REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING: CINEMA OF THE ARMENIAN DIASPORA

TIM KENNEDY
timkennedy@eggconnect.net

A sequence from Canadian filmmaker Atom Egoyan's first feature film, *Next of Kin* (1983), offers an insight into a number of the profound tensions inherent in Diasporan identity, something that occupied him in various ways over the next two decades. It starts at an airport baggage carousel where Peter, the son of a wealthy Anglo-Saxon Canadian couple, collects his suitcases and leaves. Peter's voice-over explains that for the last year or so, in order to escape from his parents' constant arguments, he has assumed a split personality, fantasised being two people. We already know from earlier scenes that these fantasies have led to sessions at a family therapist, and that while reviewing videotapes of these sessions, Peter also watches those of an immigrant Armenian family, the Deryans, who gave away their baby son to foster parents.

The voice-over, continuing into the next scene, a hotel bedroom, describes Peter's fascination with therapy, how exciting he thinks it would be to get involved with another family – 'to give direction to their lives' – and how he decided he would leave home and take control of his own life. In a slow pan round the room the camera discovers Peter recording these thoughts onto tape, as instructed by the therapist, 'as if ... talking to a stranger'. Having previously stolen a file on the Deryans, Peter now telephones them claiming to be their son. His conversation continues over a cut to the next scene, which shows him riding an escalator up into the lobby of a hotel.

Egoyan, to this point, has given us two transitions: Peter's emphatic exit from the airport, through a double set of glass doors, which signalled leaving his previous life, and the nervous meeting in the hotel lobby which starts his new one. Both settings are archetypal places of transition in the cinema, but now Egoyan also introduces stylistic changes to heighten the sense of rupture. From the conventional tripod-mounted camera of the previous scenes, he moves to a hand-held camera that tracks in with Peter as he meets his 'parents'. The following scenes are tightly-framed, continuous shots, where the camera, like the voice recorder, has become an

intimate third-party, watching and listening to Peter as he takes on the role of Bedros, the missing son. A solo violin, playing an elusive Armenian tune, counterpoints the framing of Peter in close-up, squeezed by Sonia and George, as he stares at the camera. The slight, insinuating melody suggests that Peter is 'recalling', perhaps experiencing internally, a fantasy 'recovered memory', of being Armenian, of being Bedros. For their part, as they drive him to their home, the couple easily convince themselves Peter is their son (though quite evidently he is not). To complete the sequence, Armenian music floods into the next scene at the Deryans' family home, as they sit down to an expansive Armenian meal.

These episodes provide an illustration of the way Egoyan imaginatively addresses the existential question of identity, which commonly troubles people living as a Diaspora. In this paper I examine the extensive cinematic response by Armenians to this question and to the legacy of the genocide, regarded as the defining episode of their recent history. First, I consider the crisis of identity experienced by many in the Diaspora and how the concept of a Diasporan nation emerges. Then, I discuss how the expression of Armenian identity in the cinema ranged from denial, for much of the first half century, to a resurgence of nationalism from the mid-1960s. In the second half, I analyse in detail the approach by contemporary filmmakers to representing the psychological impact of the massacres and their exploration of the relationship between memory and national identity.

A CRISIS OF IDENTITY

In the sequence discussed above, Egoyan introduces the idea of rupture or disjuncture, not only through the narrative (Peter leaving home), or by employing typical sites of transition (airports, exit doors and hotel lobbies), but also through formal means. The knee-height opening shot, taken from the moving baggage conveyor belt, is followed by interleaved scenes from Peter's home life, sessions at the therapy clinic, and more activity in the baggage hall, all accompanied by Peter's voice-over. The logical and temporal order of these scenes is not revealed until finally he collects his bags, and we can piece together the story leading up to his departure from home. The enigmatic, fragmented style associated with Peter's home life, is replaced with a linear series of scenes filmed with a hand-held camera and close framing. Egoyan thus employs a formal transition to denote displacement: in this case displacement from a disintegrating and 'battle-

scarred' home, but with the wider implication of displacement from a home*land*. In his later films, and in those of Gariné Torossian and Tina Bastajian (discussed below), textural disjunctions of a more radical type achieve the quality of a signature.

Egoyan goes on to denote an instability of identity by the way Peter creates a dual personality, a fantasy of being two people. As his voice-over tells us, 'one part of you would always be the same like an audience – the other part would take on different roles – like an actor'. When he sloughs off one identity to assume another, the camera takes on the position of Peter watching himself, and the soundtrack becomes Peter listening to himself. But Egoyan takes the idea of instability further by showing the camera constantly in search of an authentic image, one that will pin down Peter's identity. We see Peter through the lens of an omniscient observer, through a television camera in the family therapy studio, on monitors as the therapy session is edited, and in the uncertain hand-held camera that closely follows him into his new life. These varying views serve to demonstrate Peter's ambivalence. He withholds and reveals himself, but always *performs* his identity: variously that of "submissive son" to his real parents; confident "doctor" in the clinic where he views the Deryan tapes; the "lost Armenian child", Bedros; and "brother" to Azah, the Deryan's daughter.

Finally, Egoyan expresses a Diasporan fear of the erosion of ethnic identity by assimilation, through the tense relationship between George Deryan and Azah, which results in her leaving home. Azah, who is engaged with the modern world and is at least partially assimilated, refuses to conform to the patriarchal control exercised by George. By contrast, George and Sonia are over-determinedly Armenian. George is a carpet-seller, a tradition handed down from his father, and Sonia prepares elaborate Armenian food. Their home is filled with Armenian artefacts, rugs, symbolic alphabets, religious symbols, and music. They are part of a passionate and lively Armenian community, contrasted cruelly with Peter's anaemic Canadian home in two, parallel, birthday party sequences. The Deryans are presented as actively displaying their identity and trying to fold Peter and Azah into their world.

