; he was no longer satisfied with rural life. Within a few months of returning to Kessab he moved to Beirut in Lebanon, which was under the French mandate before its independence in 1943.[1] Armenians got along peacefully with the Lebanese, thrived in local businesses, and established a flourishing diaspora (Boudjikanian, 2009).

From the late 1800s to 1915, Armenians suffered the unimaginable violence of ethnic cleansing by the Ottoman Turks and the Young Turk regime. Survivors who lost their properties found refuge in Syria and Lebanon, as well as in other Arab countries, and started anew. The Armenian diaspora in Beirut established itself and opened numerous schools, churches, and even a university. The community kept to itself as there were no pressures to assimilate. However, political turmoil between Christians and Muslim Arabs, which was always simmering underneath the surface, became more pronounced when Israel became a state in 1948. Unstable political situations pushed people to more peaceful shores. Large numbers of Armenians repatriated to Armenia, which was part of the Soviet Union until 1991, and others scattered around the world. My family stayed in Lebanon, since my parents did not want to leave behind my

[1] Under the French mandate, the Christian minority Maronites were assigned the presidency, the Muslim Sunnis the premiership, and the Muslim majority Shia as parliament speakers.

grandparents who were not ready to leave their ancestral lands in Kessab even though Syria's political conditions were unpredictable. In the 1960s, three of my father's siblings left for Canada and two of my mother's siblings for the United States. Finally, in 1976, when my father believed that there was no hope for peace in the Middle East, he sent his children abroad. We left Lebanon to find tranquility and prosperity in Canada. My personal hope was to continue my education, which had been interrupted by war and marriage.

I had made a promise to my grandmother that I would always remember my heritage and tell the story of Armenians to my children and to the world. I could not have kept my promise if I had not continued my education and had not connected with those who were likeminded. I involved myself with the Armenian community when my daughter attended school in Toronto. I assisted with the preparation of a few Armenian textbooks and also published five Armenian children's books. My concern was to instill the love of reading Armenian in young children, as I was convinced that without a mother-tongue Armenian people would perish. In every diaspora, Armenians have built schools and churches in an effort to maintain their identity and heritage. Efforts to preserve the Armenian language are centuries old; in 405 AD, St. Mesrob Mashtots created the distinctive Armenian alphabet. Thereafter, Christian Holy Scriptures were translated into Armenian. Since 1512, Armenians have been printing and publishing literature, whether original works or translations from European languages. The first publication by the first Armenian printer, Hagop Meghapart, *Book of Friday* (*Ուրբաթագիրք*), is currently displayed in the Correr Museum, Venice. One of the early

translations of Aristotle's work was into the Armenian language, which is on display in the Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts in Armenia (*Հայոց Մատենադարան, Մեսրոպ Մաշտոցի անվան հին ձեռագրերի ինստիտուտ*). Margaret Bedrossian (1991) elaborates on the importance of language and religion for Armenians:

> The ties between religion and literature were so close that for many centuries most Armenian writers, poets, and historians were monastics. . . . Even during grimmer periods of invasion, pillage, and social chaos, education continued as teacher and pupils traveled from place to place. Scribes guarded their manuscripts as dearly as life, hiding them at the worst of times in caves and the crevices of inaccessible mountains. . . . And as the encoder of this [multi]-faceted language, Mesrob remains one of the great liberators of Armenian history. (p. 12)

Armenians consider the Armenian alphabet an important part of their identity and hence preservation of that language, both in its oral and written forms, is of national concern and of utmost importance to Armenian educators.

Education for Building Community

My interest in the Armenian community went beyond sending my children to the ARS School in Toronto; I needed to keep close ties in order to continue learning about my history and my relation to that history. It was important to me to understand the reasons for the centuries old displacements of Armenians. I wanted to be proud of my language and heritage not only because of our unique alphabet or because Armenia was

the first Christian state, or because we survived Genocide, but because I was in the company of educated Armenians who stood tall on their own merits.

I met Hermine, one of the participants in Toronto, at an Armenian function. Soon after, I attended her night classes on Armenian history and literature. I was amazed at her vast knowledge and her calm and composed way of transmitting that knowledge to those of us who had not yet realized the effect that our history has had on constructing our Armenian identity. Hermine believed that if we were well-versed in the Armenian language and well-informed about our history, then maintaining our Armenianness would be easier in diaspora. She had spent some time in Aleppo, Syria and in a few cities in Canada educating children as well as adults. In the 1970s and 1980s, she was active in establishing and supporting Armenian Saturday schools and summer schools in Ontario. Hermine was part of a group of seminal thinkers who worked towards the improvement of the intellectual scene in the Armenian community in Toronto. She has designed a university level course in Armenian literature and heritage and has taught night classes at the community centre. For her, teaching was the continuity she needed in her life in order to integrate into a new community. At our first formal interview, Hermine said:

> When something is taken away from you, you are determined to get it back and to keep it forever. So the Genocide gave us that will and that determination that no one on earth could take away our language or our faith from us. They could take our belongings, the furniture, other household means, but they can't take away our faith; they can't take away our language from us. (May 25, 2011)

In a new diaspora, what we could draw on for survival and intellectual growth was what we were familiar with, what we understood, and what had worked in the past. Educating the children and the community was what had helped previous generations survive hardships physically, spiritually, and intellectually. Hermine was referring to this mode of survival, which was familiar to her through the official history of her ancestors that had been passed down to her. To be precise, it is the learning and teaching of the Armenian language and history that link us to past generations. This "eternally visible past" of survival dictates how we reinvent ourselves in new diasporas (Bhabha, 1990, p. 149). We assume new lifestyles but we survive while holding onto language, culture, and community, albeit in varied ways. It was this belief that inspired Hermine to get involved in community development projects. She asserts that "it is possible to maintain our language and heritage if we establish Armenian schools and churches and teach the youth their heritage" (May 25, 2011).

The longevity of a community does not necessarily ensure the successful continuity of the identities of individuals. Time, place, and ongoing social change are factors that dictate how identities are renegotiated. Every generation has its own ways of being and evolving. Every Armenian has his/her own way of being Armenian, even though the discourse of historicity strongly shapes one's identity or the recreating of that identity.

There is a truth in what Rinaldo Walcott (2000) says: "The pain and the pleasures of history have intervened to invent us" (p. 149). Indeed, Armenians have allowed themselves, for over one hundred years, to be defined as the victims of Genocide, and

forced displacements. Historical events have influenced how we perceive ourselves and how we think we must act both as a nation and as individuals. Just as we have inherited a history, we have also inherited the identity of a victimized people dispersed around the world, struggling to keep our language and heritage. This struggle includes educating Armenians while responding to socio-political change and globalization. Education is key for expanding our identity and securing new spaces in new communities, in new worlds, in the global diaspora. Education exposes us to new ways of thinking and being. "The shift in thinking is necessary if we are to teach with any credibility," asserts Walcott, whose words comfort those who promote new or non-traditional ways of teaching and negotiating identities (p. 149). Perhaps, the shift in thinking for diasporan Armenians is that one can feel rather than express her/his Armenianness, or one can claim to be Armenian without having to follow traditions, or one can learn Armenian history without learning the Armenian language. Should we then continue to believe our grandparents' warnings that without speaking Armenian we cannot claim Armenianness? Is it time to consider the possibility that "knowledge of language is not a necessary precondition to claiming Armenian identity or commitment to Armenianness" and that we could "measure membership in the community by concrete action [and] voluntary service" such as donation of time, skills, and resources? (Bakalian, 1994, p. 253). Sharing an Armenian ethnic background does not make us homogenous. In reality, the only commonality we share is our national history, which itself is multi-faceted, contested, and still in the making.

History influences the present but does not prevent individuals from redirecting their own future and forging their own identity. Stuart Hall (2003) explains that an "essentialized identity" is one that is shaped by a shared history but that a "positionalized identity" is one that every individual takes according to her/his notion of cultural identity based on both similarity with compatriots and uniqueness of individuals (p. 237). Our historicized identity through rhetoric and tradition, language and culture, can be negotiated and redefined in order to accommodate changing environments and evolving personalities. Perhaps, through education, individuals and communities are able to recognize the complexities of identities and numerous possibilities of identity renegotiations. I have come to the understanding that education enables us to learn to articulate and rearticulate the self. However, I also acknowledge the reality that education can also be a site rife with tension, contestation, misunderstanding, imposition, and alienation when individuals are overwhelmed by obligations and expectations (discussed in Chapter 4, pp. 122-136).

Hermine believes that we must teach the next generation to be strong and without feelings of "inferiorities because they belong to a traumatized nation." She elaborates,

> If we keep raising them the way we were raised, making them feel pitiful because we've been victimized, they won't grow out of it; they won't grow any stronger. So it's a very, very delicate job how to handle the new generation. First of all they have to feel as strong as any Canadians who have their feet on this soil, who came yesterday or 10 years ago or 100 years ago. . . . The [Armenian] community extended the junior high to high school so that they will have this extra three years

to learn more of the literature, heritage, history, and language, but after that we have no control. (May 25, 2011)

With concerns for the next generation of Armenians, Hermine wrote and published a few stories that she shared with me. One of them speaks to her efforts to instill Armenianness in her three-year-old granddaughter.[2]

"Granny, why are you Armenian?"

"*Hokeese* (my soul), I am Armenian because my mommy and daddy are Armenian, I speak Armenian! You are Armenian too, your mommy and daddy are Armenian, your mommy's mommy and daddy are Armenian, your daddy's mommy and daddy are Armenian. We all speak Armenian, and our country is Armenia."

"Okay, Granny, I understand; but, I am not Armenian."

"Then, what are you?"

"I am ING."

"What's ING?"

"Your country is ARMenia, you speak ARMenian, you are ARMenian. My country is INGland (England), I speak INGlish (English) and I am ING." . . .

"Ina, my angel, you attend Armenian kindergarten, you speak Armenian, your mommy and daddy are Armenian. . . . You are Armenian."

[2] I have Hermine's consent to include this story even though it may expose her identity.

"Miss Karineh is not Armenian, Maradik is not Armenian, Irina is not Armenian, Johno is not Armenian, I am not Armenian, so we are not speaking only Armenian."

"So what do you speak in?"

"Inglishy."

"What do you mean you speak English? Last year I attended a performance when all of you recited Armenian poetry, you sang Armenian songs, you acted in an Armenian play. . . . And I cried because I was so happy."

"But we don't speak Armenian, Granny" (I am not Armenian I am ING).

At age three, this granddaughter has decided that she cannot be Armenian if she does not speak Armenian as her everyday language. Here I ask: Who is an Armenian? How can we measure Armenianness?

For over thirty years, Hermine diligently worked in assisting the Armenian community in its intellectual needs. She was active in promoting the building of a community centre, a church, and a day school in the 1970s. She organized and guided tours to the Republic of Armenia to awaken the love of *Hayrenik* (Fatherland) in the community. She says:

There was this determination to make the impossible possible, because it doesn't happen to every generation that they have to start building a community. Usually you're born in a community, and you take everything for granted because everything is there for you. But we were a lucky generation to come to Canada willingly; it wasn't forced on us. It was by choice. . . . As I said when you lose

> something you intend to get that back, it doesn't matter how much it cost you. . . . We are Armenians coming from 10,000 years back, so we have another 10,000 years to go forward and we had that chain, we're not going to break that chain. And one of the reasons as I said we came to Canada, was because we had that freedom [to maintain our language and heritage]. (May 25, 2011)

What Hermine is referring to is the centuries-old practice that Armenians have of establishing schools and churches as soon as they arrive in new hostlands. Teaching the Armenian language and history has been an important continuity and the main sustenance for maintaining Armenian diasporas. However, because survival always takes precedence over anything else, pursuing higher education has been a privilege for a select few. Armenians have been pushed and pulled from one country to another and therefore with every displacement they have concentrated on basic physical and cultural needs. For example, the generation that established institutions in the Middle East in the 1950s and 1960s had to abandon that diaspora because of wars between Arabs and between Arabs and Israel. Caught in the conflicts of other nations, large numbers of Armenians left for the West, and many moved to Toronto and Montréal. Once there, they started rebuilding the displaced community. This meant reverting to survival mode yet again. It is only in the past twenty years that the Armenian community in Canada is seeing a surge in post-secondary students (Bedrosian, 1991; Der Mugrdechian, 2007).

