

Images and Perceptions of Armenia in Diaspora Armenian Films

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Introduction

Images and perceptions of Armenia are unavoidably distinct and heterogeneous. The causes of these are multiple. Nevertheless, the most influential aspect is the dispersion of Armenians to various corners of the world. What we call the Armenian Diaspora nowadays has obtained a more significant role than it used to have. In fact, this Armenian Diaspora opened a new space for Armenian images and perceptions of Armenia. These images and perceptions have been expressed in diverse fields and through diverse methods.

It is important to acknowledge the Soviet Union and Soviet Armenia for further categorization of the images. The Soviet Union emerged as the result of the October Revolution of 1917. Armenia was situated on the Russian Empire's borders at the beginning of the 20th century. With the Red Army's capture of Yerevan on December 2, 1920, the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic was founded.¹ This was the condition of Eastern Armenia. A referendum held on September 21, 1991, ratified the Republic of Armenia's independence. The Soviet Union's dissolution on December 26, 1991, led to its recognition.

The western part of Armenia was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire from the 16th century. The Ottoman Empire organized the massacres of western Armenian in 1915 about 1.5 Armenians were killed and many others found refuge in various parts of the world. The formation of the Armenian diaspora was largely a result of the Armenian Catastrophe. The main communities of the Diaspora are in the Middle East, Western Europe and North America, with communities in South America, Australia and Eastern Europe. This research is going to focus on the Armenian diaspora largely in the West. However, it should be acknowledged that a possible diasporic experience is undergone by Armenian communities within the Soviet Union. In 1922, the Ottoman Empire collapsed and the Russian Empire expanded into the South Caucasus.

This research focuses on the visual representation of Armenia, particularly in cinematographic works. It explores the images and perceptions of Armenia of diaspora Armenian filmmakers based on their released films. The necessity of such analysis arises from the fact that little attention has been paid to Diaspora Armenian films. This research contributes to learning about national films and cultures by exploring films that depict the national experience from diasporic perspectives. It uncovers that there is no singular, identical

¹ Avci, Özkan. "Communism Propaganda in Soviet Armenia." in *Review of Armenian Studies*, n. pag. Print, 2022, 155.

Armenian culture. Armenian culture is a mixture including elements originated by Armenians with quite distinct experience. The experience of Armenians outside of Armenia makes ground for multiculturalism; the images of Armenia are always represented in combination with some cultural elements of the Other.

The diasporic Armenia film studies opens new gates in the field of film studies with its reference to the ancestral homeland without visual experience. In its further development, Diaspora Armenian Cinema, functioning in the modern process of globalization, contributes to the inclusion of Armenian Cinema into world cinema. The research brings new categorization of diaspora film studies. It depicts and analyzes the visual proofs about particular periods of Armenia that cannot be found in other representations, thus contributing to Armenian studies.

The distinct character of images in Diaspora Armenian films raise the requirement for their allocation into periods of release; here the Soviet and post-Soviet factors are essential. The significance can be proved with the fact that Soviet perceptions are imagined and inexperienced representations of the Armenian Diaspora filmmakers because of the forbiddance of coming to Armenia. They become complex as in the process of perception not only the filmmaker is present but also the one who once perceived and interpreted it.

Meanwhile, post-Soviet images are real, proficient and reasonable, they are coming from singular and direct perceptions i.e. from the filmmaker himself/herself. Another issue, partially associated with the first, is the complexity of Diaspora Armenian films, which is the direct result of the worldwide settlements and the diverse experience of the filmmakers. Thus, this research aims to uncover the distinct images and perceptions of Armenia made by various Armenian filmmakers from the diaspora during different time periods and different ways of relating to Armenia. The main sources for analysis are the films themselves.

The research is divided into introduction, three chapters, conclusion and bibliography. The first chapter, entitled “Diasporic vs. National: Debates about the Nature of National and Diasporic Cinemas,” is the theoretical basis of the work and develops a critical distinction between diasporic and national cinemas. It introduces the nature of national and diasporic cinemas based on debates. For the specification of the debate and difference between national and diasporic films Hamid Naficy’s *An Accented Cinema* and Laura Marks’ *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* become the core source. It is thanks to these distinctions and debates that the problematic features and complexities of diaspora cinema become discovered and further analyzed. The chapter argues that while national cinema is limited and conservative, diasporic cinema makes ground for the establishment and

development of global culture and global benefit. Nevertheless, the two cinemas together make part of global cinema and global culture.

The second chapter entitled “The Perception of Armenia in Diasporic Films during the Soviet Period” concentrates on the diaspora Armenian films released during the Soviet period and discloses perceptions and images of Armenia in them. The chapter argues on unreal and imagined perceptions of Armenia in the films released during the Soviet period. The third chapter named “The Post-Soviet Images of Armenia” uncovers the broader space of exploration, i.e. the post-Soviet images of Armenia. It depicts and parallels the current possibility of coming to Armenia for filmmakers. In addition, the new technological possibilities — cheaper, smaller, faster filmmaking equipment — help and facilitate filmmaking. This chapter shows how the imagined and inexperienced character of perception of Armenia transforms into a real and reasonable perception in post-Soviet Armenia.

Chapter 1: Diasporic vs. National: Debates around the Nature of National and Diasporic Cinemas

The process of distinction and classification of cinema into national and diasporic is quite complex and contradictory. The boundaries of separation are even complicated in a broader sense as well, i.e. the identification of anything national and diasporic in general. In fact, diasporic seems to be a combination of foreign and national outside the homeland boundaries. This chapter tries to represent and argue that diasporic cinema is part of global culture, which due to its reference to the homeland brings the national cinema close to the global platform as well. Meanwhile, the acknowledgment of diasporic cinema becomes somehow possible thanks to the perception of national cinema and this process of understanding and classification needs to be perceived starting from the national and diasporic character in general.

Khachig Tölölyan designates the nation as nation-state and diaspora inside the nation-state as its Others. Thus, Tölölyan views diaspora as a group of Others that belongs to distinct nation-states. Diaspora serves as a debate forum for those theoretical and concrete remappings of global "order" that take into account both the nation-state and its transnational Others.² Transnational communities can either be the nation-archetypal state's Other, ally, lobby, or even its forerunner. For national movements aiming at the revitalization of the homeland, diasporas might occasionally provide intellectual, financial, and political support.

The social sciences must consider diasporas that want to create their own discourse, define themselves through their own cultural production and consumption, and assert the right to give their experiences meaning.³ Diasporan groups work outside the borders of the multiethnic empire and bring to its related ethnonations new ideas, new money, and even new languages, as was the case with Armenia. The factors for the development of the nation-state thanks to diaspora are well defined by Khachig Tölölyan, Hamid Naficy, Laura Mark, and others, while the cinematographic experience is taken into consideration.

Diasporas become objects of knowledge, concepts, models, and problems for many academic fields, including anthropology, ethnomusicology, postcolonial literary studies, sociology, and others.⁴ They must look for signs of conflicts between and within concepts and

² Tölölyan, Khachig. "The Nation-State and Its Others: In Lieu of a Preface," in *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, University of Toronto Press, 1991, 7.

³ Tölölyan, Khachig. "The American Model of Diasporic Discourse," Frank Cass, London, Portland, 2003, 56.

⁴ Ibid.

behaviors of collective identity, of homeland and nation, in literary and visual texts, in canonical and vernacular works, in fact, throughout all cultural outputs, and throughout history.⁵ In this sense, the diaspora has even doubled and multidirectional outlook.

Diaspora has emerged as a theoretical tool in film studies, ethnic studies, and cultural studies, among other fields, and is in resonance with the discourses of migration, identity, nationalism, transnationality, and exile.⁶ The subject of borders, which is at the core of any accurate definition of the Others of the nation-state, is embodied by diasporas, which is why they serve as symbols of transnationalism. The latter constantly sees and portrays itself as a land, a territory, or a location that serves as the setting for homogeneity, equilibrium, or integration; this is the domestic peace that hegemony-seeking national elites always strive for and occasionally accomplish. In such a territory, differences are assimilated, destroyed, or relegated to ghettos or enclaves with boundaries so distinct that they allow the nation to acknowledge the seemingly unique and clearly delineated differences within itself, while also reinforcing the privileged homogeneity of the rest and the difference between itself and what lies beyond its borders.⁷

Diaspora makes references to the ancestral homeland, but it also seems to be looking for a place to call home and a way to stop feeling perpetually cut off.⁸ Diasporas are celebrated as hybrid and borderless communities within a framework of presumptions that decries the confining influence of borders and completely ignores the fact that to define is to confine, that having an identity is to have a definition, and that doing so results in the exclusion of some while including others. Diasporas are also praised for their cosmopolitanism, although the price of this cosmopolitanism is often overlooked. It goes without saying that these peculiarities of the diaspora have played a significant role in bringing the discussion of the "post-national" world order back to the diasporic social formation, which had been largely ignored until recently.⁹

⁵ Tölölyan, Khachig. "The Nation-State and Its Others: In Lieu of a Preface," 3.