Concerns over identity, instability, and assimilation may manifest themselves in any community of exiles. But Egoyan also touches on a more specifically Armenian issue – the absence of one or more family members, especially a son, caused by some rupture in the past – and the

effect that has on those who remain. Lorne Shirinian has noted such anxiety over continuity of the family, and by extension, of the race, frequently expressed in Armenian literature.[1] As an example, he cites a poem in which the pollen of a poppy is taken as a symbol of transference, that is, the passing on of culture from one generation to the next. On closer inspection, the poet sees that the poppy is sterile; it has lost its reproductive power. The traumatic effect of the genocide on the Armenian Diaspora thus appears as a figurative emasculation. In *Next of Kin*, Bedros was given up for adoption because the Deryans could not afford to look after him when they migrated, but he takes on a more general meaning as a "ghost" member of the family. He exerts the tyranny of the missing son that the therapist tries to exorcise in their therapy sessions. By taking in Peter, George retrieves his masculinity and can pass on his culture. This is denoted economically by his pride in painting a new sign for his shop, "Deryan and Son".

Shirinian also argues that the genocide caused sexual problems for many of the survivors. Because Armenians had been treated as an undifferentiated collective, one that would be eradicated to solve the "Armenian Question", survivors 'saw themselves as one large family in which [they] became brothers and sisters'.[2] The tension regarding putative 'incest' (a recurring theme in Egoyan's films) between Peter and Azah may be seen as a surfacing of this phenomenon.

Next of Kin was partly born out of the insecurity Egoyan himself felt on arrival in Toronto at the age of eighteen and his need to explore the Armenian identity which he had previously endeavoured to suppress. He creates in Peter a palimpsest, seemingly devoid of identity, able to assume whatever role people project onto him. Though Peter is not Armenian, he is a Diasporan "figure", re-creating the Diasporan condition. He answers the question, 'Who am I?', with, 'I am what other people see of me'. He experiences the rupture of leaving home. Uncertain of his identity, caught in a conflict between the past and the future, he can only begin to feel at ease when he relinquishes his past (by pretending his foster parents have died in a car crash). In an uncomfortable ending, Azah, who knows by then that Peter is not her long-lost brother, "erases" the real Bedros by replacing his photographs in the family album with new Polaroids of Peter. The choice by Egoyan of instant photographs to take the place of those that have been in the album for 20 years, qualifies Peter's new identity as

ephemeral and emphasises the abruptness of this transition from one life to another.

THE DIASPORAN NATION[3]

The rupture of dispersal is not new to the Armenian people; they have endured centuries of forced and voluntary migration. However, the greatest dispersals, occurring around the period of the Hamidian massacres and the genocide in Turkey, resulted in significant communities being formed in the Middle East, France, and North America. These diverse and complex populations have held differing views, which have also changed over time, of what it means to be Armenian. Even in the North American community, which is the principal focus of this paper, Armenians have seen themselves in a variety of ways: as 'immigrants, exiles, expatriates, refugees, part of an ethnic minority' or as citizens of their host country.[4]

But what constitutes being Armenian today in the diaspora? To paraphrase Suny: is this a people defined by its language (that many can no longer use); by its unique religion (that few practice); by its sense of history (of which many are unaware); by a shared national consciousness (which is actually fragmented), or simply by a way of life?.[5] These questions about cultural identity are doubly difficult because of the well recorded political, cultural, and religious divisions between the many different communities, and because of the intricate relationships with their respective hostlands and Soviet Armenia. Given such dissonance, what is it that allows Panossian to argue that the different communities developed 'a collective consciousness', sufficient to form 'a *diasporic nation*' – a transnational entity with a will to maintain and project its identity?[6]

In any society, tensions frequently arise between conservative and progressive elements, but in the Armenian Diaspora these have been exacerbated. Conservatives, concerned with preserving language and traditions, rehearsing collective memories of the homeland, and keeping alive the notion of return, have tended to keep separate from their hosts. Progressives, on the other hand, have worked to create cultural institutions, such as schools and community centers, and to construct a sense of identity within the wider host culture; to become "hyphenated Armenians". Panossian observes that these tensions in the Western diaspora have caused the notion of 'Armenianness' to change, and that a 'unique Diasporan identity' is being developed, based on a 'hybrid and hyphenated identity and on dual loyalties' encompassing both the hostland and the homeland.[7]

He argues that, despite the differences, there is a powerful thread, a *subjective feeling* of being Armenian, that persists and binds the fragmented communities into a nation. Can we, then, detect Panossian's subjective feeling of being Armenian in the cinema of the diaspora? Does this cinema support the notion of an Armenian Diasporan nation? And does it reflect changes in national consciousness that have occurred over time?

I will address these questions by considering three broad phases of film-making in the Armenian diaspora. The first period, which lasted some 50 years from the onset of the genocide, is characterised by virtual silence and suppression similar to that in Soviet Armenian cinema. The second, beginning in 1965 with the commemoration of the 50th anniversary in Yerevan, saw the release of a series of documentary and feature films that tried with varying degrees of success to re-awaken Armenian national consciousness and to confront denial of the genocide. Egoyan's *Next of Kin* in 1983 marks the beginning of a transition between these conventional cinematic treatments and a more intellectual and artistic approach that distinguishes the third period.