Education for Personal Interest and Professional Growth

Arminé is also dedicated to education. She was a teacher in Beirut and when she arrived in Toronto in 1991, she continued teaching. Arminé had aspirations to complete her master's degree, which was interrupted by the civil war in Lebanon. However, as a newcomer, she could not afford the tuition; therefore, she had to wait until she was secure in her job. In the meantime, she took a course at a college only to find out that it was below her intellectual level. She admits that finding her way into the education system was not easy, but she overcame the challenges because, in her own words, she is "quite strong and stubborn by character" (Feb, 2011). To her advantage, Arminé was fluent in English when she immigrated, as she had completed her undergraduate degree and master's course work at the American University of Beirut (AUB). Being the youngest in the family, and having older siblings who had attended university, it was a given that she too would pursue higher education. Arminé was privileged to have what Pierre Bourdieu (1973) describes as cultural and social capital. She had actual and potential resources, membership in a group, linguistic and cultural competence, and familiarity with culture that was attained through her upbringing; in other words, Arminé had educational qualifications, links to institutions, and an educated family. All these combined to provide Arminé with an environment conducive to success in higher education. For her, there was no other path other than the one modeled for her by her siblings as well as her social milieu. Arminé recalls her early years in Toronto:

> I felt a sort of cultural intellectual emptiness around me, because the [Armenian] centre here was not as lively as the centre that we had back in Lebanon. . . . I had

> to go back to university. I just took the subway and went to OISE and talked to one of the professors, and said that I would like to continue my master's, or re-start. And he said, "Why don't you start right away?" So in January 1994 I started in education, general education. I took evening courses. So on the days that I had courses I left my car at the Finch Station, took the subway. It was a good experience. It was very, very, very hectic, extremely hectic between my duties [at work] and my courses. Now when I reflect I wonder how I did it, but I did it; I'm glad I did. I completed my major research in the summer of 1997. (Feb. 2011)

Going to university was the natural thing to do for Arminé and, therefore, she persisted in obtaining a master's degree while teaching full time. Her remarkable research was published soon after graduation.

Arminé obtained higher education out of personal interest. She confirmed this when I asked her what motivated her to continue her education when she arrived in Toronto: "It was just interest. It was just for my self-satisfaction. . . . I really enjoyed it" (Feb. 2011). Arminé was self-motivated and perhaps seeking a continuity while crafting her new life in Canada. Being in academe afforded her the comfort that she had had while studying and teaching at AUB. In Toronto, she continued being a model teacher-learner and at the same time she was adapting to a new environment. Her father had a great influence on her as he was an avid reader. Arminé described him as "a walking encyclopedia." Furthermore, she confided: "My eldest sister was a teacher so most probably she was indirectly the one who led me to teaching. I've had a few teachers who I remember with deep respect" (Feb. 2011).

Arminé's story may appear as ordinary, one that almost every immigrant has experienced in some shape or form; however, her stories are extraordinary to her. She experienced and overcame frustrations, fear, uncertainty, anticipation, disappointments, and interruptions. She was thrown onto a new and uncertain path where the only constancy was education; that is, being in school, teaching and learning.

Zabel is a humble yet an accomplished scholar. She completed her second PhD in her mid-forties. Higher education was a path she chose in resistance to a traditional lifestyle modeled by her parents and her siblings. As the youngest of five children, she was well provided and cared for; therefore, she had the financial capital, which made it possible for her to receive a solid grounding in education. However, she did not have emotional and financial support to pursue her master's abroad. Determined not to walk in the footsteps of her older sisters, she refused to marry. Instead she found a job at a bookstore and supported herself until she was ready to travel to France. She confides that the childless couple who lived next door and who were both working professionals became her role models. Though she never talked to them, through her own observation she came to realize that there were possibilities in life other than getting married and having children. She recalls:

> I refused to have the life that they [parents and siblings] were having. For me education was very important. . . . My mother was not educated. . . . I used to resent that. I wanted to be different. . . . I wanted to continue my studies and I did. First in Lebanon and then I had a scholarship for my MA in France. I went, although my parents were against it. . . . But there was also another kind of, not

> influence, but a model, which was different from my parents' model: our neighbour [in Lebanon], a couple without children. I also started to work, because I wanted to go into an active life and not depend on what my father was giving me or my brothers were giving me. . . . I wanted to study. (February, 2011)

Zabel's pursuit of education was motivated by both personal interest and a desire for professional growth. She found cultural capital outside her immediate family, though she was financially secure in her paternal home. She went to a private French school in Beirut. Her elementary and high school French education was the foundation for her expanded intellect. She believes that her love of reading and learning about new cultures and new places came from her French education. French schools in Lebanon educated their pupils based on a curriculum designed for schools in France; therefore, they taught not only French language but also European history and geography, which were topics that introduced Zabel to new and exciting worlds outside the Middle East (February 2011). Moreover, Zabel was observant and courageous enough to venture into new intellectual territory when she asserted her independence and no longer depended on her parents and siblings. Her determination and persistence in obtaining higher education earned her a PhD degree in France and another in Canada. Zabel took notice of what was available. She seized opportunities. She attained what was rarely accessible to women in her particular Armenian community. Education gave her new lenses to see her world and her role in it differently.

Arguing against the notion of "natural femaleness," Judith Butler (1990) explains that women learn to perform their female roles. She refers to the forging of their identity

as "performativity" and observes that "an identity [is] tenuously constituted in time [and] instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (p. 270). She asserts that behaviour is "compelled by social sanction and taboo" (p. 271) and "through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time" (p. 274). Subsequently, individuals express themselves through roles they are assigned or that are available to them in a given situation and in a specific time and place. The role becomes the person, and thus she *becomes* a woman by conforming to a historical *idea* or *category* of woman (Butler, 1990, 2005). Thus, gender is a learned performance, not a biological state. Gender is enacted and continuously expressed in socially expected manners (Butler, 1990; Weedon, 1997; Weiler, 2001). However, while conforming to norms, there is often a struggle to assert one's agency. A woman *becomes* a female but at the same time, often chooses subjective ways of expressing herself, such as the way she talks, dresses, performs, resists. Butler (2005) points out: "This struggle with the unchosen conditions of one's life, a struggle—an agency—is also made possible, paradoxically, by the persistence of this primary condition of unfreedom" (p. 19).

In the experiences of her parents and siblings, who in her eyes lived the socially defined and expected lifestyle, Zabel had observed the "condition of unfreedom" that Butler (1990) talks about. As a form of resistance, she chose an educational life that secured her personal freedom and afforded her agency. In turn, Zabel personifies a success story for women in her community who also aspire to higher education because, as Elizabeth Hays and Daniele Flannery (2002) point out, some "women find validation of their experiences and a sense of connection in reading about other women's

experiences" (p. 42). Carolyn Heilbrun (2002), in turn, poignantly remarks that life stories introduce us to "the possible hidden lives of accomplished women who were educated enough to have had a choice and brave enough to have made one" (p. 59). Years ago, when I heard about Zabel's scholarly achievements, I recall thinking: If someone can have two PhDs, surely I can have one! Often women not only learn from each other's experiences but they also learn about themselves through the experiences of others: "For some women, education is a deliberate attempt to escape from restrictive roles and relationships; others gain new insights through education, which allow them to question previously taken-for-granted roles and self-images" (Hays & Flannery, 2002, p. 50). Learning experiences transform learners when they find themselves creating new knowledge and new ways of using that knowledge, not only for their own personal enjoyment, but also for professional growth and for assisting others by implementing their knowledge and capacities.

In their research about women as learners, Hayes and Flannery (2002) found that "individual women have varied experiences of voice and self that are not fixed and that do not develop along a predictable continuum" (p. 14). Using this statement as a point of reference, participants' stories suggest that their individual characteristics have played a role in their life choices, in their capacity to recognize what careers were and continue to be available to them, in their willingness as well as courage to live a certain lifestyle, and in their placing value on certain choices they have made. Learning is not only guided and shaped by institutional structures such as family, school, community, church, and workplace, but it is also shaped by personal interest, motivation, and determination. This

feminist approach suggests that women adopt new and unique ways of seeing, learning, performing, struggling, changing, improvising, and making sense of their lives while learning, unlearning, and relearning. Feminist scholars urge us to unlearn our gendered self (Hayes & Flannery, 2002), the self that performs its position based on societal expectations (Heilbrun, 2002). Finally, relearning how to be our true selves requires valuing our talents and contributions according to our own criteria and not by society's one-size-fits-all standard.

Learning in Mid-Life

The participants in this study are mature learners. That is, we entered or re-entered university as adult learners in mid-life (thirties, forties, or fifties). Even when we were no longer in formal learning institutions, we continued seeking ways in which to improve our language skills as well as our professional skills. Mary Catherine Bateson (1994) reminds us that almost all situations in life are learning opportunities. She remarks: "Living and learning are everywhere founded on an improvisational base . . . the flashes of insight come from going over old memories, especially of events that were ambiguous, mysterious, incomplete" (pp. 30, 31). We continue learning when we revisit and reflect on our learning moments and subsequently retell them in attempts to make sense of our complex lives as daughters and/or wives or mothers. Revisiting stories allows us to unpack them for new layers or possible meanings. Ongoing self-examination may lead to self-improvement and improvisation in a society where change is ubiquitous, where change is necessary to survive.

Education for Self-Change

Composing a life is what most independent and self-directed women do. In Bateson's (1989) words, we are "engaged in that act of creation . . . the composition of our lives. [We] work by improvisation, discovering the shape of our creation along the way, rather than pursuing a vision already defined" (p. 1). Reflecting on my life, I recognize the ways in which I composed my own life. I began my journey to higher education in 1996. This coincided with mid-life anxieties and restlessness. I had a secure job as a graphic designer in the field of climate control. But my interest in social sciences kept nagging me and I decided to explore the educational life again. Anthropology intrigued me and so I started taking courses at York University. Five years later, I found myself interested in a master's program at Brock University. Learning had become addictive in a positive way. I could not stop. I was living a dream that was interrupted years ago by war, marriage, childbearing, divorce, re-marriage, a second child, and countless responsibilities that a daughter, a sister, a wife, a mother, and an employee faces simultaneously. Fortunately, with support from my family, and with a clear vision for my education, I found ways to work towards living the academic life. As many women do, I too have learned to "piggyback one task on another ... stretching resources to respond to multiple needs" (Bateson, 1989, p. 238) or to simply deny myself any personal time and comfort. I was re-fashioning my life and assuming new and different identities.