⁶ Martin, T. Michael, Yaquinto, Marilyn. "Framing Diaspora in Diasporic Cinema: Concepts and Thematic Concerns," in *Black Camera*, vol. 22, no. 1, Indiana University Press, 2007, 22.

⁷ Tölölyan, Khachig. "The Nation-State and Its Others: In Lieu of a Preface," 5-6.

⁸ Marie-Aude Baronian. *Screening Memory; the Prosthetic Images of Atom Egoyan*, translated by Karen Jallatyan and Stephen Clark, Académie royale de Belgique, Brussels, Belgium, 2017, 31.

⁹ Tölölyan, Khachig. "The American Model of Diasporic Discourse," 72.

Diaspora, similar to exile, generally begins with trauma, rupture, and coercion, and it implies the dispersion of populations to places outside their homeland.¹⁰ Diaspora futurity among Armenians has tended to oppress their diaspora's emergent quality since the emergence of their contemporary diaspora in the wake of the Armenian Catastrophe (genocide). It was the nationalist ideology with a mono-identitarian, monolingual, territorially bound, and theologically inflected worldview that caused and carried out such suppression, which becomes accumulated after the Armenian Catastrophe, that has, understandably but not unproblematically, driven its victims and their generations to obsessively concentrate on proving it while remaining solely within a nation-centered discourse in doing so. Assimilation and homecoming—becoming the other or self are the two motivations that make up the two poles of the debate. Both adopt a nation-centered perspective and dismiss the continuous Armenian diaspora as impermanent and unimportant.¹¹

As a fresh topic for representation the Armenian Catastrophe (genocide), become the motive of the early 20th-century Armenian diaspora artists. Meanwhile, the national artists were deprived of the possibility of genocide representation because of the Soviet period's forbiddance of consideration of such nationalistic topics. Consequently, the contents of any possible representation become distinct both in the diaspora and in the homeland. Actually, what Armenian artists were producing during the Soviet period was the life of people under Soviet rule and particularly the praise of the rule and its leaders.

Hence, the argument that the diasporic representations were more nationalistic and were part of the nation can be particularly noticed under Soviet dominance. Soviet power forbade nationalistic ideology within its boundaries. In fact, the national elements in most portrayals first appeared in the diasporic field and it was in the later period of the Soviet rule and after it that they became pivotal in Armenia. Simultaneously, the representation of Armenia both in the homeland and outside of it appeared in various spheres. This chapter and the following two are going to concentrate on visual representations and more specifically on cinematographic ones.

First, it is crucial to understand what national cinema is in general to later come to know about the nation's diasporic character. There is not a single national cinema discourse that is

¹⁰ Naficy, Hamid. *An Accented Cinema; Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey 2001, 14.

¹¹ Jallatyan, Karen. "Towards Diaspora Armenian Cinema," unpublished draft, 3.

universally acknowledged.¹² The notion of national cinema is applied prescriptively rather than descriptively, indicating what needs to be the national cinema, rather than representing the real cinematic experience of audiences.¹³

The relationship between a nation's cinema and "an already existing national political, economic, and cultural identity and set of traditions" is stressed by Higson's approach.¹⁴ Along with state interference, industrial patterns of ownership, and dominant narrative discourses in its films, it also confronts issues of cultural identity.¹⁵ In this respect, national cinema retreats being singular in its character. Thus, this approach suggested by Andrew Higson multiplies the singular character of national cinema.

A national cinema must first be defined in terms of its coherence and unity, as well as its distinct identity and consistent set of meanings. The idea of a national cinema has also nearly always been used as a tactic of cultural and economic opposition; a way to claim national autonomy.¹⁶ In contrast to this, the formation of immeasurable characters in the diaspora is quite unlimited and marked with the absence of any kind of responsibility. In addition, there are no endeavors for the declaration of any autonomy. Diasporic cinema is more or less uncontrolled and open to distinct ideas and ways for representation.

Despite being deprived of the limits, diasporic cinema has other concerns. The diasporic film explores the ambiguities of exile and the negotiation of diversity and belonging in indifferent or xenophobic communities and nation-states through culturally diverse and frequently compelling narratives and styles. They examine the ambiguity and changeability of diasporic identities. This cinema brings forward a counterpoint to the deterritorializing and dislocating experience of global migrations, using journey narratives to interrogate the "homeless subject," as the factors of identity are complex and revised by the experience of exile and diaspora.¹⁷ The experience with the foreign culture in the case of diasporic films should not be underestimated. Whatever the behaviour of the foreign towards newcomers is the fact that foreign is always present is the place where global culture is reflected. Definitely, the

¹² Higson, Andrew "The Concept of National Cinema," 1989, 36.

¹³ Ibid, 37.

¹⁴ Ibid, 42.

¹⁵ Ibid, 36-46.

¹⁶ Ibid, 37.

¹⁷ Martin, T. Michael, Yaquinto, Marilyn. "Framing Diaspora in Diasporic Cinema: Concepts and Thematic Concerns," 22.

factors of identity are important, nevertheless, the shapes, images and the combination with foreign are the characteristics for a worldwide platform.

Meanwhile, a national cinema's imagined coherence and distinctiveness can be established or identified theoretically in one of two ways. First, there is the strategy of contrasting and comparing one cinema with another in order to define different layers of otherness. The second step, which may be described as being more inward-looking, examines a nation's cinema in connection to its other existing economies and cultures.¹⁸ In this respect, national cinema can be auxiliary but not redundantly paralleled with diasporic cinema.

National cinema needs to reflect a singular national identity that is shaped by cultural, political, and social movements within the nation.¹⁹ Nevertheless, it cannot be the possessor of a singular identity as it in some cases includes a diasporic component which itself implies a distinct identity, i.e. identity different from the national one. On the other hand, while diasporic cinema is taken as a separate cinema, distinct from national, it seems to shape a diverse identity; one that is unique not because of its singular character but because of the variety of characters it features.

Tölölyan sheds light on the complexity of identity in diasporic texts and individuals, representations as well as its connections to the circulation, sampling, and consumption of various high and low cultures. He gives appropriate importance to diasporic identity. Tölölyan believes diasporic identity matters. For Tölölyan the task of diasporists is to educate every nation, especially those founded on immigration, to learn to recognize and respect the diasporas within, changing their self-perception and self-representation.²⁰ Accordingly, diasporic representation is beneficial not only for the national factor. It extends its boundaries to international and global benefits.

However, national cinema possesses enduring importance as a notion and is to be recultivated as an analytic paradigm for cultural self-shaping/becoming, which includes institutional, economic, and discursive negotiations/struggles to define what has to be done to afford cinematic cultures critical to socio-cultural life in a national society.²¹ This chapter is

¹⁸ Martin, T. Michael, Yaquinto, Marilyn. "Framing Diaspora in Diasporic Cinema: Concepts and Thematic Concerns," 38.

¹⁹ Conti, Luigi. "National Cinema, Kinatay," *Film* 106, 2012, 2.

²⁰ Tölölyan, Khachig. "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment," in *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, vol. 5, no.1, University of Toronto Press, 1996, 30.

²¹ Conti, Luigi. "National Cinema, Kinatay," 173.

much more tended to perceive national cinema as a slippery and dubious notion.²² It is a concept that is complex and useless to identify but at the same time essential to specify.