SUPPRESSION AND CONCEALMENT (1915-65)

A common malaise in intellectual life at the beginning of the 20th century, brought on by a reaction to modernisation, is distinctively overlaid in the Armenian Diaspora by the sense of abandonment, loss, and despair resulting from the Turkish attempt to exterminate the nation.[8] Among writers in English, this appears as a disposition towards mourning and an overriding sense of futility about the future, and for those writing in Armenian (most often first generation immigrants), as nostalgia for the lost homeland combined with a strong feeling of obligation to preserve language, culture, and traditions. Yet, despite its major influence, directly confronting the genocide appears to be extremely difficult, a state of mind summed up thus by poet Leonardo Alishan, 'We are caught in a yesterday that devours our today and denounces our tomorrow'.[9]

Many artists, faced with a similar paralysing effect, also seem to distance themselves from their recent history in nostalgia and symbolism.[10] A few, however, attempt to make sense of the genocide – something Kristin Platt suggests is 'painting as a process of loss'.[11] Of these, Arshile Gorky, who became one of the most influential Armenian artists in North America, provides an important insight into the artistic response.[12] His most significant early painting, *The Artist and His Mother* (1926-36), refers

beyond the genocide to the ancient art of Armenia in its simplified forms. Yet it also carries memories of the trauma forward to the present day, as we shall see in Egoyan's *Ararat* and Torossian's *Garden in Khorkhom* (2003). Furthermore, the fragmented forms of his later style, floating freely in space, seem to cut across historical and geographical boundaries. In this, they epitomise the Diasporan condition, influencing a number of Armenian filmmakers. For example, his painting, *How My Mother's Embroidered Apron Unfolds in My Life* (1944), inspired a film of the same name by Arby Ovanessian (1985), and his abstract, overlapping structures are discernible in the forms adopted by Torossian and Egoyan.

Gorky's abstraction provides an elusive vision of the past. But he also withheld critical information about himself, changed his name on arriving in New York in the 1920s, frequently misdated his paintings, and repeatedly lied to his friends about his life.[13] It is as if he wished his Armenian identity and his experiences as a survivor of the siege of Van to remain veiled. Cinematic response to the tragic history of the Armenian people by early Diasporan filmmakers seems similarly to have been repressed. For example, one of the most accomplished Armenian directors, Reuben Mamoulian, 'avoided revealing anything of his private life'.[14] Throughout his Hollywood career, typically in such films as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931), *Song of Songs* (1933), and *Queen Christina* (1933), he seems obsessed with the idea of double identities; of his characters living a double life. Time after time he employs the mirror as a device to avoid a direct view of his ambiguous characters, offering tantalising glimpses of their internal thoughts.[15] This evasiveness seems to reflect Mamoulian's desire to hide or reject any Armenian identity in his work.

However, Mamoulian's interest in Armenia and in Armenian culture was intense. He certainly saw a number of the early films from Soviet Armenia, including *Namous* and the first sound film, *Pepo,* which he viewed in 1936. He watched the latter 'with surprise and great joy', delighted 'to see the face of my country and hear its voice ... the melody of the Armenian language, as sweet as honey'.[16] Mamoulian also considered making a film about David of Sassoun in Armenia but was prevented from entering the country by the authorities, and was 'sounded out' by MGM to make a film of *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh.* Since he had such strong ties to his homeland, it is even more remarkable that he concealed all references to his identity in his work.

In France, a survivor of the massacres in Turkey, Henri Verneuil, began his directorial career in 1951 and went on to make many successful mainstream, commercial films over the next two to three decades. Like Gorky, Verneuil changed his name and, in his work over this long period, he seems to have suppressed his Armenian identity and all references to the troubles faced by the Armenian people. It was not until 1991, at the end of his career, that he made two films, *Mayrig* and *588 rue Paradis* (discussed below), in which his Armenian identity is revealed.

Thus, though there were many significant literary and artistic contributions to the discourse on Armenian identity in the Western Diaspora over the first half of the 20th century, the prevailing reaction was to repress expression of the horrors of the genocide.[17] In the cinema, with the exception of a few films made in Armenian for the Armenian community in the U.S.,[18] and the Hollywood spectacular, *Ravished Armenia*, filmmakers seem to mirror the trauma and self-inflicted amnesia that affected Armenians worldwide. This resulted in the suppression not only of most references to the genocide but also of virtually all expression of national consciousness.

A NEW AWAKENING (1965-83)

Each Diasporan community, of course, has its own history and particular characteristics ranging from the highly fragmented to the cohesive. At one extreme, assimilation is widespread, at the other, motivation to retain national identity remains strong. In the U.S., first generation Armenian immigrants began conservatively, re-creating a cultural life complete with churches, newspapers, schools, cultural institutions, and political parties. But changes occurred very quickly. The spoken language succumbed to pressure, especially among the children, and the written language also disappeared rapidly.[19] Thus, the second generation found themselves half-way between being Armenian and American. They faced a problem of identity. As Peroomian notes, they became ethnically schizophrenic – 'American 6 days a week and Armenian for a few hours on Sunday'.[20] Similar assimilation also occurred in other Western Diaspora communities, whereas those in the Middle East largely retained strong links to their ethnic origins.

Since WWII, the strength of Armenian national feeling has ebbed and flowed in North America. The war itself, in which Armenians fought on the allied side, and the encouragement of a limited form of Armenian

nationalism by the communist authorities, were also instrumental in partially uniting the diaspora. But the onset of the Cold War re-opened political divisions, splitting the community between those who supported the regime in Soviet Armenia and those who were fiercely anti-communist.[21] These divisions caused many to reject their community. However, the beginning of détente in the 1960s saw the gradual growth of cultural and religious links between Soviet Armenia and North American Armenian communities. This was followed by a general softening of anti-Soviet attitudes and a corresponding increase in anti-Turkish feelings, all of which had the effect of bringing the Diasporan community together.

The events of 1965 in Soviet Armenia, revolutions in Egypt and then Iran, and civil war in Lebanon further inspired a resurgence of national feeling in the worldwide Diaspora and a growing effort to force the recognition of the genocide to the top of the agenda. Walker asserts that the initial failure of these efforts led to more radical, terrorist action resulting in the murder of about 45 Turkish diplomats and government officials between 1974-83.[22] He goes on to argue that it was only when it was accepted that this activity was counter-productive that alternative political means were employed to achieve some recognition of the genocide in the U.N., E.U. and U.S. The revival of nationalism began to have some effect on filmmakers in the diaspora. Documentaries and commercial feature films concerned with Armenian national consciousness all became more evident. The story of the genocide, told from an Armenian perspective, surfaced, and the existence of an Armenian people again started to register more distinctly with Western media.