Participants and I reentered educational life particularly because we are genuinely interested in transforming our lives and keeping up with the demands of a changing world, which also includes re-skilling our talents. Hermine's teaching credentials from

Syria were not accepted in Canada. She was considered insufficiently skilled, hence in a sense "de-skilled," and therefore she had to re-skill herself in order to succeed. With creative time management and efficient study habits, she was able to obtain a business degree while raising her children. She considered herself fortunate to have had the chance to pursue a new profession. She continued working with people, this time within a financial institution. Chappell et al. (2003) explain that "features such as continuous change and uncertainty, the erosion of traditional life trajectories, the need to negotiate one's life more reflexively and the pluralisation of individual and collective identities are all related to structural changes in society" (p. 3). These external forces, such as the need for professional accreditation and development, for training in new skills, or for seeking additional academic credentials, have led to the need for higher education. This need or desire for learning is not only "an adaptation to change" in order to attain qualifications, but it is also for refashioning one's life because self-directed agents, in this case mature learners, are capable of identifying needs for change and subsequently exerting their autonomy in making necessary changes for themselves (Chappell et al., 2003, p. 3). In response to the above comment, I ask: How does education help in composing new narratives and hence new identities? The educational life of the participants may answer these questions.

Paulo Freire (2006) suggests that participation in formal education changes people's social, political, cultural, material, and spiritual conditions. In turn, this active engagement in learning gives rise to personal and social transformations that can liberate the oppressed, as education is "the process of *becoming*" (Freire, 2006, p. 84). Learning

enhances critical and independent thinking and as such raises awareness that education transforms the lives of learners and can also help them overcome numerous forms of oppression. For Nectar, who came to Canada in the 1960s, education was a means of escape from her family and community. She had thought that with a secured scholarship she could continue her higher education while married. Marriage too was a way out of her restrictive environment. Unfortunately, the offer of a scholarship was rescinded because she was engaged to be married. As a result, she could no longer continue her studies and attend university in Beirut. Years later, this time in Canada, still wanting that "intellectual fulfillment," she found her way to a university and started taking evening courses in History, English Language, and Fine Arts (February 2011). Nectar confides:

> I felt I owed to my father and to my teachers and finally to myself to follow that venue [university education]. Besides, I was thirsty for higher education and not so keen to make money. . . . My father had high hopes for me. . . . I was the "perfect" daughter. My teachers had high hopes for me. . . . I was the "perfect" student. . . . I had dreamt of education all throughout the years I remember myself. As I said, marriage was a way out of the ghetto [in Beirut], and hope for a better future. What you dream, or plan, may not necessarily come true. For me [education] was something [I] had to do to satisfy a thirst, to fulfill a dream, to complete the cycle, so to speak. Whether or not I succeeded is not important. What is important is that I tried despite numerous obstacles. I consider it an act of courage to leave a well-paying job and to go to university. (February 2011)

Nectar was persistent in liberating herself from an oppression that her society had imposed upon her: the notion that women do not need higher education and in particular, married women should not go to school. She writes,

> I married into a family where educated people were regarded as "bums", a term my husband sadly still uses. The best example was my father-in-law. He was over educated for his surroundings in his days and penniless, couldn't support his family. . . . You had to have a trade and be successful financially in order to be respected. [My mother-in-law] used to say [to me]: "anyone else would have been a doctor given the years you have been studying." . . . As if it wasn't enough to have fallen into a family who did not think education was important, I came upon the director of preparatory school of fine arts [in Montréal], who literally said: "If you are married, go home and be a good wife." I was 20 yrs old! (February 2011)

Once again, Nectar was being silenced as a woman when she was discouraged to continue her education because she was married. The social order in the late 1960s was that once married, a woman's responsibility was within the household only; women were the nurturers and men were the breadwinners. Judy Rebick (2008) reminds us that "women's equality will be possible only in a world that accepts nurturing and caring as important roles for both men and women" (p. 255). Unfortunately, women continue to experience inequality. Their personal development, social progress, and economic success are suppressed because of overt as well as covert silences they endure in their families, communities, and work places. Women's silences are imposed through socialization and

thus become part of their performative lives. Almost invisible, silences often become women's untold stories, hidden struggles, and suppressed experiences.

Socially imposed or learned silences perpetuate inequities, give rise to socioeconomic imbalance, and thus promote discriminations. For example, immigrant women's stories may conceal private moments, opinions, or personal tragedies that may be embarrassing and painful to share with others. Immigrant women may think that their experiences are not relevant to the context of the storytelling. Or perhaps, they may think that they are sparing the listener's feelings by omitting certain parts of stories. Often, speakers tell safe stories and conceal lived stories. That is, we tell what we are expected to tell only or what we believe is safe to speak about publically in order to safeguard our reputation, but we hide the real stories that we have experienced, which we think may harm us if we broadcast them. This telling and concealing, or voicing and silencing, are both socially learned and imposed (A. Panossian, 2005).

Discrimination is often used as a powerful silencing tool that penetrates deep and causes great pain. Harmful discriminations sometimes arise from linguistic and communicative incompetence (inappropriate and/or imperfect speech), from imposed ideologies such as stereotypes (economic status), from systemic unfair treatment (covert and overt inequalities), and from people's insensitivities (negative attitudes and stereotypes). These invisible discriminations are often not recognized and thus not addressed. For example, the myth that immigrants must work hard but not expect quick upward mobility is ingrained in society and thus their socioeconomic status as working-

class are often given or imposed upon and therefore their experiences deemed unimportant and often kept silent (A. Panossian, 2005; Sleeter, 1993).

Nectar endured discrimination but she also fought against it. With persistence and courage, she continued working towards her dream of attaining higher education. Education gave her strength to ignore the societal myths, the unfair treatment, and insensitive remarks. Finally, as an accomplished artist, she started teaching. She produced numerous children's books in her effort to revive and teach traditional Armenian children's stories. She also worked with several Armenian communities directing art projects and arranging exhibits. Her active engagement in self-change through education gave her confidence in herself. Moreover, education provided her with the stamina she needed to continually assist her students as well as fill the need of Armenian communities for professionals who could motivate children to respect and love their heritage.

My personal experience of oppression and discrimination always relate to my immigrant status (class), to my Middle Eastern background (physical appearance), and to my gender (female). My specific experiences as an immigrant woman inform me; my personal, cultural, and historical experience of class-related oppressions should not be explained only through gender differences. Covert racism continues to persist in Canadian institutions (Carr & Klassen, 1997; Solomon, 2000). Patrick Solomon (2000) observes that " although equity and social justice have been introduced into progressive teacher education scholarship, discontinuities plague the passage of such issues from university lecture-rooms to practicum classrooms" (p. 968). Henry et al. (2000) identify

the forces of persisting discrimination as "systemic and democratic racism," which refers to an ideology that allows the justification of two conflicting values: "a commitment to egalitarian values" such as fairness and equal rights and an attitude that includes "negative feelings" about people who are different, and hence discrimination against them (p. 407). Just recently, I was once again reminded that I am part of an institution that categorizes its members by race rather than by intellect or professional merit when I was coerced into filling out an Employment Equity Self-identification Survey. First I was given an explanation as follows: "Members of visible minorities are persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour, regardless of birthplace," and then asked the following question: "Based on this definition, are you a member of a visible minority group? Yes __ No __" (CUPE 3903 Employment Equity Committee, York University).

The purpose of this survey, according to York University, is to "Put into place positive policies and practices to ensure that the effects of systemic barriers are eliminated" (Sheila Wilmot, 2010, CUPE 3903 Equity Officer). This claim may be well intentioned, but at the same time, the institution is asking certain members, once again, to construct their identity as either "mainstream" or "other." After hesitating for a few days, I checked the Yes box despite the fact that Armenians identify themselves as Caucasians. But in the recent years, based on genetic distance analysis that quantifies differences between populations, there are theories that the DNA of Armenians is very similar to that of Hazara Tajiks who are categorized as non-Caucasian (Cavalli-Sforza, L. Menozzi, P.,

& Piazza, A., 1994). Yet another study confirms that the DNA of Armenians is closely clustered with that of Ashkenazi Jews! (Rosenberg et al., 2005).

Arun Mukherjee's (1993) compilation of autobiographical stories of Canadian women of Aboriginal, Asian, African, Caribbean, and Middle Eastern descent reveals that women of colour continue to be asked where they are from, thus implying that "real" Canadians are white. Mukherjee observes that "second or third generation white immigrant women, once they no longer speak with an accent, do not face the kind of systemic discrimination that remains the lot of immigrant women of colour, no matter which generation they belong to" (p. 5). Linguistic accents are racialized, politicized, and sometimes even gendered according to sociopolitical and economic hierarchies. Certain differences in speech are discredited while others are not. For example, often a British accent is not discriminated against, but a Caribbean accent is. As an immigrant woman, I struggle against the social perception that my intelligence and education are at the level of my English language proficiency and my speech intonation (I began learning English as an adult and as my fourth language). Because of my non-Anglo-Canadian accent, I am categorized as a non-native speaker of English and therefore that is held against me. Not long ago, I was advised to withdraw my application for a position to teach English as a second language at a private school because English was not my first language. Many immigrants in Canada are generally considered working class persons who can fulfill economic demands because immigration laws allow entry to Canada to those who qualify for a certain labour force and who are willing to do jobs rejected by Canadian citizens (Abu-Laban, 2008; Wilton, 2008). In particular, the policy "tends to favour male

applicants from countries with extensive educational and training opportunities" but these newcomers are expected to enter the labour market rather than work in fields for which they were trained (Abu-Laban, 2008, p. 96).

Institutional discrimination is based on not only language accent but also on race and class, which are topics that should be discussed openly and publicly. Antiracism entails acknowledging racism, naming it, and discussing it. It means, "making anti-discrimination an explicit part of the curriculum and teaching young people skills in confronting racism" (Nieto, 1996, p. 309). Racism can be fought against when we work in partnership with individuals and communities. bell hooks (2003) suggests cultivating our "collective awareness" in a "spirit of community" (p. xv). She says, "I rely on the sharing of personal narratives to remind folks that we are all struggling to raise our consciousness and figure out the best action to take" (p. 109). Community is where we learn, where we perform, where we teach, where we struggle, and where we triumph. On the other hand, community can also be a site where we are silenced, oppressed, and marginalized when we do not perform as expected.

Education for Intellectual Responsibility

For the participants, education has been the point of detour in our interrupted lives when we arrived in Canada. For some of us, education opened new doors for better jobs. For others, education provided comfort and created a continuity to reconnect with what was lost in the process of immigration and resettlement. Going back to school or starting

to teach again placed our daily routine on track and suddenly there was hope that one day we would feel less alienated in our new environment.

For me, education is learning and adding new information to my repertoire of knowledge for my own pleasure and intrinsic need and in order to one day share that knowledge. I must admit that education has become a privileged use of my own learning after years of absence from it. I love the process of learning. I am stimulated when I understand new theories or experience a thought in new ways. Education helps me think critically, examine carefully, reflect deeply, respond analytically, evolve unexpectedly. Learning comforts me knowing that it will give me pleasure and satisfaction, help build character and confidence, and leave me with a trained mind. Thus far, higher education has given me moments of joy and years of adventure in classrooms and in workplaces. It has afforded me a language to articulate my experiences. I have finally begun to understand my diasporan identity through the social science courses I have taken. I recall the first time I thought about "who I am". I was learning the language of articulating my identity through theory and practice. It was not easy to admit that issues of identity lay in the grey zone, the not-so-easily definable areas of social thought. In a paper for my Political Anthropology course I wrote the following:

> My identity is a construction based on my history, my language, and my culture. In fact, this paper is yet another reconstruction of myself for my readers (and for myself). Stuart Hall (1996) observes that "identity is a narrative of the self; it's the story we tell about the self in order to know who we are. . . . Identity is a process, identity is split, identity is not a fixed point but an ambivalent point" (in

> Morley, D. & Chen, p. 345). My identity is constantly changing and taking on new faces in new places as I learn about myself when I adapt to new situations. (April 1999)

Years later, in yet another course at university, I wrote, "I continue to struggle with my multiple, shifting, and unsettled identity. This is a concern that I intend to continue to explore" (October 2008). Even after numerous university degrees and multiple research projects, I continue to write about the ambiguity of my identity.