For this conceptualization of diasporic cinema Hamid Naficy's *An Accented Cinema* is influential. He conceptualizes the films produced by displaced people as accented cinema. Accented Cinema considers the filmmaking of postcolonial, Third World and more emphatically filmmaking of displaced individuals living in West. The main concentration Naficy puts on the way the experience of the diasporic individuals appears in cinema. Hamid Naficy writes "If the dominant cinema is considered universal and without accent, the films that diasporic and exilic subjects make are accented. The accent emanates not so much from the accented speech of the diegetic characters as from the displacement of the filmmakers and their artisanal production modes." (4) In this manner, the author underestimates the role of the cinema thus overestimating the role of the filmmaker giving a specific role to their displacement and modes of production. In fact, it is the factor of their displacement that made the diasporic images possible; nevertheless, the analysis tends to prove that the characters and representations are more important and accentual than the filmmakers themselves. The process of formation of the collective form of diasporic film production is not so much the labor of the intercultural filmmaker but rather the representations and the characters that are involved in films. The point of making filmmakers' roles more significant than their representations will mean sacrificing the collective for the individual. Thus, standing for the collective acknowledgment of diasporic cinema the chapters will not so much rely on the filmmakers but rather their representations.

While Naficy specifies accented cinema, Marks designates the cinema that is laboring outside the place of origin as intercultural. Thus in contrast to Naficy who specifies the accented character of diasporic cinema based on the displacement of filmmakers and their distinct mode of filmmaking, Marks calls diasporic cinema intercultural which designates a situation that transcends a single culture. Additionally, it determines movement between cultures, suggesting diachrony and the potential for transformation. Hence, a work is said to be intercultural if it mediates in at least two cultural orientations and is not the exclusive property of any one culture.²³ This statement is unavoidably true when turning to diaspora Armenian cinema. The

²² Choi, JungBong. "National Cinema: An Anachronistic Delirium?" in *The Journal of Korean Studies*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2011, 174.

²³ Marks, Laura. *The Skin of the Film; Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2000, 6.

representation is mixed; in this way intercultural encompasses both Armenian culture and the culture of the Other. This Other is different from Tölölyan's Other mentioned above. This Other is the foreign that intercultural filmmakers bring to the cinema in combination with the national. This combination makes ground for globalization and global culture.

Armenian diasporic experience of cinema is quite diverse. Its multiple character is obvious while the representatives of the diaspora have the initiative to refer to Armenia and portray its image. Beledian brings his own understanding of returning.²⁴ Returning is neither mending the damage nor recovering a purity that has been spoiled. Returning is "searching for the truth", "the truth as I perceive it," as it appears to the gaze. It implies lifting the forgetting and endowing memory with the force of a restrained imagination that has been impeded by bad spells or seductions of power.²⁵ Bypassing this specific diasporic character of awakening the forgetting, which always is present but not always dominant, the following two chapters are to focus on a distinct kind of returning. Returning that is imaginary and returning that is physical.

Thus, the cinematographic experience of the diaspora representatives was complicated while turning to the discourse of homeland as Soviet Armenia was inaccessible to them and their embodiment of Armenia was outside of it. However, it was also auxiliary as the dominant power mediated the relationships between cultures, establishing the parameters of what constitutes knowledge. In its terms, other knowledge was unacceptable. In contrast to this, the diaspora was aside from restrictions and at the same time closer to global. Hence, diasporic films were able to refer to objects and notions determining Armenianness quite freely and were able to combine Armenianness with foreign thus functioning in the process of multiculturalism.

The formal similarities and stylistic tendencies, which determine films as examples of the accented style appearing in an extremely wide range of films, include accented uses of voice, sound, and language; the textual representation of the lost homeland as master referent; the visual presence of a traumatically broken relationship to the body guiding to "tactile optics;"²⁶ underlining of border subjectivities and multiple identities; and the filmmaker's autobiographical inscription included in the film's text.

It is already clear that neither national nor diasporic cinema, as critical categories are unproblematic. It is no longer theoretically viable to define national in the crude terms of where

²⁴ Beledian, Krikor. "Philosophically Paradjanov" translated by Laure Astourian, orig. publish in *La Part de l'Œil*. *Revue de pensée des arts plastiques*, n. 30, 2016-2017.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Naficy, Hamid. *An Accented Cinema; Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, 28.

and by whom films are produced, or by a comparative approach that distinguishes across national cinemas. Instead of focusing on "production" and text-based national cinema, Andrew Higson develops a "consumption" strategy.²⁷ In this respect, Higson opposes Naficy, as Naficy is more inclined to focus on the textual representation and the filmmaker's autobiographical inscription included in the film's text. Higson's outlook is more global, which attempts to reach the further process of filmmaking, namely consumption.

Meanwhile Marks focuses on the aspect that intercultural cinema is doing the recombination of sensory experiences. Intercultural filmmakers and videomakers are aware that it wouldn't be accurate to try to render the sensory experience of their culture of origin. The sensory organization of the society in which they live, however, is something they resist, and the cinematic apparatus that frequently reflects this organization is something they criticize. One might therefore look to the works to stretch cinematic apparatus in order to depict the memory of home in all of its multisensory fullness—and when that fails, to represent the growing sensorium that is a result of both memory and change.²⁸ Marks and Higson have a wider outlook on the cinema than Naficy. Naficy is more concentrated on the individual (filmmaker) experience and on the accents the films include, while speaking about diasporic cinema. In contrast Marks exposes the essence and issues of diasporic cinema calling it intercultural and Higson focuses on the consumption strategy. The intercultural cinema and consumption strategy are part of the idea of global cinema that this chapter strives to emphasize.

Naficy emphasizes the specific elements found in diasporic cinema, calling them chronotopes. Chronotopes are not just visual but also, more significantly, synaesthetic, encompassing the entire human sensorium and memory. The "organizing centers" of the accented films, or the locations where "the knots of narrative are tied and untied," are these chronotopes.²⁹ Naficy calls church as a cathected collective chronotope that incorporates the contentious fate and legacy of Armenia. When a nation's status is under question, as it is with Armenians, some elements of nature and culture—such as mountains, historic sites, and ruins—are employed as so forcefully cathected collective chronotopes that they compress the entire concept of nation. In Armenian accented films rural landscapes and mountains, specifically Mount Ararat appear frequently.³⁰ This factor together with other mentioned help

²⁷ Higson, Andrew "The Concept of National Cinema," 36-46.

²⁸ Marks, Laura. *The Skin of the Film; Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, 242.

²⁹ Bakhtin, Mikhail, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981, 250.

³⁰ Naficy, Hamid. *An Accented Cinema; Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, 160, 164.

to develop the idea that diasporic is beneficial for the national ideology. However, in this respect, Naficy focuses on the conservative elements found in diasporic films overlooking the intercultural and global benefits these films generate.

Other characteristics of diasporic films is their strong focus on territory and territoriality as a result of being deterritorialized. Their open and closed space-time representations reveal their place-obsessed nature. That of the homeland comes to specify boundlessness and timelessness, and it is perked up through fetishization and nostalgic longing to the homeland's natural landscape, mountains, monuments, and souvenirs. On the other side, the depiction of exile and diaspora is more likely to emphasize claustrophobia and temporality, and it is more likely to be associated with places of confinement and control as well as with stories of panic and pursuit. While the idyllic open structures of home emphasize continuity, these paranoid structures of exile underline rupture.³¹

Diaspora Armenian films in this sense encompass both the notion of idyllic and paranoid structures. This is because of the contradictory feeling of absence and presence of homeland. The explanation for this statement is the presence of Eastern Armenia, which embodies the idyllic structure and the absence of Western Armenia, which embodies the paranoid structure. In contrast to the diasporic perception, the national cinema of Soviet Armenia is not so much concerned with territoriality. The core aspects of representation in those films become Soviet life, villagers' lifestyle, and depictions of cultural and mostly multicultural encounters.

Marks indicates that those who have left their culture of origin and are living in a diaspora the memory brings up the senses of touch, smell, and physical presence which are important connections to home. The author analyzes how cross-cultural filmmakers use cinema, a visual medium, to convey that concrete sense of place and culture. The author demonstrates how the picture enables viewers to experience cinema as a physical and multi-sensory embodiment of culture, not merely as a visual reflection of experience, by drawing on approximately 200 instances of intercultural film and video.

The new notion suggested by Marks is haptic visuality, which acts like the sense of touch by evoking physical memories of smell, touch, and taste. The senses frequently recall things that no one else does. The senses have the ability to recall histories of transnational

³¹ Naficy, Hamid. *An Accented Cinema; Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, 5.

objects, histories that have been lost en route.³² I argue that this kind of multisensory experience is not always accurate as the memory of a displaced person always contains a foreign element, which makes the film a combination of national and foreign. This combination of multisensory experience also supports the notion of global culture.