DOCUMENTING HISTORY

One strand of Diasporan documentary film is clearly polemical and campaigning. It is exemplified by *Where Are My People?* (1965), the first in a series of documentaries produced by genocide survivor Michael J. Hagopian in the U.S. It consists of a grand tour of Armenian history that includes the legend of Noah's Ark beaching on Mt. Ararat; the conversion to Christianity in 301CE; the 'golden centuries' which saw the development of the written language and the flourishing of literature, art, and architecture; the hero Vartan losing the battle of Avarayr but 'preserving the faith'; and the desperate decline under Moslem rule until the 'final martyrdom' of the genocide. Illustrated with maps of Greater and Lesser Armenia, extending from the Caspian to the Mediterranean, it re-

constructs a myth of Armenia as an ancient territorial nation-state. Hagopian represents Armenians as a peaceful, rural people: happy 'maidens' dance, collect apricots, and produce grapes and wine – they are a people with a 'zest for life and happiness'. He evokes affecting images of the perfidious, cruel, and vicious Turks. The beautiful maidens are swept off to serve in harems, and images of mutilated victims and sounds of human pain and violence are used to elicit emotional response to the massacres. The film, made in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the genocide, for the 'survivors of the great martyrdom', pleads with the older generation not to remain silent 'as new crimes are committed against humanity'.

In their analysis of this and other documentaries, Kassabian and Kazanjian make a useful distinction between *mourning*, which is a normal response to the trauma of loss of a loved one or object, something that may be overcome in time, and *melancholia* which is a pathological response. The latter, the result of ambivalence about the loved object, does not allow the feelings of loss to be resolved.[23] Taking the example of Theodore Boghosian's, *An Armenian Journey* (1988), they argue that it is the mythic nature of the Armenian homeland – the loved one in this case – that induces ambivalence and hence the melancholic response of this film. This interpretation is supported by examination of *Where Are My People?* and several other Hagopian films, most of which display traces of melancholia. By contrast, his last and most autobiographical film, *Voices From the Lake: The Secret Genocide* (2000), could be classified as a work of mourning. In this, the lost object of love is no longer the abstract Armenian nation or the mythical homeland, it is his family and the people of his birthplace, Kharpert, and the surrounding area, who were massacred on the shores of Lake Goeljuk.

A number of other documentary films are also preoccupied with the genocide.[24] These invariably endorse a nationalist discourse on identity; affirming ancient Armenian ethnic origins and evoking the unique language and religion, a glorious past, and a rich culture. Most of them are also historically reductive. They construct a generalized and idealized lost past, and at the same time homogenize the Diaspora in a transnational identity, to be shared by all Armenians. Though it would be wrong to dismiss any of this work lightly, it may be faulted on two counts. First, like much documentary history, the films make use of archival footage and stills that are often un-accredited and are open to interpretation; they offer a

single point-of-view, they use witness stories affectively and without interrogation, and they provide only a partial narrative, one that often results in the creation of new myths. Thus, by presenting events selectively and emotionally, they fail to give an entirely convincing historical account. I would except *Voices...* from most of this criticism since it makes reasonable efforts to authenticate the documentary evidence. Secondly, in trying to construct a normative nation, the filmmakers gloss over the complexity of Diasporan society and exclude many sectors of the population.[25] For example, *Back to Ararat* (Holmquist, 1988), though applauded by one critic for 'validating' her existence as an Armenian in the diaspora, ultimately failed to answer her question, 'who is us?'.[26] More devastating is the criticism of the territorial nationalism in these films. For Veeser, Armenians lack what he calls the 'stupidly sentimental overplus of emotion' that drives such nationalism.[27] They are rather a 'non-territorial nation', at home wherever they are and in no need of such nationalist propaganda.

Though these documentaries perform an important function in keeping alive the story of the Armenian nation, the majority are essentialising; they perpetuate a mythical account of ancient Armenian history that supports the notion of a territorial nation. At the same time, they exploit the genocide and the need for restitution as unifying forces with which to construct a homogenous Diasporan nation. Thus, if these films failed both to represent the complexity of the Armenian Diaspora and authentically to relate the genocide, have other cinematic forms fared better?

DRAMATISING HISTORY

There have been a few attempts by commercial feature filmmakers to engage with the issue of Armenian identity and the recent history of the people. The earliest of these was the plan by MGM to make a major film of Werfel's *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*. The screen rights were acquired in 1934, but apparently due to intense diplomatic pressure from the Turkish government, the project was dropped soon after.[28] It was not until nearly 50 years later that an independent filmmaker, Sarky Mouradian, who had previously directed a series of films in Armenian, completed the film, now called *Forty Days of Musa Dagh* (1982). Though his earlier films enjoyed popular success, this film, even in its extended 'director's cut' version, is surprisingly inept.

The novel is a sweeping dramatisation of the history of Armenian communities in an area of southern Anatolia who resist the Turkish clearances on the mountains of Musa Dagh and are put under siege for fifty-three days before being rescued by the French navy. Mouradian's rendition of the novel, which contains many intensely dramatic episodes, is banal. Consider the sequences of Armenian civilians being herded by Turkish soldiers to their certain deaths. Mouradian's attempt to dramatise the vicious cruelty of the death marches has little of the horror of Werfel's prose, and cannot compare with Wajda's chilling, silent march of the Jews in *Holy Week* (1995), or even with the dream-like marches of Malyan's *Nahapet* (1977). Consider also the crude stereotyping of Turkish soldiers and their leaders, and the stilted re-enactments of meetings between Morgenthau, Lepsius, and the Young Turk leadership. And, though Werfel creates a heroic central figure who leads the Armenian resistance, the film fails to use this personalisation to express effectively the ideas of sacrifice and the determination to survive, which are embedded in the novel.