Education, in particular teaching, frustrates me when I witness the indifference of students towards their learning. At times when I'm at the Armenian Centre and hear children and youth speak English with each other, I feel disillusioned and angry that the magnanimous teaching efforts of Armenian educators and parents appear to have failed in the area of Armenian language transmission because the new generation chooses to speak English rather than Armenian even in a space where they are expected not to do so. Nrani also shares my sentiments; she says: "In diasporic situation, if you want to continue that [language] transmission . . . it's a collective endeavour. We have utterly, utterly failed in that collective endeavour" (May 2012).

With regard to teaching the Armenian language and heritage in Armenian schools, the participants in Montréal and I feel that we have somewhat failed. Nectar's daughter Maral attended Armenian school up to grade 11 yet she feels that

> the school didn't give anything. What she has is from home. . . . From my experience with her, whatever she picked up in Armenian culture she picked up in the house, nothing from her school. . . . Her background knowledge is very

> limited to go in-depth in any kind of Armenian research in the arts. It's very limited. . . . What's missing with this generation is that foundation. They don't have it. . . . They have to live it first and they're not living it. (February 2011)

What I think Nectar means is that children are taught rudimentary Armenian language and history without being sufficiently immersed in Armenian culture, arts, and heritage so that they consider these topics relevant to their everyday lives. One of the reasons that children are not learning to think in Armenian is because the topics they learn in Armenian classes are not interactive. Armenian textbooks and the teaching methods have not noticeably changed in the last two decades. Furthermore, today's children are heavily involved in electronic technologies, which are not yet fully utilized in Armenian language/history classrooms.

Lori is very concerned about her teenage children's lack of interest in the Armenian community even though she and her husband are actively involved with the Armenian community. She confides,

> I find that there are no enabling factors for that transmission [of Armenian language]. That collective failure has a direct effect on my personal understanding. When I hear in my home my children speak in English, even though every minute I remind them not to do so. I tell them that we're Armenian and we're losing the language. I thought that I was doing what was necessary. I don't know what went wrong. (May 2011)

Zabel comforted Lori about her frustration of language transmission:

> I cannot preach to my children. I cannot force them. But I think that who I am and who I'm not is the model I'm leaving for them. . . . I think the culture, the language and the traditions I want them to have, these will stay, but they will be different Armenians. (May 2011)

Nrani responded to Zabel and Lori:

> Our problem is that we think we're all the same. We're not. . . . There are issues of engagement of critical thinking and public discourse, which is sorely, sorely missing. . . . I have to come back to education. . . . We are all accountable and we're all responsible for that. (May 2011)

An important concept here is the notion of who we think is an "Armenian." For our generation (first generation immigrants in Canada), being Armenian includes speaking the language and thinking in Armenian. But perhaps for our children, whose world is dominated by the language of social media, which is definitely not the Armenian language, speaking Armenian is reserved only for their parents and teachers. This phenomenon is new to us; therefore, we have not yet learned how to assist our children in facing the loss of the Armenian language.

Nrani was a teacher at one of the Armenian day schools. She feels that teaching and learning is her life. Even in wartime Beirut, she crossed streets under fire so that she could attend her classes. Her parents were active in Armenian intellectual life in Beirut and successfully instilled in their daughter similar values. Nrani says: "I was fascinated with learning. I was interested in exploring and in having adventures in learning" (February 2011). Because of her positive outlook towards education, nurtured by her

teachers and her parents, she observed that war was also educational because of the emergence of resistance art and poetry at the time.

> Growing up in the civil war was also an education, and a huge part of who I am now. Being brought up with certain ideals, very humanitarian ideals, and then seeing all that being crushed around you when you're growing up. I had just turned 12 when the war started, and I lived 15 years of it. . . . What kept me going in those years was another part of informal education. . . . It was resistance art, resistance poetry, that was something again that had to do specifically with the local Lebanese scene. And I must say Lebanese and Palestinian scenes. . . . Artists of resistance worked and thrived in West Beirut despite the difficulties, despite the other challenges, despite the violence and the grotesqueness of the war, but they were there. For me that was a very, very important part of my education, an informal but a very essential part of my education. (February 2011)

Nrani continues living the educational life: teaching and doing her post-doctoral research. She admits that the

> opportunity of understanding border crossings and defying the patrolling of boundaries within our own communities . . . despite all the hardships we lived, also enriched us incredibly and gave us a different understanding of our own Armenian heritage and of coming back to it in a very different way. (May 2011)

What I understand Nrani to mean is that because she observed firsthand the immersion in resistance art as a coping mechanism that artists used to express themselves under horrific conditions, perhaps there is hope that Armenian identity issues can be addressed in

relation to our inherited history of trauma in new and different ways. With a new approach, it is possible to face challenges in education presented in the Canadian Armenian diaspora; diasporan mentality requires different teaching and learning approaches and techniques. Armenian-Canadian diaspora issues and challenges vary from those of Middle-Eastern ones that, nevertheless, remain the model for the Armenian diaspora in Canada. Nrani confides,

> We've been quite near-sighted. I say this with feelings of guilt because I think that we are all accountable for that and we're all responsible for that. I'm talking in the context of North America. Here we have all the tools and the resources to have done much better and to use them in a way that would have been creative. What we did is we took the situation that was in the diasporic communities in the Middle East and we transplanted it here. It worked in the Middle East; we're proof of that. But the tragedy is that here education [in Armenian schools] became more traditional and controlling of boundaries that created a strange insularity in a very open [Western] society. So there were so many things happening and in the meantime we lost time and energy—we wasted them yet we did not create the creative resources. (May 2011)

According to Nrani, the Armenian diaspora in Montréal was employing strategies used in diasporas in Beirut, Aleppo, or Cyprus, which were major Armenian diaspora centres. A substantial number of Armenians began leaving the Middle East in the late 1960s when the various political climates were no longer stable. In the diasporas mentioned above, the education system was traditional: top down teaching with a content-centered method

rather than a collaborative student-centered approach. In addition, these diasporas were somewhat segregated from the mainstream, both geographically and socially. Armenians had their own business and school/church quarters. These communities were almost self-sustaining and therefore there was only a limited amount of interaction between Armenian students, and for example, Arab students. Furthermore, religion also created boundaries between Armenians and Maronite and Orthodox Lebanese or Muslim Arabs. Guardedness against assimilation in host countries and uneasiness with Islam, because of Genocide, kept Armenians, who are Christian, at a distance from mainstream and non-Christian communities. The insularity of the Armenian diasporas because of linguistic and cultural differences was a contributing factor in successfully maintaining the Armenian language, culture, and religion in Muslim countries, even though Armenians have lived in the Middle East for centuries. Nrani was born and raised in Beirut; she attended school for a short time in Cyprus but kept in contact with peers and educators; she had close ties to relatives in Aleppo; therefore, she had a good understanding of how the Armenian school system worked in these diasporas. Nrani shared her opinion.

> In diasporic situations, if you want to continue that [language] transmission, [it] must be a collective endeavour. . . . The problem is not that we don't realize this but that we don't have courage to talk about these things. . . . As a community, do we come to the understanding that we also need to give voices and spaces and create that critical mass where we can have artists? Actual artists and scholars. . . . It breaks my heart that we're losing the [Armenian] language. For me language is essential and very important. I will never be able to come to grips with that, after

> my generation, already with this generation, language is less than 30%, 20%, and that is horrific. . . . Where is renewal going to come from? Renewal for me would come from humanities and social sciences and arts. Do we have people in these fields? Do we encourage young women to become artists? . . . We still encourage them to become lawyers and engineers and doctors. . . . Change will happen to a generation who is attuned to openness. We have not invested reflectively and critically in our education infrastructures. We have three schools and spend millions on the buildings but do not have a university course that could prepare teachers for this generation. (May 2011)

Nrani believes that education can be reparative. It is reparative when it is applied based on place, time, and specific needs. Ursula Kelly (2009) explains that "reparative education propels forward a sense of cultural responsibility . . . and forges more ethical, reparative attachments as a practice of renewal and hope" (p. 118). Reparative education in Armenian schools would involve creating curricula that is student-centered, interactive, collaborative, and relevant to students' lives in their Canadian multiethnic communities. Students can come to understand the importance of the Armenian language in their intellectual development. They can become more connected to their language and to their heritage; that is, they can be guided to love and respect it as valuable and irreplaceable. It is true that the circles in which Armenian children can speak Armenian are very small, but they hold the opportunity of keeping safe a language that has survived for thousands of years, and they now can assume the responsibility to protect that language so that it does not perish under their care. This may sound burdensome, but according to my

generation, it can also be a privilege. However, is it morally justified to expect children to bear their parents' and their community's burdens? Moreover, is it not true that each generation reacts against the generation that has come before it?

Hannah Arendt (1993) points out that every generation inherently brings newness to the world, "something unforeseen by us" (p. 196). She explains, "Our hope always hangs on the new which every generation brings; but precisely because we can base our hope only on this, we destroy everything if we so try to control the new that we, the old, can dictate how it will look" (p. 192). In order to nurture renewal, we can prepare an environment conducive to creativity where children can experiment and be productive. But at the same time, is the expectation of this renewal another imposed burden? We are caught in a paradox where we impose in order to have our expectation of this renewal met.

Nrani encourages the developing of a special project in the Armenian community, one that involves addressing its particular need for renewal. She advocates for teacher education of Armenian teachers in select universities in Montréal or Toronto who plan to work in Armenian schools. She insists that we need to prepare Armenian teachers for the challenges that they and their students face in today's Armenian schools. She asserts that having Armenian schools is not enough if we do not have an adequate intellectual force guiding these institutions (September 2011). These suggestions in education rekindle hope that the Armenian schools can be places for superb education and places where children and youth build their identities as Armenian-Canadians while learning new ways of belonging to their respective communities and new ways of being Armenian.

Lori's attachment to her Armenian community started years ago when, with her husband, she founded an organization that assists new Armenian immigrants who were fleeing the war-torn Middle East in the 1980s and 1990s. She too had left Lebanon, but in 1977 as a young high school student. She continued her schooling at universities in Montréal studying political science and then business. Lori was drawn to social justice issues and continues to work with NGOs locally and internationally. She also teaches a university course about community development and promotes learning circles in a few non-Armenian ethnic communities. Her interest continues to be in helping those in need through education. She says: "I've always been in the university world, in the learning world. Learning for me is life. I am active because I learn. I feel young because I learn and teach . . . so that's wonderful" (February 2011).

Lori describes her life as full of ruptures and discontinuities but she has found education to be a continuity that sustains her. In her work, she promotes Paulo Freire's transformative learning concept. She explains:

> The idea is if you want to direct your action and if you want to change and transform the world and the community, you need to think about your actions; you need to be conscious of who you are, of what you're learning and then re-implement them in praxis. (February 2011)

Indeed, Freire (2006) asserts, "Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (p. 72). This means that consciousness about one's social and intellectual status is raised through self-awareness

and a desire for education. Lori admits: "I had a few women [in my life] who were so courageous and incredible, and that's where I started re-appreciating, re-entering the community with another identity. I started appreciating the whole idea of being an Armenian, differently" (February 2011). As a learner and an educator, Lori feels an intellectual responsibility for her multiple communities and continues advocating the value of active learning and teaching. Lori's words resonate with me. Through our interaction with the "world" around us, we understand ourselves and renegotiate our identities. I strongly believe that when we take an inventory of possibilities, we can re-invent ourselves and build a hopeful future for us and for our fellow diasporans.