Naficy also indicates the importance of consideration of the non-audiovisual methods: "The exiles produce their difference not just through what they see and hear but through their senses of smell, taste, and touch. Indeed, these aspects of the sensorium often provide, more than sight and hearing, poignant reminders of difference and of separation from homeland."³³ What is not expressed physically registers in pain, nausea, memories of smells, and caresses. What does not echo in the seeable and utterable orders may reverberate in the sensible order. These kind of differences that the exiles strive to produce based on Naficy's statement are important. These differences between exiles are the elements due to which global culture acquires more diverse and more heterogeneous character.

Marks contends that the encounter of cultures is resulting in fresh interpretations of the senses' perception and new methods to embody how one relates to the world. These new sensory experience combinations provide a countercurrent to the rising simulation of sensory experience in contemporary global culture.³⁴ Accordingly, diasporic cinema comes to surpass national cinema with its ability to include itself in the global culture. Both national and diasporic cinemas profit from this. The diasporic, including national characteristics, appears in the global cultural field and draws the attention of the global towards both diasporic and national. Thus, diasporic cinema implies multiple functions. This heterogeneous function is also found in Naficy who states that diasporic films are accented more by multiplicity and addition.³⁵

Accordingly, diasporic cinema can neither linguistically nor culturally be monolithic.³⁶ Eva Rueschmann states that diasporic films compile "a truly international genre of contemporary cinema...in a variety of national and transnational contexts...in a 'world on the move.'" ³⁷ In similar manner, Naficy affirms that diasporic films compile "a mammoth,

³² Marks, Laura. *The Skin of the Film; Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, 110.

³³ Naficy, Hamid. *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles Minneapolis*, University of Minnesota Press, 1993, 152,153.

³⁴ Marks, Laura. *The Skin of the Film; Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, 23.

³⁵ Naficy, Hamid. *An Accented Cinema; Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, 15.

³⁶ Martin, T. Michael, Yaquinto, Marilyn. "Framing Diaspora in Diasporic Cinema: Concepts and Thematic Concerns," 22.

³⁷ Rueschmann, Eva. *Moving Pictures, Migrating Identities*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003, ix.

emergent, transnational film movement and film style."³⁸ I argue that the international genre mentioned by Rueschmann's and Naficy's indication of diasporic films' way of compiling emergent, transnational film movement and style prompt diasporic cinema to make part of global culture and be inseparable from it.

Diasporic cinema, like diasporas, are in the process of engaging national cinemas and audiences, problematizes national identity and the nation as an imagined and bounded territorial expanse. In this manner, diasporic cinema becomes simultaneously global and local. It expresses a distinctive transnational style, as indicated by Naficy, also reflecting national elements. Despite possessing multiple characters, the conservative characteristic of national cinema is the leading principle for the kinds of depiction that it generates. Meanwhile diasporic cinema implies the formation of consistently and sustainably new characteristics without erasing the national character. In doing so diasporic cinema comes to assist, refresh, and make prosper national cinema. Diasporic films are an essential part of film culture and are also powerful political tools.

The parallel perception of diaspora and nation and the further consideration of diasporic and national cinemas shows that national cinema together with diasporic comprise distinct identities. National cinema becomes diverse partly due to the diaspora. Primarily, it is not singular as the notion of national cinema is applied prescriptively rather than descriptively, indicating what needs to be the national cinema, rather than representing the real cinematic experience of audiences. In addition, it cannot be singular as it confronts state interference, industrial patterns of ownership, dominant narrative discourses in its films, and issues of cultural identity. Diasporic cinema mainly obtains its heterogeneity thanks to the encompassing of the culture of origin and foreign culture. Mostly thanks to the foreign elements, diasporic cinema together with national cinema become part of international cultural production. They are components of global culture and global cinema

³⁸ Naficy, Hamid. *An Accented Cinema; Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, 18, 19

Chapter 2: The Perception of Armenia in Diasporic Films during the Soviet Period

Representation of Armenia and Armenians has always been significant for the cultural delineation of Armenia and the worldwide outbreak of the Armenian issue. For a long period, the focus of the diasporic Armenian films was the Armenian genocide. However, the pivotal angles that make the theme possible and resonate with the Armenian fate have been less observed. Armenian diasporic films have been understood from a single, fixed identification perspective, Armenian diasporic cinema discourse has remained inside a linear theorization.³⁹

Formally analyzing the ways various Armenian diasporic subjects who originate from various Armenian diasporas negotiate, struggle, and express their homeland has become crucial. By doing this, the diversity of the Armenian diaspora's identity and means of attaching to the homeland are brought to light. It is proposed that the negotiations and intersections that occur within other aspects of the subjects' identities help them relate to the Armenian homeland in the diaspora. As a result, the conceptual range of Armenian diasporic cinema is wider and more accurately tied to the diasporic identities of the Armenian diaspora and the diaspora identity as a whole.⁴⁰ This chapter is going to argue that the suggested negotiations and intersections between diaspora representatives created an imagined relation to Armenia. There is no accurate answer whether such kinds of associations within diaspora people that result from the imagined figure of Armenia are useful or not. Anywhere, these are only ways in which the perception of Armenia has become possible.

Commercial film and television possess common interest in the sensuous qualities that experimental works generate.⁴¹ A commercial film with a humanitarian context was released in 1919 on the Armenian genocide called *Ravished Armenia*. The film takes the theme from a book entitled *Auction of Souls*, the story of Aurora Mardiganian, who plays herself in it. Oscar Apfel became the first to direct a feature film on Armenia in New York. Reportedly, Armenian archives have a few feet of film. The film was financed by the Armenian and Syrian Relief organization, which also assisted with its publication; posters and newspaper ads are still

³⁹ Bayramian, Shant Parsy. "Exploring Armenian Diasporic Cinema from the "Third Space,"" MA in *Film Studies*, University of Amsterdam, 2019, 2.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Marks, Laura. *The Skin of the Film; Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, XII.

available.⁴² Thus, the acknowledgment of early filmmaking experience concerning the representation of Armenia is dedicated to the film *Ravished Armenia*.

However, it remains contradictory whether the film can be included within the list of Armenian diasporic films as the director is not Armenian. Nevertheless, the fact that *Ravished Armenia* is the first with the pivotal Armenia representation is undeniable. *Aurora* is the specific depiction of Armenia of the particular period (post-genocide); *Aurora* is *Ravished Armenia* herself. The film serves as the basis, out of which the later appearance of the Armenian diasporic filmmaking sphere becomes possible and furtherly developed.

The representation of Armenia has acquired heterogeneous and distinct character both in the homeland and specifically abroad. In the case of homeland experience, the representation becomes possibly more reasonable and realistic while early diasporic representation is more imaged and fictitious. The filmmaker's experience and perceptions from distance i.e. outside of Armenia, is particularly influential in the Soviet period when most filmmakers did not have the opportunity to express themselves as Armenians in their homeland; instead, what they merely knew about Armenia was that Armenia is a place of their origin. This factor made the image more complex but at the same time, - brought new notions and perceptions into being. This chapter acknowledges the special interest to uncover the angles and the elements on which each filmmaker relies on while representing Armenia.

The initiative of the chapter is the explosion of the angles that shape Armenia of the Soviet period. What directors Michael Hagopian, Henri Verneuil, Sarky Mouradian and Ted Bogossian make the central themes in most of the below observed films is the Armenian genocide, however, because of formulated perspectives this theme will be bypassed to some degree. The analysis is to infringe the chronological order of publications. These methods assist in outlining the associating characteristics of the films for the perception of further image of Armenia in Armenian diasporic films of the Soviet period.

Diasporic filmmaker Michael Hagopian born in Kharpert, Ottoman Empire and later settled in Fresno, California, in his documentary film *Where Are my People* (1965) leads the film with the rhetorical question "Where are my People?" building the content around this question. In this documentary film, Hagopian has adopted to start with the narration of vital events in the life of Armenians such as the pagan period, the period of Tigran the Great, the adoption of Christianity, the invention of the alphabet, and the falls and ups of the nation with

⁴² Kouymjian, Dickran. "Filmmaking in the Armenian Diaspora of America," Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1984, 1.

the inclusion of maps (see Appendix 1) and other didactic objects (Appendix 2,3). These elements prompt the nationalistic perspective of the film and the images are the ways Hagopian perceives and symbolizes Armenia in general.

The film's visual proof of the narration in the context of the Armenian genocide include the picture of a massacred family in hands of a surviving member, pictures of the methods of massacres, the deportations, the leadings into deserts, and the concentration camps, and the documents of the Ottoman government decision. (Appendix 4) Pictures of the killed in deserts – the orphans, the starved people, the girls forced into Turkish harems serve as implements of expression. "*Ter voghormya*" (Lord, have mercy) a song composed in the commemoration of the victims of genocide makes the atmosphere of the lines touching and reachable to the audience. Such visual and audio representations form the victim character of Armenian.