Another film made in the U.S., *Assignment Berlin* (Hrayr Toukhanian, 1982), tells the story of the assassination in 1921 of Talaat Pasha, the Ottoman minister of the interior, accused with other Turkish leaders of planning and carrying out the genocide, and the subsequent trial and acquittal of the assassin. The first three-quarters of the film deals with the build-up to the killing, interleaved with chunks of 'history' to fill in the story. Again, it contains a crude representation of the Turks and lacks any dramatic tension, even in the assassination. The last quarter is devoted to the trial of the assassin, in which evidence of the genocide from European and American sources is presented. However, the film fails almost entirely in its attempts to humanize the protagonists, and thus exhibits failings similar to most of those in the documentaries discussed earlier.

As the Soviet Union began to crumble in the late 1980s, cinema in Soviet Armenia began to lose its former constraints, and this may have provided the release necessary for filmmakers elsewhere to open up the issue of the genocide. For example, Verneuil made two films in France, based on his autobiography, that attempt to articulate "the Armenian experience". The first of these, *Mayrig* (1991), covers familiar ground: ancient Armenian history, the genocide, and the plight of the exile. In contrast to the other feature films, Verneuil's evocation of history is poetic and symbolic: a sequence of iconic images of Armenia – Mt. Ararat, an ancient church, shepherds and their sheep, the grottoes of Christian

ancestors, *khachkars*, and sounds of the flute – accompanied by the commentary, 'for a long-time I called myself Armenian without knowing where to find that land', and continuing with a compact description of the 'agony of a people'. The absence of maps or references to specific territory, inducing the audience to imagine a pastoral idyll, greatly strengthen the effect.

The genocide is invoked first by a taut dramatisation of the assassination in Berlin of Talaat Pasha and the courtroom scenes that follow, and then by the story told by Apkar, one of the immigrants, of his survival of a massacre. It is difficult to detect any authorial commentary on these scenes. Filmed efficiently, and graphically rendering the cruelty and heartlessness of the perpetrators, the film nonetheless maintains a distance and seems to invite the audience to decide for themselves on the truth of the events. In this way, *Mayrig* avoids the pitfalls of an over-emotional nationalist discourse. After Apkar tells his story, he is seen to limp away down a dark, cobbled street, following tramlines which converge into the distance – an image that suggests that however badly they have been mutilated the Armenian people will survive. This scene marks an important transition. From this point on Verneuil does not refer to the genocide again, concentrating instead on the classical immigrant story centred on the boy child Azad Zakarian. The penniless family suffers hardship and persecution after arriving in Marseille, but through sacrifice the second generation becomes assimilated and "makes good".

588 rue Paradis (1992), continues the story of the Zakarian family and is the more interesting of the two films since it engages with issues of assimilation and Diasporan identity. The obvious similarities between the character Azad and Verneuil – both trained as engineers and both changed their Armenian names to a more acceptable French name (Azad becomes Pierre Zakar) – is deliberately obscured. Azad is now a theatre director with a string of successful productions carrying such titles as 'The Stateless Person' and 'The Signet Ring', referring to episodes in his past, whereas Verneuil, of course, became a film-director with an equally successful series of bland commercial comedies and thrillers. The urge towards concealment is compounded in a flashback to Azad as a child, seeing a cinema hoarding for Mamoulian's *Queen Christina*. He proudly proclaims to his friend that Mamoulian is an Armenian, but goes on to say he has not seen the film because he never goes to the cinema. Nonetheless, this

moment is a *coup de foudre* which supposedly makes Azad want to become a theater director.

In a complex scene at the start of the film, Verneuil focuses on these differences. Pierre has just completed a rehearsal in the theater where he very obviously *directs* his cast in a scene that mirrors one from *Mayrig*. The correspondence between the scenes is made clear by means of cross-cutting between the two and by Pierre wishing for 'the fluidity of film', for its ability to express emotion through the artefact of slow-motion. He is then interviewed for television, sitting in the stalls of the theater. During the course of the interview, filmed images and television images repeatedly displace each other. Verneuil uses this sequence not only to make the commonplace point that the image is a construct, but also to argue that storytelling is a series of *indirections* or mediations. Theater, film, television, and even the biography are, in his view, just different forms of artifice, each dependent on the other. When asked by the interviewer if the play is autobiographical, Pierre replies 'I hope not'; when pressed on his determination to 'erase' himself from his work, he offers 'I am just the story-teller who remembers and who recounts'.

Thus, the condition of being Armenian in the Diaspora has elicited cinematic responses ranging over repression; a tendency to celebrate assimilation; and a celebration of Armenian identity through repetition of myths and traditions and, perhaps above all, by memorialising the genocide. Verneuil, who would appear to epitomize these responses, begins, however, to touch on the deeper question of what sustains identity in the diaspora. It is true that in his last two films he displays his immeasurable pride in being Armenian, recalls memories of rupture and displacement from an idealised homeland, and recounts the sacrifice by one generation for the next and the fight for survival in an alien culture. But, in Pierre Zakar, Verneuil also appears to argue that one can be intensely Armenian and at the same time an internationalist. The character seems to confirm Veeser's view of Diasporan Armenians as being beyond nationalism, that while they see themselves as a nation or 'tribe', it is in 'a worldly, cosmopolitan, sophisticated way'.[29]

For Veeser, the process of identifying with the nation is *merely* a reaction to the condition of being an otherwise anonymous part of international society. Does this imply that Panossian's 'subjective feeling' of being Armenian is nothing more than the need for a people to articulate their uniqueness in the face of globalisation? If so, why is such a fear of

assimilation and fragmentation expressed in many parts of the Armenian community? Verneuil and Egoyan hint at the instability and insecurity induced by the Diasporan condition, but these questions seem to require a more detailed exploration of the psychology of belonging and displacement.