Additional Remarks

As mature learners, the participants in this study adapted to change, accumulated new skills and qualifications, and demonstrated that, as independent learners, we are capable of self-change. We learned from interruptions and improvised to work with what we had. We reshaped our lives and adapted to new situations and environments. As we gained confidence returning to education, we developed a language to articulate ourselves because we had begun to understand our desire to learn, our intentions, our shortcomings, and our diasporan Armenian identities. We began narrating our lives with those who listened, with those who critiqued, and with those who were willing to dialogue. Education gradually transformed and eventually afforded us the opportunity not only to take responsibility for our own learning but to also assume responsibility to teach in our respective communities, of course, in our individual capacities.

CHAPTER SIX: REVISITING DISCUSSIONS AND OFFERING CRITIQUES

> *We write to heighten our own awareness of life, we write to lure and enchant and console others. ... We write to taste life twice, in the moment, and in retrospection. ... We write to be able to transcend our life, to reach beyond it. We write to teach ourselves to speak with others, to record the journey into the labyrinth, we write to expand our world. (Anaïs Nin, 1974, p. 149)*

In this chapter, I continue my discussion in order to expand my world of knowing, for my project is an open-ended life history research where participants relive and reinterpret their stories while sharing them with their listeners. As a participant and an observer, I continue to be open to emerging topics and responsive to dominant themes that linger in our conversations, such as our historicized and socialized identities. I attempt here to synthesize my findings, continue my interpretations, and offer critiques where appropriate.

Theory and Methodology Revisited

The purpose of this study was to grasp the essence of how historicized and socialized identities are refashioned and renegotiated. Data collection centered around the lived, relived, retold, re-examined, and reinterpreted life stories of seven diasporan Armenian women living in Canada. Participants' narratives about their educational lives were key in explicating the ways in which they secured spaces in their respective communities and how they were informed by and in turn informed the academic debate on particular diasporic dynamics and issues.

Using life history research as methodology suited my desire to conduct participant-centered research that employed autobiographical and autoethnographic

methods, personal interviews and group discussions, as well as a variety of writing styles and differing voices, such as academic writing in a researcher voice, journaling, poetic, and dialogic reflexive writing in a participant voice, and reflective and responsive writing in an observer voice. The autoethnographic approach related the self with the social and interconnected the researcher, the participants, and the communities they speak in and from. We narrate our lives to resonate realities, semblance, familiarity, compassion, acceptance, sympathy, solidarity, and to understand complexities of life (Bateson, 2004).

The group setting used for discussions proved to be both self-censoring and self-expressing spaces. We were encouraged by each other's narratives but also concerned about revealing personal information that could have damaged our reputations in the group and in the community at large. However, recalling moments from a particular group discussion, I am reassured that some silences were broken and voices reverberated in positive ways.

Zabel: Our problem is that we did not let the people create other institutions, new institutions. We brought the old ones with us from Lebanon, from the Middle East to the new continent and we continued here and this generation does not identify itself with these old institutions. . . .

Nrani: *Jamanagavreb* [anachronism], just like the political party. And the point is that they're all on these power trips. They want to consider themselves leaders of this community. The community is totally rudderless at this point. . . . The problem is that in this community we have three schools with buildings that have cost I don't know how many millions. . . . If we had spent 10% of the money that we have put

in those schools in establishing let's say a two-course, three-course cycle in a university . . . to prepare Armenian teachers, . . . I guarantee you, we would not have been in the stagnated pit that we are in today, and that we will wallow in for the next 50 years. But that's the reality and I'm really sorry that I sound extremely bitchy when I talk about this.

Lori: That's why I think spaces like this . . . have to be promoted in the community. . . .

Arpi: We need spaces where we can talk freely. (May 2011)

Our group discussions were spaces where we articulated the challenges in Armenian schools and where I hope we were encouraged to continue raising our voices in public.

I used "dialogic writing" to reconstruct experiences in order to recover their meanings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Davies & Gannon, 2006; Miller & Paola, 2004b). Through reflexive and reflective journaling, I explored my thoughts, feelings, assumptions, ambiguities, and challenges, and thus uncovered understandings and explored sentiments that I had not yet contemplated or experienced. These journal entries offered an additional interpretive space where I found the flow of writing to be less self-censored and less inhibited by academic demands.

I situated my research in a feminist pedagogy believing that women subjectively construct their identities as learners and educators through self-narration (Bateson, 1989, Chappell et al., 2003; Neilsen, 1998, Weiler, 1999). I made this decision because the life choices participants had made illustrated their feminist ideology: independent souls who, against numerous obstacles, pushed themselves out of the patriarchal dominance that shaped their daily lives in order to pursue post-secondary education at a time and place

when women were neither expected nor encouraged to attain higher education (1960s and 1970s in the Middle East). Throughout their careers and in several countries, participants successfully used education for both personal growth and social change. Their life experiences reaffirm the feminist pedagogy that women's ways of learning are subjective, fluid, improvisational, and always within context (Bateson, 1989; Belenky et al., 1986; Weiler, 1999, 2001).

Education: An Identity Marker

Whether in universities or in their respective communities, participants followed their passion for learning, for improving their intellect, and for honing their talents and skills in their professions. Along the way, they faced the challenges and discomforts of being newcomers in Canada, feeling displaced and disconnected from communities, and feeling fragmented as Armenians and Canadians belonging neither here nor there. However, with persistence they slowly became grounded physically, emotionally, and intellectually when they developed a language to articulate themselves and to understand the multilocality of their diasporan Armenian identities. They found comfort within their new community of learners and teachers. Nrani said that she feels at "home" in the company of intellectuals at her university where she is comfortable with her identity as a "fragmented whole." Nectar feels comfortable with her students and proud of their accomplishments. Lori loves teaching and promoting learning circles. Zabel is content with doing research and publishing. Hermine finds gratification in promoting intellectual events at the Armenian community centre. Arminé has found a continuity in teaching and

learning. As for me, I am proud of my tenacious pursuit of higher education. All seven participants have used education as a means for self-fulfillment, to understand the ruptures in their lives, to establish roots in their new diaspora, and to build connections in both the Armenian and the mainstream communities.

I must admit that I have an intellectual romanticism that education is superior to all other means for change or for ways of being in this world. How else could I prove to myself that William Saroyan's (1908-1981) popular words are correct? "It is simply in the nature of Armenians to study, to learn, to question, to speculate, to discover, to invent, to revise, to restore, to preserve, to make, and to give" (from *First Visit to Armenia*, 1935). Moreover, I cannot ignore my grandmother's belief that a person is nothing without education. Nor can I forget her longing for learning as she was deprived of education when orphaned at age eight. Grandmother Nouritsa taught herself to read and write and on occasions, she even wrote poetry. I remember her as being an avid reader and a great storyteller. My grandmother's words have influenced my thinking greatly. For me, the meaning of life is improving intellectual capacities; therefore, I am quite passionate in my belief in education.

I am also concerned, however, that higher education often creates a gap between the educated and the uneducated in the community. In my study, I found that some of us felt as "outsiders," "others," and "exiles" in our own communities, because of our education. For example, Nectar was concerned that the more she researched a specific Armenian art-form, the more she observed her distance from Armenian sources and the community. This experience is in line with what Trinh T. Minh-ha (1990) describes,

> The moment the insider steps out from the inside, she's no longer a mere insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. . . . She is, in other words, this inappropriate other or same who moves about with always at least two gestures: that of affirming "I am like you" . . . and that "I am different" while unsettling every definition of otherness. (pp. 374-375)

This explains the reason why my participants often reside on the margins of their Armenian community as "outsiders"; but as "insiders," they have an incessant need to work with the community. Like whales, they must come up for air.

However, I must acknowledge that higher education is a privilege for those who have the academic, cultural, and financial capital to pursue post-secondary education. Not every Armenian woman has the intellectual capacity, family support, and financial security to pursue higher education. In addition, some women do not have aspirations to amass degrees or the need to receive credentials. Others may find fulfillment in vocations that do not require university education.

Diaspora Issues Continued

My research exploration focused on finding meaning in everyday narratives of diasporan Armenian women in their attempts to refashion their lives in Canada. Diaspora, as a theoretical framework, helped me interpret my data. The concept of diaspora, in a broad sense, refers to voluntary or forced movement of people from one

location to another as well as people's collective efforts to maintain a relationship with their actual or imagined country of origin (Braziel & Mannur, 2003; Berns-McGown, 2008; Safran, 2003; Tölölyan, 1991). My data illustrated that, for my participants, the Armenian diaspora is a complex dynamic; it is a space, mindset, lifestyle, identity. In particular, it is a fluid situation where multiple languages emerge, cultures and religions merge, and thus new identities are created. The term diaspora also encompasses the host-countries where we have established a home and from where, individually and collectively, we have maintained ties with Armenia: our *motherland* or imagined *homeland.*

The Armenian diaspora is also a space where we are creative, maintain connections with other Armenians, resist assimilation, and embrace Armenian traditions. In diaspora, we justify displaced feelings, and feelings of not-belonging and not wanting to belong; we justify nomadic behaviour because of which we have become global transnationals (Kotchikian, 2009; Wayland, 2006). We are the "other."

Diaspora as a dynamic phenomenon frames my participants' perception of who they are and who they could become. We consider ourselves diasporans because we are displaced but have found a place to call home, uprooted but have established roots in Canada. We fear becoming deracinated if we lose our mother-tongue and if we sever ties with our Armenian community. As Tölölyan (1996) points out, we live "both the perils and rewards of multiple belonging" (p. 15). This multilocal and multivocal belonging is also a source of power with which to claim legitimacy for socio-political entitlements such as ethnopatriotism or being able to understand and work in two worlds to economic

advantage, as in the case of Hermine's organized tours to Armenia for the purpose of teaching history and heritage (Clifford, 1994; Tölölyan, 1996).

As diasporan Armenians, participants illustrated in their narratives how personal and collective history influences identity construction. We all introduced ourselves as the daughters or granddaughters of Genocide survivors. This introduction established our identity as Western Armenians sharing a history of trauma that unites us in support of the Armenian Cause; we understand that we are both socialized and historicized in this dogma. On the other hand, when we articulated the burden of that inherited history, we began composing our own narratives that were in resistance to the inherited identity of "genocided victims." Recollecting our collective history, we also realized that we have been privileged to have direct contact with Genocide survivors who taught us perseverance and courage, and who filled our hearts with hope. But at the same time, they have imprinted their sorrow on us. We feel disadvantaged to have inherited their pain, their shame, their orphanhood, but we are honoured to have inherited their brave souls and resilient spirits.

The Armenian diasporic position is also fuelled by our sense of entitlement of being the first Christian nation state, and having a distinct language with its unique alphabet, and by our search for recognition as the first genocided people of the 20th century. These are markers of our Armenian history and identity (Kaprielian-Churchill, 2005; Panossian, 2002) and as such, these mythic (Christian nation/language) and indisputable (Genocide) stories bolster our pride as well as oblige us to pass on our

religion, language, and history. As Saroyan (1948) says, we cannot ignore the "remembrance in the blood" (p. 83).

Identity in Flux

The complexity of our Armenian identity extends beyond the official or national history into our personal narratives. In the collective, there is the personal. It is within the personal that growth and change percolate. The well being of the group starts with the healthy individual. But also, the strength of a people is in its collaborative number as well as its unifying tensions.