The experience of survivors comes this time to change and indicate fate has chosen the survivors to perpetuate the heritage of Armenian people. Thus, the film, smoothly bypassing the exterminated image, shows the role and place of survivors in future Armenia. The heritage of the survivors is reflected through various characters of the film; the blind girl caressing the map of Armenia, the grandfather reading the Bible, a boy finding consolidation in Armenian music, and others. (Appendix 5) These embodiments can be rendered as an attempt to alter the victim and ravished image of Armenia and shape the unbroken image notwithstanding the challenges and losses.

The closing lines underestimate the initial praise of previous historical representations of Armenia and through parallels emphasize the nowadays Armenians' useless nationalist ideologies and endeavors. "What happened can happen today or tomorrow. Who can resurrect them, who can feel the horror of their deaths? New generations cannot understand the injustice of yesterday, yet the older generations remain silent as new crimes are committed against humanity."(26:46-27:15) Thereby, the initial representation of the path of Armenians, and the praise of the nation in the end, are exposed as implementers for reaching the contradictory point. The previous successes get meaningless under the veil of the present reality. The truth is that neither success nor failure is fully transformable. The future generation inherits the consequences and later experiences them. The film uncloses the fact that each Armenian generation and each victim has its own challenges, horror, and trauma that is non-transferable. Here Armenia is separated into generations and more distantly within individuals. Thus, the representation of Armenia is difficult, as it cannot have one angle, it is distinct and heterogeneous.

This heterogeneity formulates the distinct corners of the Armenian identity. A French-Armenian playwright and filmmaker, Henri Verneuil in his autobiographic film *Mayrig* (1991) continues to sustain the grief of genocide. The revenge for the genocide is depicted in a trial where the fate of *dashnaktsakan*,⁴³ Soghomon Tehlerian was to be determined. The trial of Soghomon Tehlerian turns into the trial of the Armenian genocide. The witnesses indicate the horrors of the genocide. As Aurora in *Ravished Armenia* embodies destroyed Armenia, Tehlerian and his justification embody the inefficiency of genocide recognition for Armenia.

In addition, the barriers to Armenian life in France become the unacceptability of some survivors by most inhabitants of France. The families of survivors also serve as portrayals of the inefficiency of genocide recognition in France. The film indicates that the Catastrophe become inseparable part of each of the survivor life together with the stamp *apatride* (in French) (Appendix 8) *anhayrenik* (in Armenian), which means stateless, without a homeland. Other survivors have an inseparable stamp on their bodies (Apkar with lame of permanent damage in one foot) that will always remind them of the path they proceeded. These physical and document stamps are the images that Armenia obtained after the Catastrophe.

This film embodies the figure of the mother in three characters – Azat's real mother and his two aunts. This factor emphasizes the strong relative ties within Armenian families. The sacrificial figure of the family is remarkable. All Armenian parents are represented as self-sacrificing characters. Although the film is called *Mayrig* anywhere, the father is also pivotal in this film. However, it shows the imperishable place that mothers are given in the lives of Armenian children. Verneuil thus perceives Armenia first through contrast to French image and specifically through the Armenian mother, family and its values. Another significant factor for the commemoration of Armenia is Verneuil, who was a celebrated person in France, and his autobiography *Mayrig* could be treated as the microhistory of the Armenian community of the early 20th century Marseilles.⁴⁴

Another image shaped around Armenia is the revengeful spirit of the Armenian man, which seems to start from *fidais*, who can be treated as freedom fighters. This was a spirit that later was transferred to *dashnaks* such as Tehlerian. The development of self-defensive and in addition,

⁴³ A representative of the Armenian party called Armenian Revolutionary Federation in short ARF founded in 1890 in Tiflis. One of the principles of the party is that the still unpunished crime of genocide against the Armenian people must be condemned and redressed by the return of the occupied territories and by the just reparation for losses to the Armenian people (ARF Shant Armenian Student Association).

⁴⁴ Mkrtchyan, Mkrtich. "Communicating Memories Through Autobiography: A Semioticanalysis of *Mayrig* by Henri Verneuil," University of Tartu, 2021, 6.

revolutionary ideologies within *fidais* in Armenia can be found in the film *Sons of Sassoun* (1975) by Sarky Mouradian, who was a filmmaker, television host, and music composer born in Beirut.

The movie starts with an indication about the slaughter of some Armenians, the pitiful and ignored existence of Armenians and the revival thanks to *fidais*. *Fidais'* figure is mostly characterized with the feeling of revenge, as was the case with the leader of Sassoun's *fidais* Varouj. The film hints at the victimized identity of the Armenian nation and the feeling of revenge awakened consequently. The individual memory of each of the freedom fighters generates the collective memory. The memory of each fighter was distinct in the context of loss, but the collective memory of grief associates and gathers them.

Due to *fidais* powerful, fearless, and faithful characteristics Armenia obtains powerful and moral images. The victim identity becomes somehow mitigated through *fidais'* characteristics. In addition, it is mitigated this time through parallel with the Turkish image, which is depicted as fearful and unconfident. (Appendix 9) The Turks are people exaggerating their deeds and falsifying the truth. In their eyes, Armenians are *giavours*.⁴⁵

Not only the life of Armenians is depicted but also those of Greeks under Turkish rule before Catastrophe. The film utilizes the comparative technique by contrasting the Armenian identity and character not only with the Turkish cowardice but also with the Greek one, finding Armenians as powerful and struggling. In a conversation with an Armenian *fidai* Aram, the Greek father Nikola indicates: "You never give up. You fight for your rights – your beliefs. You are fighting united, fearless. What refers to us Greeks talk and get excited about things but nothing happens. While you Armenians risk your lives against all odds." (46:50-47:27) The unity of the nation is marked as a key element. However, unity is not proportional, not all Armenians see *fidais* as warriors and heroes. For some of Armenians, *fidais* are criminals.

Sons of Sassoun creates some contradictory separation between Armenian traditions and the Armenian homeland. The father cares much more about the traditions of his ancestor than the preservation of his homeland and Armenianness. (1:04:56-1:05:34) Although the traditions are perceived as an inseparable part of nationalism ideology this time, they appear to be against nationalism and the nation's endeavors. All the mentioned factors show that the image of

⁴⁵ *Giavur* (*giaour*), means "infidel," with the connotation of impiety in the context of the Ottoman Empire. The Armenians, in general, and the Armenian peasant, in particular, were periodically harassed and even persecuted on religious grounds. (Hovannisian, Richard. "The Armenian People From Ancient To Modern Times Volume II: Foreign Dominion to Statehood: The Fifteenth Century to the Twentieth Century," Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, 194)

Armenia is distinct and multiple. Armenia is both the brave *fidais* and a traditional father who does not care about the homeland.

Another proof of the flexibility of the problem-solving image of an Armenian like *fidais* lies in the documentary film *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* (1982) by Sarky Mouradian. Touching upon the theme of the Armenian genocide, the film has the perspective that the real responsibility for the annihilation of Armenians lies on the shoulders of the government. The film reflects the early resettlement of Armenians who left Armenia to find a residence in European countries. Thus, Armenia is perceived as a subject of Ottoman government. The mapping of places of Armenian annihilations in Ottoman government with the sword near and the indication of successes compose the confirmations of crime Ottomans did against Armenians. (Appendix 10)

Mouradian includes an eyewitness experience of an American journalist as more proof of the happenings. He shows the abandoned character of Armenia through a foreigner. Representatives arriving in Turkey from various countries show awareness of the world about the violence against Armenians and their inaction on this issue. This fact once more proves Armenia is abandoned. The film raises an assumption that if there was support from foreign countries as was the case with Musa Dagh who received help from France, much more Armenians could survive. Abandonment remains the image of Armenia that Mouradian builds in *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*.

The destructive policy of the Ottoman Empire caused not only the eradication of Armenians from their homeland but also supported the confusion for identity distinguishment as the result of resettlement in different corners of the world. *California Armenians: The First Generation* (1989) by Michael Hagopian represents the migrations of Armenians from their homeland before the Armenian genocide. The film concentrates on the diasporic life of Armenians in California, Fresno. (Appendix 11) It marks the reasons that made the Armenians leave their country and seek refuge resulting dispersed image of Armenia.