MEMORY AND IDENTITY (1983 TO THE PRESENT)

The term "collective memory" is regularly used as a metaphor to denote memories which are held in common by a people and which function to articulate the nation. There is, of course, no single entity that possesses this memory; it has to be preserved and retold through stories of heroes, maps, flags, monuments, and so on. The canonical national stories favored by nationalists are constructed by a selective process of remembering and forgetting and, where necessary, by invention. Armenian cinema in the Diaspora plays an important but frequently problematic part in the construction of this collective memory. As we have seen, documentary and commercial feature films, with a few exceptions, are selective, highlighting the dramatic and omitting detail. They appeal to emotion rather than logic, and they invent that which they cannot reliably demonstrate.

The artist, on the other hand, has an obligation not to be easily persuaded by nationalist rhetoric, but to find a genuine "voice" in which to contribute to the memories that articulate the nation. Gorky, for example, believed 'man speaks most authentically when he does so *in his own speech*', and his abstract forms derive from being Armenian.[30] Egoyan accepts this obligation, beginning, with his second film, *Family Viewing* (1987), to develop thematic and formal strategies that enable him to examine the relationship between memory and identity.

The film is a web of stories centered on a young man, Van, who lives with his non-Armenian father, Stan, and his father's lover, Sandra, in a modern block of flats in Toronto. Van's Armenian mother has disappeared some time in the past, and his maternal grandmother, Armen, has been confined by Stan in a nursing home. These fictional names, as in many of Egoyan's films, are significant. Van is a reference to the city where major resistance to the genocide occurred, and Armen, which is not a woman's name, situates Van's grandmother as standing in for the nation. Lisa Siraganian even finds a sinister allusion to the genocide in the name Stan; referring to historic Armenia bereft of Armenians.[31]

For sexual stimulation, Stan needs to video himself making love with Sandra and to engage in telephone sex with a young woman, Aline. Van discovers these activities and also that Stan is recording over old tapes he made of Van as a child, playing with his mother and grandmother. The Armenian language, such a critical marker of identity in the diaspora, which these three use together, is challenged by Stan. The erasure of these sounds and images seems to be necessary for Stan's sexual potency. Van replaces the tapes with blanks, to preserve the only record of his Armenian childhood. Meanwhile, Aline's mother, who is in the same nursing home as Armen, commits suicide while Aline is away. Van takes this as an opportunity to spirit away Armen by swapping her identity with that of the dead woman.

Thus, one undercurrent is the story of Armen, who epitomises the first generation refugee, separated from her family by the callous Stan, and placed in a home. Van moves her to Aline's flat, then to a hotel, then disguises her and moves her to a women's hostel. In Armen's frequent displacement, she embodies the Diasporan condition induced by rupture from her family and home. Armen also is constructed as an individual traumatised by the past; she is passive, unable to communicate, and has apparently repressed all her memories. She lives in a cocoon of television images of the natural world, which affect her behaviour and which are her only 'reality'. Van tries to cure her trauma by showing her the family videos he saved, but her reactions are ambiguous. At first she responds positively, but then she is tortured by her memories (illustrated in flashbacks taken from the videos). Later still, she cannot or will not watch further images of her daughter literally in bondage to Stan's sexual desires. In this oblique but powerful way, Egoyan shows the difficulty for the survivor to come to terms with trauma or to give an account of her history.

Van's unnamed and silent mother represents the second-generation immigrant in the diaspora, invisible and subject to, but part of, the dominant host culture. Van, himself, is the third generation whose links to his Armenian identity, in the form of family and language, have been severed by Stan. Like Peter in *Next of Kin* (and Egoyan himself), Van has lived his early life seemingly without concern for his past. At the start of the film, as illustrated in a scene shot as a soap opera, Van's present reality is mediated entirely by television. At the end of the scene between himself and Sandra, Van simply picks up the remote control and rewinds. It is only through visiting his grandmother and his discovery of the video tapes, that

Van begins to question his real identity. He starts to resist the assimilation forced on him by Stan. He tries to recover his past by 'saving' Armen and preserving his heritage in the form of the videos he salvages from his father's destruction. Van's quest for self-discovery and recovery of his national identity seems to be fulfilled by the end of the film.

However, Van is also guilty of creating a false image of the past. In Aline's absence, he arranges for the burial of her mother, with a full graveyard ceremony by an Armenian priest, and records it on video. But the record is flawed – the sound does not quite work – and the burial is false since it is supposed to be that of Armen. When Van shows Aline the video, ironically filmed by Egoyan in a video store surrounded by boxes of the most lurid fiction films, she rejects this artefact of memory. She has no wish to preserve a false vision of the past. Instead, she clings to the real symbol, her mother's grave with its stone left unmarked, unmediated by Van.

Stan's role is primarily to raise the spectre of assimilation and consequent erasure of Armenian identity. In the early videos he is positioned as trying to remove Van from the grasp of his mother and grandmother and to suppress his use of the language. In a later sequence, filmed through a window, where the pane acts as a barrier, Stan on one side and Van and his mother on the other, Stan insists Van comes over to his 'side'. But Stan seems additionally to be haunted by memories. His need to erase them is not simply a part of his effort to assimilate Van, but also an increasingly desperate act of denial. It is a denial that eventually will fail as, towards the end, his power gone, he collapses and is confronted with the serene, smiling, and seemingly forgiving image of his wife. Here, Egoyan conflates the host country's assimilation of a minority with its denial or forgetting of the causes of their presence.

Thus, Aline and Van, in different ways, recover their individual identity and resist assimilation. In the final sequence, they come together with Armen and Van's mother in a women's refuge. Egoyan groups the four together in a master shot, cutting in clips from the videos, which in a sense may be taken as memories constructing the Armenian collective identity. But the question remains, can they maintain this fragile identity, set as they are on the fringes of the host society? This is a question Egoyan leaves unanswered, and to which he returns in his later films, especially *Calendar* (1993).

PARTIAL DISCLOSURE

Egoyan, however, is not simply satisfied with this thematic approach to questioning memory and identity. He employs a number of formal elements that, I will argue, are characteristic of his work and that of other Armenian filmmakers in the Diaspora over the last 20 years.