Interpretation of history is an essential part of identity construction. Often major events disturb both the personal and the collective identity construction and thus the process of reformulation or renegotiation begins. Genocide was one of those events that forever changed the Armenian national identity. Stuart Hall (1990) asserts that identities are not "fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous play of history, culture and power" and that "identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past" (p. 225). Daphne Winland (1995) elaborates:

> Hall's observation is particularly true in the context of diasporan identities, where people's relationship to the past is continually and doubly influenced by developments in the host country and in the homeland, and especially so where conditions in the country of origin have become uncertain. In these contexts, the

> symbolic representation of the mother country becomes especially critical in negotiating diasporan identity. (p. 5)

Identity construction involves reinterpretation and reconstruction through rediscovery, which does not occur in a vacuum but rather within the context of an established community. In the case of diasporan Armenians, the reformulation of their diasporan identities against the symbolic representation of their motherland have been challenged with the Sovietization of the Republic of Armenia in 1922 and then its independence in 1991. Diasporan Armenians were resigned to the fact that Soviet Armenia could never be their homeland and therefore they did not have to maintain loyalties to their ancestral homeland other than in their imagination. However, since 1991, when Armenia became a democratic country and opened its doors to the West, that irrefutable socio-political distinction between the Republic and the diaspora started dissipating. The ambiguity of where is homeland is now compounded by the fact that diasporan Armenians can repatriate. But the question is, could they really leave behind their diasporic lives and feel at home in an Armenia that has undergone, just like they have, the pains of change in time and place? Could we now adjust our identity from being homeland-less to homeland-ed?

My participants decisively said that they do not feel connected to Armenia as a "homeland" and that they are comfortable with maintaining the idea of having a *motherland* rather than a *homeland* in Armenia. We share an ancient culture with Armenia, but we have put down roots in diaspora. So, the elusiveness and illusiveness of belonging to a "homeland" continues. In Clifford's (1994) words, this new dimension—

the possibility of finding a homeland, or being homeland-ed, in Armenia because of its independence—adds another "tension … and entanglement" (p. 311) because we the diasporans believe in the multilocality of homeland, the imagined motherland, and the home within hostland.

The expectation of repatriation to the motherland is another burden diasporan Armenians are now experiencing. How do we now justify our distance and disconnect from a motherland that could become, if we wanted it, a tangible homeland? Reversing the situation, in my case, I have felt guilty for not visiting Kessab, my fatherland (where my near ancestors were rooted). But now that Syria is in political turmoil, that guilt is somewhat alleviated because it is impossible for me to travel there without endangering my life. I am now both *homeland-less* and *fatherland-less*—another twist in my identity.

I was Middle Eastern but a Christian Middle Eastern-Armenian born in Beirut.

I am Armenian but a Western Armenian in diaspora.

I am Canadian but a diasporan-Armenian-Canadian in Canada.

Canada is my *home (տուն)*.

Kessab is my *fatherland (Հայրենիք)*.

Armenia is my *motherland (Մայր Հայաստան)*.

Research Contributions

In this life history research, I focused on the premise that in their persistent and individual ways, participants compose their lives as diasporan Armenians and hone their

skills in education while negotiating spaces in academe and refashioning positions in the diaspora.

The credibility of my research is in its contribution to wider research both in the context of new knowledge and in the validity of methodology and methods. Through sharing our collective and personal narratives, the seven participants recognized the possibility that perhaps we no longer need to find solace in our imaginary homelands or drift in and out of identities with confusion and resistance, for we might find a homeland within our hostland among our diasporan Armenian peers and colleagues. When Zabel resolutely maintained that diaspora was her home; when Nrani expressed her confidence with her fragmented, multilocal, multilingual, and hybrid identity; when Nectar was at peace with her decision not to write a dissertation and thus balanced family and profession in her own way; when Lori helped us deconstruct the word *deracination* and define it as a total eradication of one's roots and not just (up)rooting; when I understood how Arminé found her "homeland" within the Armenian community by assisting in its development unconditionally; when Hermine assertively claimed Canada as her homeland and Armenia as her spiritual homeland, I finally found my "homeland" among my friends, my fellow Armenians in Canada. I have realized my goal of solidifying my identity in a locale, in a space where I could arrive home. As a diasporan, my homeland is where I am accepted and what I embrace as a "home"-in-the-making.

I did not seek *a truth* nor one particular way of understanding how participants renegotiated their identities as diasporan Armenian intellectuals. I did not guide my research rigidly, but rather was open to new possibilities, to new emerging themes

(diaspora issues), and any such daunting ambiguity as where *homeland* is for a diasporan. I engaged in several research methods (interviewing, group discussion, writing) and several writing styles (autoethnographic, journaling, essay writing, poetry), all of which enriched my data. Employing an interpretive rather than an empirical research methodology, I was not concerned about data coding or triangulation because "in postmodernist mixed-genre texts, we do not triangulate; we *crystallize*. We recognize that there are far more than 'three sides' from which to approach the world," explains Richardson (1994, p. 522). Just like crystals that shine from different angles and under different lights or "reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions" (Richardson, p. 522), my theoretical approaches, research methods, and writing styles provide multiple interpretations and understandings of my topic; therefore, my constructed text for this dissertation validates itself. This life history research, expressed in a variety of writing styles, provides a reflective, creative, evocative, and unique narrative.

Another contribution this research offers is the consensus of seven women who believe that our Armenian diaspora in Canada is in need of change. We must plan for a healthy future and not live in a past infected with the disease of violence and pain. We can surround Armenian youth with positive energy, with pride in their heritage and language in order to mobilize them to dedicate their time to building the Armenian diaspora rather than merely sustaining it. I recall my father talking about the need for building the Armenian community (*Hayakertoum*) and not only maintaining the Armenian community (*Hayapahpanoum*). Attarian (2009) explains this phenomenon,

insisting that it is imperative to focus on the positive aspects of community building rather than simply on community preservation:

> This positive shift in terminology would then focus on actual community building, and lead to the more essential phase of *hayakertoum*—that of creating, constructing, and reinventing Armenianness as identity. *Hayapahpanoum* is a complex noun, made up of the words *hay [hye]* signifying Armenian and *pahpanoum*, meaning preservation or protection. *Hayakertoum* contains the words *hay [hye]* signifying Armenian and *kertoum* meaning construction. *Hayapahpanoum* is a term heard often in Armenian diasporic circles, from school classrooms to public podiums, as a mechanism of survival in the struggle against assimilation. (p. 88)

What Attarian is emphasising is that survival is not enough. We should continue reinventing ourselves and excel in doing so. It is encouraging to witness the progress in the outlook of Armenian thinkers and their recognition that change is imperative. It is a great leap in social movement to be able to define a diasporan condition by inventing a new vernacular, or even vernaculars, that articulate precisely what the Armenian diaspora needs and what we can do in order to secure its bright future. With conviction and courage and with forward thinkers, our young generation is asserting that we should come out of our survival mode and enter a space where we will renegotiate, reconstruct, and re-fashion a diasporan Armenian identity in new and creative ways appropriate for the present as well as for the future.

What intrigues me here, and what I note for future research, is how our children (generation 4 of Genocide survivors) understand their own Armenianness and their belonging to a diaspora. Do they feel that we have failed them in instilling in them a sense of nationhood, a pride in their heritage? Is Armenianness for them a source of pride? Would they cherish the Armenian language as our generation does? What is Armenianness to them? What would "change" in the Armenian community entail and mean for them? Do they feel historicized and burdened by their inherited history? I have been contemplating the possibility of interviewing the daughters of five of my participants and hearing their impressions of their mothers' involvement in the Armenian diaspora. When my daughter read my chapter on education, she made a note in the margin that she remembered her own experiences at the Armenian Day School in Toronto. The school had been a space that was "controlling" rather than "nurturing," where instructors praised all things Armenian and insisted on speaking only Armenian on the school premises! A curious interpretation that could be an interesting topic for future research.

Interpretations in research are dynamic as they occur at all stages of analysis, and even at unexpected moments. I was taking a break from writing this chapter and randomly flipping through a recently purchased book about the works of Zabel Yessayan (1935), when I came across a parable she wrote in her *The Garden of Silihdar*, a fictionalized memoir of her childhood. Yessayan was born in Constantinople (1878) and educated in Paris. She repatriated to Armenia but was exiled to Siberia where she died in 1943.

CHERRIES

One day, during recess in the school garden, a girl by the name of Melanie was eating cherries. It was early spring and cherries were not yet in season. Across from Melanie sat a girl from a poor family staring greedily at the cherries.

Melanie held the cherries in one hand and with the other she took hold of a stem and after placing the fruit in her mouth bit at the juicy pulp, as the other girl moved her voracious lips as if she too were eating.

I found this spectacle revolting and after a while could endure it no longer. With a rapid, wild movement, I approached Melanie, grabbed the cherries from her hand and threw them on the other side of the garden wall. And I will never understand why, instead of Melanie, it was the girl from the poor family who suddenly burst into tears. (cited in Baliozian, 1982, p. 84)

Is the cherry orchard in the Garden of Eden or in the heart of diaspora? Is it in a home, a homeland, a fatherland, or a motherland? Does the poor girl represent the diasporan trapped in "exile" who lives vicariously in a land of cherry orchards? Or, is the poor girl the Armenian trapped in Soviet Armenia, behind the Iron Curtain, living vicariously through the stories of the "abundant" and "free" West? Is this another characteristic of Armenianness? Do Western diasporan Armenians and Eastern Armenians live vicariously in each other's lives: in an imagined motherland, in an imagined free diaspora?

Life history research through life narratives provides insight into identity negotiations. Participants' shared experiences merge and story a new narrative, a

narrative of uprooted and burdened lives, but also of rooted and enlivened ones. Their persistence in continuing their education, even when they were middle-aged, demonstrates the importance we place on education. We model lives in which we have accumulated intellectual rather than material wealth. We chose an educational life which allowed us to refashion our lives. We hope that our self-confidence demonstrates, especially to our female readers, that the displaced lives of diasporan women can evolve into rooted lives and fragmented wholes. Even though we continue to be concerned about our collective history and the potential of being deracinated from our Armenian roots, we are mindful of our personal narratives because that is where change is articulated and executed. It is in our everyday lives that we feel the need to evolve, especially when inherited identities are no longer comfortable or no longer suitable for personalities in flux. Our historicized identities have now energized us to aspire to new ways of understanding and being, new ways of facing challenges in diaspora.

I now share a poem as I do not want to have the final, conclusive word. I am convinced that stories are partial and storying is an organic process of always growing. And then diasporan life continues.