Armenians are depicted as contributors to Christian culture, art, architecture, and literature. The film shows how the life of Armenians in Fresno was. Armenians felt there like in Armenia, viewing this as a reasonable explanation for Armenians' settlement in Fresno. The climate and the fruits are marked as the main coinciding elements with the Armenian ones. All these factors emphasize the attachment of Armenians to their cultural life and perception of Armenia not through territory but through these cultural occupations. (Appendix 12)

The film makes the viewers acquainted with traditional Armenian culture, especially with the kitchen. The dishes such as *dolma*,⁴⁶ *tanapur*,⁴⁷ biscuits, and others are pointed. *California Armenians: The First Generation* also emphasizes the good characteristics that Armenians spread in their places of residence, namely their strong family ties, their food, their customs, their friendly city rivalries, their urge for learning, their pride in their heritage and their contributions to Californian life. (Appendix 13)

The film marks how Armenians assimilated, developed and became merchants from craftsmen, and also great landowners and industrialists. Independence and somehow the formation of small Armenia in places where Armenians settle are significant factors. Some Armenians even get rid of their surname suffix –ian behaving themselves as being on the side of anti-Armenians. The love for the climate in Fresno, the cultural occupations, and the factor of getting rid of Armenian surnames show Armenia is not perceived through the specific territory but through the feeling of something Armenian. Hagopian hints Armenia is not an irreplaceable spot, the places where groups of Armenians gather can turn to “Armenia,” this is the explanation of having dispersed image of Armenia.

Another similar experience with different complications represents the feature film *Next of kin* (1984) by a Canadian-Armenian filmmaker Atom Egoyan. This film depicts an Armenian family who appeared in Canada and having no money gave up their son Bedros for adoption. They lived with their daughter with whom they had constant disputes. Peter Foster, a 23-year-old boy, comes to this family pretending to be their son Bedros. The acknowledgment of Armenia becomes possible through the eyes of a foreigner. The conservative elements of Armenians are felt in the gathering of family. *Next of Kin* presents the occupation of the Armenian father as a merchant. What resonates here, as Armenian is the product on sale, Armenian carpets. (Appendix 14)

Despite the disputes and difficulties inside the family, the Armenian family is represented as a place where a person is treated expectedly. The warm and caring Armenian mother is a necessity for any person regardless of nationality. The qualities that children are taught in the Armenian family are priceless. Father urges her daughter never to be cheap, she can be a dishwasher, a waiter, or anything but she is to keep her respect. (52:57-53:13) These qualities impressed the foreigner as well. In fact, Egoyan in this film represents Armenia through the

⁴⁶A stuffed dish from Middle Eastern cuisine cooked with beef meat and leaves of grape.

⁴⁷Soup made from matsun (Armenian yogurt) and wheat grains.

Armenian family. In other words, the image of Armenia is not necessarily geographical Armenia but the character, the carpets, the values of Armenian, the preservation of which become in most cases the responsibility of the Armenian families anywhere.

Coming out of the family frame to the more extended group - the Armenian community, the character of Armenia is marked in the feature film *The Pink Elephant* (1985) by Ara Madzounian born in Beirut, Lebanon. His film starts with the representation of distraction. The Armenians are staging French performances in the midst of the Lebanese Civil War. The director of French performance finds the presence of the picture symbolizing Armenianness absurd in their performance, which later becomes the most meaningful thing for all of them, however. (Appendix 15)

The traumatized Armenian identity that already existed, as some of the artist escaped from genocide, becomes more sharpened now in Lebanon, as survivors experience another disaster-war. The gathered actors in the shelter speak about their problems and their worries. This gives them the chance to express their worries. (14:12-15:25) The Armenian community with its traumatized identity is the image of Armenia and Armenians. Hence, the generations of Armenians in the diaspora are complex. The past generations are becoming mad. Some future generations' representatives are cowardly while others are brave and fearless. Some Armenians are greedy; they care only for their money. These become the image of Armenia embodied through Armenians living in Lebanon. The representation of the Armenian community proves Armenia cannot have a single character.

Both *Next to Kin* and *The Pink Elephant* manage to encompass the cores of the cultural representation of Armenia. While *Next of Kin* makes the perception of Armenia within the framework of family paradigms, *The Pink Elephant* delineates the comprehension of Armenia through distinct individuals outside of the family but at the same time formulates a broad perception of the family as a nation. Thereby, what encompasses essential components of *The Pink Elephant* in the scope of cultural representation is wider than that of *Next of Kin*.

The commotion in *The Pink Elephant* caused by the explosion wakes everyone up and brings them together to a picture that reminds them of Armenia. Mount Ararat (Appendix 15) in the picture, symbolizes both the connection and separation in the current and ongoing situation in Armenia. Thus, having Mount Ararat in the midst of the conversation, the explosion of the ways through which the survivor perceives the image of Western and Eastern Armenia becomes possible in the film *An Armenian Journey* (1988) by T. Bogossian. Now, a much more complicated heterogeneous representation of Armenia prompted Bogossian in his

documentary, a research-oriented film to investigate the death of more than one million Armenians in 1915. The director is a successor of Armenians who lived through genocide and lives in America. The proof of the tragedy is constructed thanks to an eyewitness experience. Maria Davis (Appendix 16) is an Armenian Genocide survivor whose family was killed before her eyes.

The film is extraordinary as it represents life in Eastern and Western Armenia almost simultaneously. Visit to Western Armenia being the successive spot of research is accompanied with Davis who willy-nilly is acquainted with these places. Maria's emotions reaching the city of Arabkir are very touching. She tells what the surrounding once used to be, and how she was. (31:50-39:30) Appearing in these places, she visited the present and recovered the past. Bogossian was able to discover the immortality of the Armenian spirit and more significantly found a nation. This film perceives Armenia through the survivor, the Armenian spirit and more especially through the Armenian nation. The film images Armenia as the wholeness of its Western and Eastern parts. Thus, the combination and creation of a connection between Western and Eastern Armenians are remarkable; Eastern being the place for the analysis of existing evidence and Western being the place of recovery and awakening.

The complex heterogeneous image of Armenia is obviously the long-term characteristic that prevails in most films. What filmmakers represent are self-formed imagined images of Armenia, and not real Armenia. The heterogeneous image encompasses the image of Armenia determined by the present of any period and the distinctiveness of the images among individuals. Mostly, the films focused on something Armenian or determining Armenianness such as Armenian mother, Armenian families, Armenian communities, *fidais*, but not Armenia itself. The mentioned elements are the points that make the images of Armenia imagined heterogeneous.

Chapter 3: Post-Soviet Perception of Armenia in Diasporic Film

Until the Post-Soviet period, practically all Armenian fictional and non-fiction films were produced thousands of miles away from Armenia. The comprehension of the Armenian filmmakers' multigenerational diasporic rupture and relationship with their ancestral motherland becomes better thanks to their independent and personal homecoming films.⁴⁸ The face-to-face acquaintance with Armenia in these films helps transform an unwelcoming place back into a place of origin. Thus, the collapse of the Soviet Union opens more space for the recent perception of Armenia. While the Soviet period rarely gave chance to diasporic representatives to appear in Armenia and apprehend its reality, post-Soviet Armenia opened the gates wider for further realistic acknowledgment.

In most cases, Armenia becomes a place of self-determination. The consequences of this self-analysis form the recent perceptions, which can be interpreted in some cases as excitement and as a disappointment, as connection and separation, as ruin and as completeness. The upcoming films represent the remnants of Soviet period, which are not surmountable even now. This chapter is aimed to emphasize the point, which have become pivotal for distinct realistic representations of Armenia. Most filmmakers are representatives of experimental cinema such as Oksana Mirzoyan, Gariné Torossian, Tamara Stepanyan, and others. Their representations are in some films mixed in the context of localization i.e. one and the same film represents a specific diasporic spot and Armenia simultaneously. In other films, the representation is unilateral i.e. representing specifically Armenia without making parallels.

Gariné Torossian, a Canadian filmmaker formulates her perception of homeland in *Stone, Time, Touch*, (2007) via unique demonstration. The film involves three distinct women, each of them with a particular role; Kamee Abrahamian - the visitor, Arsinée Khanjian who visited Armenia quite many times and she speaks about her relationship, and the observer Torossian herself, who was just taking pictures.