There is always something hidden or only partially revealed in Egoyan's films. For example, the photographs of Bedros in the family album – images that contain the Deryan family's memories – are never seen. In *Family Viewing*, the opening sequence that uncovers Van and the television screen that will be the mediator of all his memories is gradual and incomplete. The Photographer in *Calendar* is never visible in the landscape of his homeland.

This reticence is not confined to Egoyan's work. Tina Bastajian uses a mirror propped on a table to confine the image we see in *Pinched Cheeks and Slurs in a Language That Avoids Her* (1994). A small white girl skips in and out of view; a black woman (perhaps an Ethiopian-Armenian) appears and disappears, seated at the table; and a group of chattering Armenians is never visible. Above the sounds of conversation in the background, the girl and the woman tell stories of exclusion from the community: the girl because she does not speak the language and the woman because of her color.[32] Torossian's films, *The Girl From Moush* (1993) and *My Own Obsession* (1996), play with the idea of the elusiveness of memory. Torossian herself appears mysteriously against a background of iconic Armenian images, sometimes as a shadowy face superimposed like a ghost, sometimes as a disembodied figure moving across the frame. She seems to be exploring her relationship to her Armenian heritage, trying to imagine how she fits into this culture.

Partial disclosure or the fear of disclosure that seemed to infect Mamoulian, Verneuil, and Gorky, seems also to be a factor in the work of these contemporary Armenian filmmakers. Each of them represents the instability of Armenian identity in the Diaspora through fragments of memory, hidden and partially revealed. This trope of incomplete disclosure results in a representation of memory that, like Gorky's later work, is abstract and expressionist. And, affirming his view that authenticity derives from 'speaking' in their own language, the contemporary filmmakers possess the common feature of being autobiographical.

In other instances of Egoyan's work critical scenes are absent altogether, scenes that by his own admission become more "visible" by virtue of their absence. For example, an explanation for the disappearance of Van's mother in *Family Viewing* is avoided, and in *Calendar*, the point at which the Translator discovers her affinity with the Driver (and thus with her homeland) is carefully elided. Given Egoyan's interest in psychology, it is not unreasonable to apply Freudian analysis to the deliberate fissures in these and other narratives. Siraganian, indeed, relates them to the 'primal scene' of trauma described by Freud. She notes such scenes, observed in early life, contain a 'shocking, frightening, or arousing event [that can] neither be articulated nor forgotten'.[13] For her, it is not a long jump to explain elisions in these three films as a reference to one such primal scene, the genocide. Whether or not it is Egoyan's intention to draw this parallel, a core element in his films is the difficulty for members of the Armenian Diaspora to reveal their experiences or memory of the genocide. He contends that this collective memory remains an unhealed wound in the community.

DISJUNCTURE OF THE VISUAL AND VERBAL

The second characteristic that is evident in Diasporan art cinema is the frequent disjuncture between the visual and the verbal. In Egoyan's work this has become a structural device: the dream form of *Next of Kin* where Peter's audio diary is frequently unrelated to the images we see, where a phrase is repeated in a different context, or where the voice-over may anticipate an event from another sequence; the abstract form, such as the photographs of Bedros in *Next of Kin* or the inside of a chapel in *Calendar*, where images are discussed but never revealed; or the partial or damaged form embodied in the use of untranslated foreign language in *Calendar* or the silent grandmother in *Family Viewing*.

Torossian creates a multi-layered narrative in *The Girl From Moush* where images that may be associated with Armenian identity – churches, architecture, the Armenian script and religious artefacts – are structured in a series of 'chapters' denoted by different musical forms, and are set against a soundtrack of untranslated Armenian poetry which then metamorphoses into an English text. The visual and verbal elements rarely intersect. An even more comprehensive set of disjunctions occurs in Bastajian's *Jagadakeer ...between the near and east* (2001). Several different, disembodied speech tracks weave in and out of the soundtrack:

an oral history account of an Armenian woman survivor of the genocide; competitors in a radio quiz show devoted to "Near East trivia"; an Armenian voice-over, sometimes translated in sub-titles and sometimes not; and a Turkish voice-over, translated in sub-titles. The material on the soundtrack is usually set in opposition to images that range from shots of the desert, a family group photograph, and women in traditional Armenian costume to belly dancers and home movie footage of children playing games.

Following Deleuze, Laura Marks argues that the visual and the verbal are different forms of truth about events that reflect different aspects of the way we remember.[34] In art film, gaps between what we experience visually and what the film "tells" us are not uncommon, but they acquire a particular meaning in Diasporan film. It seems as if the gap represents an indeterminate space between two "truths" or between two worlds: a space that the exile inhabits, belonging nowhere. Naficy has coined the term 'accented' to describe filmmakers in the Diaspora 'who work in the interstices of social formations and cinematic practices'.[35] In *My Own Obsession*, Torossian creates an archetypical interstice by having a set of cameras that are triggered by movement. As she tries to step from one "space" to another, she disappears and re-appears, evoking the notion of trying to travel from exile to "home". Bastajian moves between different oral and visual representations of recent Armenian history, exposing the complex emotions of a people living with the knowledge of loss. In a simple but effective sequence of children playing musical chairs, she expresses this fear of living in an unstable world.

TIME PAST AND TIME FUTURE

Separation of the visual and the verbal in cinema is sometimes accompanied by bifurcation of both into the "virtual" (the past that is preserved) and the "actual" (the present that passes).[36] The actual is the film we are watching and the virtual may be represented by photographs, still images, or inserts of different media, such as video. Similarly the soundtrack may be synchronous with the image or, as we have seen, may contain recordings, voices, or sounds from different times. Just as the visual/verbal separation is prevalent in Armenian cinema from the Diaspora, so too is the division of time. But what can we derive from an analysis of the points at which such divisions occur?