KESSAB, SYRIA

In my memory
you are
not a prairie dream
revisited
not a distorted shoot

from early spring
not a purple-stoned sceptre
nor the remnants of a blind man's dog
but a veil I wear
when blood scratches
my brain searching
for cradle
the sound of wedding drums
approaching
the wait of moon brides
unravished bodies
willing sweet sable
to a stride.
(Arpine Konyalian Grenier, 1991, p. 6)

APPENDIX A: TRANSLITERATION

Armenian Alphabet	English Sound	Pronunciation Example
Ա	ɑɑ	*ah* in father
Բ	bpʰ	*b* in boat
Գ	gkʰ	*k* in key or *g* in goat
Դ	dtʰ	*d* in dog
Ե	(j)ɛ(j)ɛ	*ye* in yet or *eh* in bet
Զ	zz	*z* in zebra
Է	ɛɛ	*e* in end
Ը	əə	*u* in but
Թ	tʰtʰ	*t* in tomorrow
Ժ	ʒʒ	*s* in measure
Ի	ii	*ee* in meet
Լ	ll	*l* in lily
Խ	χχ	guttural *ch* in Bach
Ծ	tsdz	*tz* in Mitzi
Կ	kg	*ck* in Micky
Հ	hh	*h* in hello
Ձ	dztsʰ	*ds* in kids
Ղ	ʁʁ	guttural French *r*
Ճ	tʃdʒ	hard, clipped *j*
Մ	mm	*m* in mom
Յ	jj	*y* in year or *y* in buy
Ն	nn	*n* in number
Շ	ʃʃ	*sh* in shower
Ո	(v)o(v)o	*vo* in vocal (beginning) or *o* in (within word)
Չ	tʃʰtʃʰ	*ch* in church
Պ	pb	*p* in pizza
Ջ	dʒtʃʰ	*j* in jeans
Ռ	rr/ɾ	rolled Spanish *r*
Ս	ss	*s* in sand
Վ	vv	*v* in Victor
Տ	td	hard *t* in but
Ր	ɾɾ	*r* in red or *rh* in bother (word endings)
Ց	tsʰtsʰ	*ts* in bits
Ւ	vv	*oo* in cool
Փ	pʰpʰ	*p* in pear
Ք	kʰkʰ	*k* in kite
Օ	oo	*o* in bone
Ֆ	ff	*f* in life

APPENDIX B-1: TIME-LINE HISTORY OF ARMENIA

Adapted from Adalian (2002); Panossian (2008, pp. 1696-1697)

ca. 860 BC	Urartu emerges as a powerful state around Lake Van.
ca. 782 BC	The Fortress of Erebuni is built by Urartians (currently in Yerevan, capital of Armenia).
ca. 585-200 BC	The Yervanduni Dynasty rules over Armenia, either as vassals or as independent kings.
ca. 520 BC	First mention of Armenia and Armenians in history, on Behistun Rock, by King Darious I of Persia.
188 BC-AD 10	Artashesian Dynasty.
95-55 BC	King Tigran II "The Great" establishes a short-lived Armenian empire, stretching from the Caspian to Mediterranean seas.
ca. AD 66-428	Arshakuni Dynasty.
ca. **301-315**	Armenia adopts Christianity as the state religion; the population is converted to the new religion.
387	Armenia is partitioned between Byzantine and Persian (Sassanid) empires.
405	The Armenian alphabet is invented by Mesrop Mashtots; beginning of the "Golden Era" of Armenian literature.
451	Armenian rebellion against Persia and the Battle of Avarayr. Armenians lose the battle but maintain Christianity as the state religion. Also, the Council of Chalcedon, the decisions of which the Armenian Church eventually rejects to maintain its independence from the Byzantine church, is formed.
484	Treaty of Nevarsak between Persia and Armenia, granting Armenians certain rights and allowing them to remain Christian.
640	Beginning of the Arab invasions of Armenia.
884-1045	Bagratuni Dynasty
1045	Ani, the capital of the Bagratuni Dynasty, falls to the Byzantines (followed by the fall of Kars in 1064).
1071	Battle of Manzikert. The Seljuks defeat the Byzantines after conquering Armenia.
1080s	The establishment of Rubenian and Hetumid principalities in Cilicia, on the Mediterranean coast. A kingdom is eventually established in 1199.
1236	Mongol invasions of Armenia begin, leading to century-long domination.
1375	The last Armenian Kingdom, in Cilicia, falls to the Mamluks of Egypt.
1386	Timur (Tamerlane) invades Armenia.
1400s	Consolidation of Ottoman rule over Armenia.

1512	The publication of the first Armenian book (in Venice); the beginning of Armenian printing. The Bible is published in Armenian in 1666 in Amsterdam. The first comprehensive dictionary is published in 1749 in Venice. Father Mikayel Chamchian's *History of the Armenians* is published in 1784 in Venice. The first political tracts calling for the liberation of Armenia are published in the 1770s in Madras, India.
1514-1639	Ottoman-Safavid (Iran) wars over Armenia.
1722-1728	Rebellion led by Davit Bek (in Eastern Armenia) against local Muslim rulers and Ottoman conquest.
1722-1828	Frequent wars in or around Armenia among Russian, Persian, and Ottoman empires. Russia advances into South Caucasus and gains control over eastern Armenia. The borders delineated by the Treaty of Turkmenchai (1828) between the Russian and Persian empires eventually become the borders between present-day Iran, Armenia, and Turkey.
1839-1876	Tanzimat (reform) era in the Ottoman Empire. Armenian *millet* constitution is adopted in 1863 [Code of Regulations, which included 150 articles outlined by the Armenian intelligentsia].
1877-1878	Russian-Ottoman war and expansion of Russian control of Armenian provinces.
1840s-1890s	Height of the Armenian national "renaissance," particularly in culture.
1885	The establishment of the first Armenian revolutionary political party in the Ottoman Empire, followed by revolutionary activities.
1915	The genocide of the Armenians from the Ottoman lands.
1918-1920	Establishment of an independent Armenian republic in the territories of Eastern (Russian) Armenia.
1920-1921	Sovietization of the Armenian Republic.
1988	The beginning of the popular national movement in Armenia, demanding the unification of Gharabagh with Armenian SSR (Soviet Socialist Republic). Major earthquake in northern Armenia.
1991	Independence of Armenia, as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics collapses.
1994	Cease-fire agreement in the war with Azerbaijan (but no peace agreement).
1998	Forced resignation of first post-Soviet president, Levon Ter-Petrossian, through a "constitutional coup." Robert Kocharian, the prime minister of Armenia (originally from Gharabagh) becomes president.
2007	The U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs approves a bill (HR 106) that recognizes the Armenian genocide, bringing a total of 25 countries that have passed resolutions or laws on the Armenian genocide in the preceding decade as a result of diaspora advocacy.

APPENDIX B-2: HISTORIACAL OVERVIEW OF KESSAB

From the official Webpage of Kessab (2013) kessabtsiner.com

- Six Millennia ago the Kessab region was part of the ancient civilization that spread from the Syrian basin up to the valley of the Orontes River.
- The famous Phoenician City state of Ugarit located on the shores of the Mediterranean, not far from Kessab was linked with Asia Minor, Cilicia and Northern Mesopotamia through the region of Duzaghaj of Kessab. During the Seleucid- Hellenic period the Kessab region was at the center of the triad comprised of Antioch, Seleucia and Laodicea. The Laodicea- Seleucia sea road passed through Kaladouran Bay whereas the Laodicea Antioch land road passed through the Duzaghaj valley.
- The Gassius Mountain at this time was believed to have been the sanctuary of the god Zeus. During the reign of Tigran the Great and later the Roman era, Laodicea, Antioch and Seleucia flourished greatly and had a positive effect on the development of the Kessab region.
- There are no written sources about the early history of the Kessab region. The first record is from the historical documents of the Crusaders when Duke Belmond the First gives the region of Kasbisi to the family of Peter the Hermit. Casbisi, Cassembella or Cassabella are the names from which we have derived the name Kessab.
- Kessab is viewed by some as a region developed during the Cilician Armenian period. However it actually remained outside the borders of the Cilician Kingdom.
- Research conducted on the peculiarities of the Kessab dialect and the dialects of the region of Suweidiye (Seleucia) shows that the populace of Kessab and the surrounding region are the remainders of migrants that came from the region of Antioch and who may have been descendents of the Rubinian Kingdom (Apelian, 1913; Cholakian, 1995).
- During the Memluk period and more specifically the first period of the Ottoman Rule (13th-14th centuries) the region of Antioch was emptied of its Armenian, Greek and Syriac inhabitants, due to intense persecution. In an attempt to avoid persecution, the Armenians of the flat lands of Antioch took refuge in more mountainous regions, such as Kessab and Mousa Dagh.
- The development of Kessab and its surrounding villages extends from the 16th century up into the 19th century.
- Kessab turned into the center both of old and newly- arrived migrants. The inhabitants of Kessab later became landowners in the surrounding areas and by the beginning of the 19th century; new villages began to merge in the regions.
- The Kessab region was placed under the jurisdiction of the Governor of Antioch who was directly appointed by the Ottoman Sultan until the middle of the 19th Century. The region of Antioch was made a part of the Vilayet (province) of Aleppo.

- During the 1850s Kessab turned into a mission field; namely by the arrival of Evangelical and Catholic missionaries. As a result, Catholic and Evangelical Communities merged, which had both positive and negative effects on the community in general. For example, divisions and problems arose amongst the different communities as a result of the separation of the community into Apostolic, Catholic and Evangelical religious affiliations.
- However, the positive effect was that there was a great emphasis on education by Evangelical missionaries. Records show that until the 19th century there was only one Armenian Apostolic school in Kessab. The evangelical missions worked with great momentum to increase the level and availability of education. By 1880, the evangelical schools were at the elementary level, and by 1908 they had achieved secondary level school education.
- Armenian political parties are evident in Kessab by the year 1890. In 1893 Aghasi visited Kessab a few times and organized the region. He later formed the Kessab division of the Henchagian party. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation party entered Kessab several years later. The ARF party is brought into Kessab in 1906 by some Kessab youth who were studying at the American University of Beirut and Ainteb College.
- In 1910 the Kessab Educational Counsel is formed with the aim of bringing education out of denominational influence and establishing it on a national basis. The need for such a move is evident from the statistics showing that in 1910 the Kessab region had a population of 6000, but had more than 20 schools as a result of the denominational divisions.
- In 1915, The Armenians were deported in two directions: one towards the desert of Der Zor and the other towards the south to the desert of Jordan. Thousands of Kessabtsi Armenians were killed during this deportation process. Some died in Jeser Al Shoughour, some in Hama or Homs while others on the way to Damascus or Jordan. The majority were killed in the desert of Der Zor.
- The population of Kessab was estimated to be 2200 in 1919.
  In 1921, the population was 2500. In 1923, the population was 3500.
- On the 23rd of June 1939, the whole region was joined to Turkey. By the efforts of the 15th Cardinal Krikor Bedros Aghajanian and Remi Leprert, the Papal representative in Syria and Lebanon, the parts of Kessab inhabited by Armenians were separated from Turkey and joined to Syria. The poignant result of this operation was that Mount Gassios was attached to the Turkish side including the farms, the fields, the properties, the laurel tree forests and the grazing lands located in the mountains bosoms and valleys, which once used to belong to the native Armenians.
- On the 25th of July 1947, 2400 Kessabtsis out of 5100 individuals repatriated to Armenia.
- Until the recent Syrian conflict that began 25 March 2011, Kessab was a summer resort.

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Arpi Panossian-Muttart: PhD candidate York University *arpi_panossian@edu.yorku.ca*
Dr. Naomi Norquay: Dissertation Supervisor *nnorquay@edu.yorku.ca*
Elizabete Petersons: Graduate Program Co-ordinator *epetersons@edu.yorku.ca*
Office of Research Ethics, York University, 4700 Keele St. 309 York Lanes, TO, ON, M3J 1P3

Research Project Title: (UP)ROOTED AND IMPROVISED LIVES, (DIS)CONNECTED AND EMPOWERED SPIRITS: ARMENIAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN CANADA

Purpose of Project: I will conduct life history research with five Armenian intellectual women for the purpose of compiling and examining their stories of immigration and experiences in higher education.

Study Design: I wish to explore issues of Armenian women's identities, Armenian Diaspora, trauma and history in relation to the Armenian Genocide, the notion of a homeland, hostland, motherland, community engagement, challenges in universities, benefits of higher education, personal accomplishments, discriminations, displacements, and what emerges from our telling and writing. The data gathering methods are two interviews, two focus group sessions, and email communications. You will receive a copy of the Research Proposal.

Required of the Participants:

1) Documenting personal stories in writing (journals, prose, poetry, etc.).

2) Four face-to-face meetings as follows: two one-on-one interviews (2 hours each): a) introduction to research and expectations, b) wrap-up discussions. Two Focus group sessions (4 hours each): telling and/or writing stories, in dept discussions (for more information, please see Research Design section of my Proposal).

3) Email communications for clarifications if necessary.

All sessions will be tape-recorded and transcribed. You may review the transcriptions and retract certain comments if you wish to do so.