The ways *Stone, Touch, Time* reaches the heterogeneous perception of Armenia start with Armenian women and reach the stones of Armenia. Armenian women's perception is observed from diverse corners. What Arevik Arevshatian makes pivotal is the linear perception of women as beautiful beings regardless of their occupation. The film connects Armenia, Armenian women, and Armenian stone. It makes specific, nuanced connections and

⁴⁸ Bilici, Kumru. "Post-Exilic Armenian "Homecoming" Films: Working-through the Traumatic Postmemory of 1915," Carleton University, OTTAWA, Ontario, 2016, ii.

interpretations for the significance and symbolization of stones. An interesting connection and allegory with stone is represented by an artist Nora Badalian. Hitting with a hammer the stones are considered an internal and external limitation of Armenian women that she needs to get rid of. However, the process is useless to some extent as they are huge solid stones. Only pieces from the stone are falling, it seems one cannot fully destroy these limitations. (47:45-48:56) From this indication, the post-Soviet image of Armenia is perceived as a place with limitations, which are unavoidable.

For Torossian, touching of stone of old churches was and remains a favorite practice as she experiences the sacred energy coming from inside. The flavor and image of Armenia become old churches. However, the film is not limited to the perceptions of Armenia thanks to stones and women. The challenges of Armenian women and men also find a place in this film. The meetings with some victims of internet deceit, (15:06-16:43) those who went through the earthquake, those who went through war, (17:34-21:27) and those who experienced exile become the elements for representing Armenia. Armenia is perceived as a place of constant challenges and constant struggles but also a spot where humanity prevails.

In a village, an old woman tells about her lifestyle. She says her children are in Russia. "I am not satisfied with my life as my children are not always with me." (30:20-30:24) This part of the film reflects the ongoing diaspora formation. The emphasis of this footage becomes the music "Bingol." The song represents the pilgrimage of the young Armenian man as typical reality in post-Soviet Armenia.

Another constructive part of the post-Soviet perception of Armenia is the little Catholic Church of Yerevan. (Appendix 17) Here, a man speaks about the stones and marks "We are all relics – I am a ruin from Erzurum and he is a ruin from Kars, she is a ruin from Bayased, but we are all relics that are connected." (38:42-38:58) In addition to the challenges and struggles from outside and inside the post-Soviet Armenia is also a region full of genocide survivors.

Arsinée Khanjian touches the stone saying "I don't know why it connects me with time, it is like touching Jesus' wound, make sure it is there. It is the closest way to grab history in my hands." (39:09-39:42) She speaks about nature: "I didn't spend much time in nature, why is it so that I feel like part of it? What is belonging? I ask more questions to the landscape than people. Nature loves me with no words. This connection is on a different level. It is spiritual perhaps." (43:38-44:24) The ways Arsinée perceives Armenia shows Armenia as a religious spot and its nature is the connective point.

The puzzle that the film sought to collect is unique. It represents Armenia from different angles, with distinct occupations, distinct lifestyles, labor, worries, creativity, memory, and experience. Armenia is place with limitations, struggles, challenges, genocide survivors but it is also place where spirituality exists, where humanity prevail and where new rebirth is expected. Representing the ruined parts of Armenia the film concludes the possible connection of the ruins. These stones, pieces, and relics make and keep Armenia Armenian.

Unlike stones of Armenia that serve as a connection for Torossian, a well-known filmmaker Atom Egoyan points to the fact of separation due to Armenia which is quite individual. In his feature film *Calendar* (1993) the first representation is a car reaching a church, accompanied by traditional music. Ararat, standing in front of the moving car and before it being an endless herd of sheep, is a factor of separation, it gives the parted and detective image of Armenia. It is Armenia, which lost its half and remained looking at the point (Ararat) of the separation.

The main actors of the film are the photographer, his translator (wife), and the driver. The point at which *Stone*, *Time*, *Touch*, and *Calendar* corporate become the perception and introduction of Armenia through the Armenian churches. The driver tells the stories of distinct churches the characters stand before. Arsinée translates them for the photographer. As indicated above (see p.26) in this film there is mixed representation in the context of localization and time. The film works in two spaces simultaneously. We are back and forth between the past and the present, to Armenia and Toronto. There is always confusion and it shows the confused thoughts about Armenia.

The driver suggests the visitors to touch the churches, use their feelings to understand the essence of the churches. An interesting notification by the driver is that most churches were built in the most dominant significant spot of the surrounding. This indication of the driver gives an explanation for understanding various films that perceive Armenia thanks to churches. Due to the drivers interpretations Armenia perceives spiritual image. Armenians devoted the best position of all spots for the construction of churches. Now we come to understand why Torossian and Khanjian are much more connected with Armenia thanks to churches. Through churches, she encounters the former significance of Armenian identity, of her ancestors, which is not present now. The only connective points are churches which didn't change and were conservative. However, the values of Armenians are changed. This is the reason Torossian, Egoyan and other filmmakers find an absence in Armenia. The changes in values changed the imagined perception of Armenia. Armenia is no longer a place that diaspora Armenians talked

about in their childhood. Besides the churches, other images of Armenia serve for separation and partition between Armenia and Armenian diaspora representatives.

Another negative image of Armenia is exposed in the indication of the photographer; “He (the driver) keeps telling stories and they are great stories.... I just don’t really know whether he is expecting at the end something extra. He’s gonna expecting more money or something like that.” (29:17-29:28) Thus, post-Soviet Armenia is a place where cheating is normal and not rare. Especially tourists are deceived. Most taxi drivers ask for more money than needed and tourists are not safe in this respect. *Calendar* is an extraordinary emotional and mixed film where diaspora and homeland encounter and the perceptions of such an encounter are contradictory. The realistic image of Armenia is being connective, separative, deceitful, religious and so on.

The images of Armenia continue to accrue in Suzanne Khardalian’s film *Grandma’s Tattoos*. (2011) Khardalian’s motive for this documentary film became her grandmother. She starts the film in a desert in Der Dzor marking the inevitable fate of Armenians. Khardalian describes her grandmother as rude, expressing no subtlety or solicitude to her. The call of the homeland for this film became the tattoos that Khardalian’s grandmother had. She found a picture of her grandmother. (Appendix 18) Grandmother had black tattoos, these tattoos disgusted Khardalian, and she was scared of her. It was then she discovered that tattoos were signs of slavery. As she was inclined to research the Armenian genocide she found other girls being tattooed as well. The film marks the sad points that have the power to become motives for new exposure of extremes of Armenian identity.

What later interviews with Khardalian⁴⁹ prove is that the women who are an inseparable part of the image of Armenia were underestimated even in the post-Soviet reality. “Grandma did everything not to pass shame onto us, the next generation; I know it will never go away.” (44:53-45:03) These observations show the black corners of the Armenian reality that seem unchangeable and everlasting. There is always space for future exposure and discovery of the Armenian experience. There was no article on the fate of women. One feature of the Armenian mentality affected the concealment of the image of women – the Armenian male pride, which prohibited any reference to the violence against women. Armenia is a place where truth is concealed and deceit is preferred because of shame. The realistic image of Armenia is more like a box full of secrets. Khardalian dives in this box to find out her grandmother was raped.

⁴⁹ <https://hetq.am/en/article/53891> 10/01/2023

Ultimately, Khardalian's reconciliation spot becomes a little village in Armenia. "For long time I have been looking for a refugee, a safe heaven. This is my paradise: a little village just outside Yerevan in Armenia. May be this can repair what was broken in my family all those years ago. Maybe this place can erase the feeling of insecurity I have walked through life with. It feels as though this is mine, in a sense. No one can force me to leave my land. Nowhere else do I get that feeling." (45:18-46:13) Thus, Armenia is a reparation place of what was broken in Khardalian's family. Khardalian's representation became unique as she put aside the fear from the "shameful" stain of her family; this makes obvious the traumatized, concealed, shameful and deceived image of Armenia.

The embodiment of realistic heterogeneous images of Armenia resonates in another masterpiece of Gariné Torossian *Girl from Moush*. (1993) This film features the early endeavors of Torossian on the comprehension of Armenia. The representation appears mostly through photos that are continuously moving on camera roll. The folk songs follow one another throughout the film. A girl is talking at times whose voice is hardly heard. The pictures as dominant elements of film are of churches, of Armenia, of distinct people. (Appendix 19) Thus, the film can be treated as a frozen representation with music accompaniment. This film shows the early image of Armenia in Torossian's eyes. This image is both hers and another's. In an interview with Torossian she indicated that the music and the character of the namesake song *Girl from Moush* inspired her for this title. The girl from this song also used to look at pictures like Torossian. In some way, this girl appears to be Torossian but at the same time another person. Torossian is not from Moush; the choice for the title was made because of the music which was not even used in the film.

The choice of the title and the explanation for it is a pivotal point. Torossian makes a film that includes and excludes the provenance of its idea i.e. it is the girl from the namesake song and not her. She connects and dissociates herself from this girl from the song. This contradictory characteristic can be justified by the words of Torossian looking for the one who can listen to her and understand her speech. For her, this person can be only an Armenian. An Armenian who acknowledges the beauty of Armenia. (1:57-2:04) This girl from Moush from the song was her compatriot which justifies Torossian's choice. The image of Armenia is the beauty that Torossian perceived and now needs to share with those who are acquainted with it, especially with those of Armenians.

There are distinct rhythms within the film. Each rhythm influences the viewer distinctively. It is like composition, taking things and composing. It is the way Torossian

composes. These distinct influences make the collection of the image of Armenia. Armenia is the collectivity of churches, its sightseeing, its people, and its beauty.

The image of Armenia is distinct in *Girl from Moush*. In fact, it is not the Armenia that Torossian formulated in the above-mentioned film *Stone, Time, Touch*. The girl claims she always looks at the photos, and Armenian is always inside her. Wherever she appears is Armenia. “Armenia is always in my heart, it makes me feel complete.” (3:48-3:58) However, the gap remains between the perception and the consequent reaction towards Armenia that is formed not thanks to self-determined observation but thanks to the representation of the other i.e. the perception of the other not as Torossian but very similar to her person. The exclamation for Sayat Nova, Ararat, Lake Sevan, Komitas, Ejmiatsin, Yerevan, and beloved Armenia form the prompts of the significances that first come to mind in the process of creation of images of Armenia. (4:35-4:45)

The defective character of Armenian society becomes revealed in the film *140 Drams*⁵⁰ (2012) by Oksana Mirzoian. It shows the social gaps in Armenia. In her film Mirzoian gives a specific post-Soviet representation of Armenia. This film represents an Armenian family where the man is at the head of the family and the woman bears the responsibility for the household. The early post-Soviet bad conditions encountered in most of the families are not an exception in this family as well. The father has no job, and no money; consequently, the family has no food. (Appendix 20) This lack of money reflects on the relationship of the couple and on their treatment of their child Edo.

Mother sends Edo to a store to buy some milk for his little sister, giving him 140 drams. In the store, another issue of post-Soviet life directly connected with the first comes to the surface – the increase in prices. The people in the store are complaining about this issue. (9:36-10:11) The price of milk is 240 drams. Edo is before choice. Eventually, he takes the milk secretly as the salesperson is out of the store, leaves the 140 drams on the table, and reaches home. Hence, we see how the bad conditions of a family lead a member of it to become a robber. This is the spot to assume why robbery became so frequent and spread in Armenia. Mirzoian sees Armenia as a remnant and consequence of the Soviet period. She insists on the destructive impact of it, which has led Armenia to its current condition.

Tamara Stepanian expands to expose the consequences of the destructive impacts of the Soviet period in *The Village of Women* (2019). The director represents the life of Armenian

⁵⁰ Dram is Armenian national currency.

women. She depicts an Armenian village called Lichk, where the rule belongs to the women. They are responsible for the plow, and the harvest, they even drive the tractors (Appendix 21). The women cook, eat together, laugh, and sing. An interesting part of the film is the singing of an aged troublesome woman. The words of the song resemble the women of the village. They are like a tree that is very useful for everyone but has no gardener.

Even if sadness seems to cloud many conversations, life moves along with ease. The lack of men in the town manifests itself as a natural phenomenon. The women became adapted to the conditions, working together to find solutions. Except for a few elderly men, every male villager spends nine months of the year working in Russia. Armenia doesn't have any employment. This became the solution to the issue that Mirzoian revealed.

Only in the winter are all the families united. The atmosphere in the village starts to shift as soon as fall comes to an end. In addition to delight and enthusiasm, the men's return also brings changes and insecurity. After the joyous welcoming celebrations, a new daily routine sets in where couples are abruptly reunited, kids play with their dads, and the women finally realize that some of the burdens of their labor are in the hands of others. However, duties need to be divided again each year. With warmth, humor, and a big measure of lived feminism, the director has created a warm-hearted, stylistically assured depiction of a female community of fate that bears its challenging circumstances. It shows how the absence of employment for Armenian men has doubled the trouble and responsibilities of Armenian women and complicated their life.

Thus, the complex heterogeneous images of Armenia have become realistic in the post-Soviet perceptions of Armenia. The components of the formation of realistic images of Armenia become the connective, separative, deceitful, religious, traumatized, concealing, shameful, and defective characteristics revealed in the post-Soviet films. In addition, the post-Soviet image of Armenia is the hidden beauty it has notwithstanding the economic problems and the complicated lives of women.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the analysis, Armenian diasporic cinema is part of global culture, which through its reference to the homeland brings the national cinema close to the global platform as well. The nuanced observation of the two cinemas shows that national together with diasporic cinemas comprise distinct identities. The diversity of national cinema is partly due to the diaspora. More specifically, national cinema is not singular as the notion of national cinema is applied prescriptively rather than descriptively, indicating what needs to be the national cinema, rather than representing the real cinematic experience of audiences. The impossibility of singularity is also due to its confrontation with state interference, industrial patterns of ownership, dominant narrative discourses in its films, and issues of cultural identity. The heterogeneity of diasporic cinema is due to the factor of including the culture of origin and foreign culture. Through the foreign elements, diasporic cinema together with national cinema become part of international cultural production. They are components of global culture and global cinema.

Further analysis of diaspora Armenian cinema retreated from linear identification of diaspora Armenian films, sought various directions and focused on distinct diasporic filmmakers to uncover Armenia in their films. Chapter 2 established the initiative to expose the Soviet images of Armenian. It started with first attempts of visual representation of the destroyed character of Armenia and reached the confrontation of its Eastern and Western parts. The complex heterogeneous image of Armenia is obviously the long-term feature that prevailed in most films. M. Hagopian hints the image of Armenia is determined by the present of any period because the perception of Armenia is diverse both for distinct generations and even more specifically for distinct individuals. H. Verneuil perceived Armenia through his characters who despite genocide and following difficulties kept their traditional mentality and remained Armenian notwithstanding the challenges. While Hagopian and Verneuil depicted an individual-oriented image of Armenia, Mouradian showed the collective image thanks to *fidais*. From a victim now Armenia became revolutionary. The later film of Mouradian *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* pictures abandoned Armenia. Subsequently, M. Hagopian hints Armenia is not an irreplaceable spot, the places where groups of Armenians gather can turn to “Armenia.”

In a narrow sense, Egoyan equals an Armenian family with Armenia. Meanwhile, Madzounian extends the scope of family making the framework of cultural representation wider. T. Bogossian concludes the perceptions, showing Armenia can only be perceived fully

i.e. with its western and eastern parts. In fact, what filmmakers represent are self-formed imagined images of Armenia and not real Armenia. The concentration was mainly on something Armenian or determining Armenianness – an Armenian mother, Armenian families, Armenian communities, *fidais*, survivors, etc. but not Armenia itself. These mentioned elements are the components that made the images of Armenia heterogeneous.

Chapter 3 delineates the post-Soviet period's images attained realistic conceptualization because of the diasporic filmmaker's allowance to come to Armenia. Most filmmakers of the chapter are representatives of experimental cinema such as Oksana Mirzoyan, Gariné Torossian, Tamara Stepanyan, etc. The complexity of images is caused by the factor of diverse localization as some films depict a particular diasporic spot and Armenia simultaneously. This factor makes the images complex and heterogeneous, as there is a possibility to have an image of Armenia mixed with a foreign image. Apart from this, the formative characteristics of complex heterogeneous images of post-Soviet Armenia exposed in the films are connectivity, separation, deceit, spiritual essence, trauma, concealing, shame, and defects. In addition, the post-Soviet image of Armenia is the hidden beauty it has notwithstanding the economic problems and the complicated lives of women.

Hence, diasporic cinema coming into existence brought Armenian cinema to the global platform. The diasporic filmmakers' experience with Armenia generated new notions. The heterogeneous character of the Armenia image gained reasonable interpretations. Furtherly, the Soviet and the post-Soviet divisions of Armenian diaspora cinema allowed conceptualizing of the Soviet imagined and the post-Soviet realistic images of Armenia.

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