Incentive: Participation may provide the opportunity to preserve your stories and to share them with a wider audience. Also, your stories may provide insight into issues of immigration and higher education in Canada.

Risk(s): Recalling past experiences could trigger painful memories that may be disturbing to you.

Confidentiality: All information will be held in confidence. Your name will not appear on any document unless you provide written consent to waive your anonymity.

At any time during this research and for any reason, you have the right not to answer questions and to withdraw from participating in this study.

Should you decide to withdraw from the study, all data generated as a consequence of your participation will be destroyed.

You may address any ethical concerns regarding this study to the Manager of Research Ethics, York University, 4700 Keele Street, 309 York Lanes, Toronto, Tel: 416 736 5914.

The information gleaned from this research will be used as follows: published in the dissertation, shared with research supervisor and committee members, and discussed during the dissertation oral defence.

All data gathered during my research will be stored in a secure place in my home office for at least seven years from the date of completing my PhD, upon which time all material will be shredded and disposed of.

This research project has been reviewed and approved for compliance to research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Subcommittee of York University. Should you have questions, please contact Faculty of Education, Graduate Program Office, 282 Winters College, Tel: 416 736. 5018.

Please formalize your decision of participating in my research by signing below.

Participant Name:	Signature:	Date:
Researcher Name:	Signature:	Date:

APPENDIX D: SAMPLE EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE WITH PARTICIPANTS

On 2011-05-03, at 10:11 AM, Arpi Panossian Muttart wrote:
Dear [Lori, Nectar, Nrani, Zabel],

Time flies! It's almost time to get together again. Thank you so much for being available and helping me with my research.

Following up on what we discussed last time, I've listed some concepts that we could elaborate on next Wednesday, May 11th:

Memory *- Official memory, community, family, individual, and also newly "awakened memory".*

Continuities *- Linguistic, intellectual, and socio-cultural. Challenges of maintaining continuity as diasporan Armenians.*

Connectivity *- Our need to tell, need to belong, need to visit lost lands, need to write about homeland, and even need to disconnect or to disrupt the continuity as we live fragmented lives in diaspora.*

Trauma *- A turning point, source of strength and resistance or victimization and despair, source of historicity and identity, source of traditions ...*

Exile *- Voluntary, imposed, and inherited that we experience physically, emotionally, socially, politically, and intellectually.*

Persistence *vs.* ***survival****. Do we persist because we're in survival mode?*

If we're inclined, we could also write for a short while about whatever inspires us or follow a line such as "I am the daughter/granddaughter/sister/mother/teacher of...." or "I'm an Armenian-Canadian/Canadian-Armenian ..." or "I'm an educator because ..."

Of course, I'm always open to your suggestions and insight as to what to discuss.

Wishing you a quick recovery from the shocking results of last night's election. At least it was peaceful!

See you soon,

Arpi

On 2011-09-05, at 3:09 PM, Arpi Panossian Muttart wrote:

Happy Labour Day, Ladies.

As I emailed you a month ago, I still would like us to explore the notion of ***return****. We could share some experiences or anecdotes related to moments and/or spaces of return. In our everyday life, there are times when we tend to find solace in the idea of return or we find ourselves being pulled to a space in the past (or the present or the future). This often happens when we're nostalgic or experiencing feelings of loss (or gain). Where do we return? (family or national history, intellectual family, birthplace, favourite music, favourite story, a "homeland," a space on the margins, a partner or a friend, etc.). My need to visit Armenia stems from my need to return to a place where I could ground my identity. I may find out otherwise!*

A related topic is ***loss****. I've been reading Ursula Kelly's* Migration and Education in a Multicultural World: Culture, Loss, and Identity, *and would like to share some of the passages with you: "loss and dislocation can be viewed as an assault on identity, a challenge to the very constitution of who we are and who we see ourselves to be ... These insights also relate to migrations and the losses they summon, both for those who leave and those who are left, as both are changed through the mutual loss migration creates" (p. 26). I'll share more when we're together. Please think of times when you've felt loss as a Diasporan Armenian woman. My last experience was when I was visiting my prof in her cottage. She proudly pointed to her mother's books that she had saved since her childhood. The oldest I think was a 1920 print. I was impressed but all of a sudden I felt sad and then angry. I remembered, that I too had books and artefacts that belonged to my grandparents. In Kessab, the house where my grandfather and then my parents grew up still exist but is presently unoccupied. I felt displaced because I was experiencing loss of identity, of culture, of family members, of places, of grounding, of "home".*

See you soon,

Arpi

Reflective Notes Shared with Participants

Moments of Loss:

- When I have to justify my being Canadian. When I'm asked, "Where are you from?"
- When I eat an apple and realize it doesn't taste like a "real" apple.
- When I witness indifference. Example Matt's not caring to go to mass in an old church in Armenia or his indifference to the Armenian cause.
- When I cannot go to Kessab because of political unrest.
- When I witness those who are born, raised, and schooled in the same place, who can have reunions w/o traveling over the oceans. Ex. Milree and her friends in Oakville (June 2009 BBQ). Naomi in Roundhouse showing her mother's childhood books.
- When I cannot find the Armenian words, instead I use the English or the French word.
- When I realize that I speak English with my children.
- When I hear my parents express their longing to die in their ancestral land.
- When I go to a cemetery and cannot find the spirit of my grandparents there.
- When I feel that my neighbors are not concerned about my wellbeing.
- When I smell saltwater at a Caribbean beach instead of the Mediterranean Sea.

Points of Return:

- Need to go to Kessab and Armenia hoping that in those places I'll feel grounded or my identity would be solid, belonging to a place
- Need to write about Armenian issues when in higher education
- Need to talk about national history, in particular about the Genocide
- Need to tell my grandparent's history
- Need to do gardening in the house or outdoors to feel my grandmother's spirit with me
- Need to forget all things Armenian
- Need to avoid attending Armenian events
- Need to learn more about personal narratives of Armenian women
- Need to speak in Armenian
- Feeling guilty for not reading Armenian, visiting that space but exiting from it again and again

APPENDIX E: TENTATIVE DISCUSSION THEMES

- Circumstances and reasons of immigration
- The process of entry into a Canadian university or college
- Reasons or motivation for an intellectual quest
- Challenges faced/facing in higher education
- Stories of life altering conscious improvisations in order to overcome interruptions
- Stories of persistence and courage necessary to continue formal learning
- Stories of education as a vehicle for self-change
- Stories of professional or personal success and failure
- Self-narrating as a practice in recognizing achievements and/or challenges
- Roles in the Armenian community
- Family histories
- Stories of (dis)placement and (up)rootedness
- Issues of connection and or disconnection with and from motherland, country of birth, and hostland
- Moral values that family histories ingrain in us
- Where is "home"? Where is homeland?
- What does it mean to be a diasporan Armenian woman? (Armenian-Canadian or Canadian-Armenian)
- How does inherited history of trauma affect identity formation and building a new life in Canada?

APPENDIX F: RESEARCH DESIGN

FIRST MEETING – INTERVIEW 1: Meet with each participant individually and discuss the following:

- Research intent (compiling life histories of five Armenian intellectuals in Toronto and Montreal). I will introduce my research project, explain my intent, and clarify inquiries. I will then provide a list of possible themes to contemplate and write about before the focus group session.
- Research methodology (life history research) and methods (interviews, writing, collective memory work, autoethnography, oral history). We will discuss each of the methods. I will provide a copy of my proposal.
- The role of participants: participate in two interviews (two hours each) and two focus group discussions that may take up to 4 hours each; participate in writing for discovery and submit the work to me and, if they wish, also share the work with other participants at subsequent focus group sessions),
- Agreement to give consent for all oral and written information provided during the interviews and focus group sessions (read and discuss the consent form before signing).

SECOND MEETING – GROUP DISCUSSION 1: A session with all participants in Montreal and another with all participants in Toronto. During this session we first get acquainted with each other and share our profiles. We then collectively determine what themes we are interested in discussing and begin sharing our thoughts and experiences. In the second half of the session, we tell or read the stories that we have prepared or written. We then decide what themes to discuss/write about for the next meeting.

THIRD MEETING – GROUP DISCUSSION 2: A session with all participants in Montreal and another with all participants in Toronto. I review our previous meeting. We then read and discuss what we had written/rewritten or what we had prepared to share in this session.

FOURTH MEETING – GROUP DISCUSSION 3: A session with all participants in Montreal and another with all participants in Toronto. I review our previous meeting. We then read and discuss what we had written/rewritten or what we had prepared to share in this session.

SECOND MEETING – GROUP DISCUSSION 3: Face-to-face and/or online one-on-one discussion/communication. This session will take place after I transcribe the discussions and email the files to each participant. The purpose of this interview/communication is to wrap-up discussions and to give the participants one last chance to add further insights or to retract any part of their stories.

Online communications: After reviewing dissertation chapters.

APPENDIX G: RECIPES

Anoushabour: Armenian Christmas Pudding

(Recipe by Anais Salibian in Arlene V. Avakian's *Through the Kitchen Window*, pp. 301-302)

12 cups water
1 cup white winter wheat berries
1 ½ cups chopped dried apricots
1 ½ cups chopped golden raisins
2 tblsp rosewater or orange blossom water
Cinnamon to taste
Blanched almonds, walnuts, or pomegranate seeds.

Wash wheat and add 12 cups of water. Bring to a boil, cover and set aside to soak over-night. Cook on low heat for 1 1/2 hours. Wash raisins and apricots. Cut apricots in quarters, and add all to wheat. Cook another 30 minutes until the pudding thickens. Add rose water or orange blossom water and pour the mixture into a deep dish. While warm, garnish the top with walnuts or blanched almonds. Serve cold. Serves about 20.

Raw Beet Salad: An Artsakh Recipe Modified by Nectar

1 or 2 medium sized beets, washed, peeled, and grated
1 or 2 small carrots, peel and grate
1 slice of daikon (chinese radish) and/or black radish, peel and grate - optional
1 tomato (I prefer Roma), finely chopped with the skin on if you want
1/10th (slice) of a small onion finely chopped (either white or vidalia)
Half a clove of garlic, finely chopped or grated
A bunch of either fresh coriander or parsley or both if you have, chopped
Olive oil to taste (2-3 tablespoon)
2-3 tablespoon of apple cider vinegar to taste (could be replaced by lemon)
Salt to taste (pepper optional)

Voila!
Bon appétit

APPENDIX H: A REFLECTIVE WRITING

Why do I have so many Carolyn Heilbrun epigraphs?

In order to find the answer to the question above, I engaged in a short reflective self-dialogue.

Heilbrun is my mentor in feminist thought. In 1996, I found her book, Reinventing Womanhood, rather serendipitously lying face down on a table in a public library. After reading a few random passages, I checked out the book and within a few days I had read it. I was awe inspired, even though I did not comprehend most of her feminist thoughts. This is because I had not yet had the opportunity to attend university classes in the general arts and social sciences. I understood her message though: "Women must now say: I wait no longer" (1979, p. 124). That fall, I took my first psychology course at York University as an undergraduate student. I had just turned forty-five. I sat next to my daughter who was also starting her undergraduate degree.

Carolyn Heilbrun is an inspiring feminist author. Her works have influenced my thoughts and guided my educational life. Her essay writing style taught me how to unravel life narratives, how to focus on lived experiences, and how to situate the seemingly unimportant details. Her writing exemplifies the expression of complex issues in very clear language. Over the years, I have tried to adopt her narrative style of writing. It is no coincidence that I have accumulated a list of quotations from Heilbrun in my list of possible epigraphs to use in my dissertation. After using two of these quotes in two sections, I decided to continue the practice and demonstrate my love for her words and honour her immense contribution to feminist scholarship and to my own intellectual development.

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