First, there is the noticeable effect of denoting a separation between the continuous present, the life lived in the hostland, and a frozen past. As in the work of Armenian filmmaker Henrik Malyan, Diaspora filmmakers also use the still image or photograph to represent the past. In *Next of Kin*, photographs play a prominent part: not just the images of Bedros that constitute the family's memory of the past, but also the instant pictures of events involving Peter, taken to create a new set of memories. Bastajian uses a group photograph of her family as a central element of *Jagadakeer* ... She animates the image by scanning it and focusing on individual faces, and re-constructs on the sound track the moment at which it was made. Then, she "updates" the history contained in the photograph, projecting a negative image to indicate that most of the family members were lost in the genocide. Finally, in a repeated sequence (sometimes shown in reverse), a woman in traditional Armenian costume receives the picture and passes it on to someone else out of the frame. She appears to be the custodian of this history, passing it from one generation to the next.

With *Family Viewing* and *Calendar*, Egoyan continues to develop the notion of the division of time, with videotape representing a preserved past. The videos taken by Stan are a family history, and the separation of past and present is rather obvious. However, by *Calendar* this formal trope has become more complex. Video now represents the fragmented memories of an assimilated Canadian-Armenian of a trip to the Armenian homeland: images and sounds loaded with significance to a Diasporan Armenian; Mt Ararat, churches, the Armenian script, shepherds, a flock of sheep, voices on a radio, bells and songs. But personal memory constantly intrudes. The video is fast-forwarded or reversed as if the Photographer is searching for a particular image.[37] Sometimes he questions the image, sometimes he lingers on the body of his wife, sometimes he painfully re-constructs her gradual estrangement from him. But always, the film suggests that time past is not permanent, memory is not immutable. Thus, though a concrete national history seems to be embedded in the stones of churches and temples that the Photographer is precisely recording for a calendar, their "meaning" has to be explained by the Armenian Driver, and "interpreted" by the Translator. Shepherds on the hills and a flock of sheep that endlessly passes by the car window seem to be an evocation of unchanging rural Armenian life, traditions that stretch back into the historical past, yet in the Photographer's memory these images denote the points at which he is alienated from his wife and from his "homeland". If collective memory

defines a nation, the projection of canonical images of that nation, such as those of a calendar, can have, as Egoyan acknowledges, an 'overwhelming effect on the intensity of nationalism' (director's commentary on the DVD). But, by juxtaposing points at which these images are recorded with video memories of the process, he questions the relationship between the historical nation that is recalled by the images and modern Diasporan Armenians.

A second effect of this division of time is the way it augments the idea of the instability of memory and, thus, the transience of the past. I have already noted Azah's replacement of photographs of Bedros with Polaroids of Peter as an index of transience, and Stan's attempt to erase the videos of Van and his Armenian origins. Egoyan explained his attachment to video thus:

> Video can be changed, one can transform it, it is a flexible thing, transient, transitory like memory, like consciousness. For me, video in film is a metaphor for the way in which thought works, that consciousness works.[38]

Finally, there is the 'intrusion' of the past into the present: still or video images of events or people replace their actual 'presence' in the film, and this has the effect of emphasising their 'absence'. Naficy observes a common feature of 'accented' filmmakers is the way one medium seems to '[take] up residence within another', just as the past haunts the present.[39] We can see the development of this idea in Egoyan's work from its earliest manifestation as a photograph album in *Next of Kin*, and through the videos in *Family Viewing*, where Van's past directly confronts him. Here, a repeated sequence that also concludes the film shows Van looking intently at a television screen where an image of Van, as a young boy, approaches him and stares uncertainly into his unknown future. Van present and Van past are joined by this impossible connection. The past, captured on video, assumes even greater importance in *Calendar*. It nearly overwhelms the Photographer with its potent images as he tries to exorcise the trauma of his loss. By *Ararat*, the subject seems to require an even more definitive separation of the past from the present; the historical story of the defence of Van and the genocide is told as a film-within-a-film. The actual, the story of a Diasporan Armenian community living in Canada, is separated from but intimately bound up with the virtual, to the extent that, at times, they almost merge.

In *Jagadakeer...*, Bastajian not only embeds photographs and still images, which she animates to give them a new history; she also includes projected "home movies". The latter have the effect of 'sediments', like grounds left in a cup of Armenian coffee, that have to be 'read'. The present in her film is subjugated to the past in a melancholic response to Armenian history. But this trope of weaving the past into the present is, perhaps, taken to its limit by Torossian in *The Girl From Moush*, where she pastes 8mm strips of film over a 16mm master. Here, the effect is complex. At first the stills provide routine images of Armenia: the landscape, a peasant, Mt. Ararat, a woman in traditional costume, portraits, a carpet design, and an ancient manuscript. Then, as if trying to relate herself to the culture of Armenia and to peer into the past, Torossian manipulates strips of the 8mm film that contain architectural images, portraits of Paradjanov, musical instruments. Sometimes these slip out of synchronisation with the master frame; sometimes they dance in time to the music; sometimes they are filtered expressively.

The approach to memory in these works by Bastajian and Torossian is almost obsessive. The virtual and the actual merge. In Torossian's words 'wherever I go ... I am always an Armenian'. By contrast, I would argue, however fascinated Egoyan is with representations of the past, he emphasizes the importance of living in the present, of rejecting 'frozen images' of the past. As we shall see, he questions the integrity of this type of imagery in his later films.

REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING

Ernest Renan first articulated the idea of the nation as a set of memories that constitute a narrative of the past, held somehow in common, and perpetuated into the present by various means – the 'collective memory'.[40] If we admit this concept, then we must be aware that these memories may be contested; people may see things in different ways deliberately or unconsciously. Whose memory, therefore, do we take as representing the truth? And, since the collective memory has to be preserved over time, maybe over long spans of time, who do we entrust to decide what is retained and what is left out as memory is passed forward?

Thus far, I have shown how some Diasporan Armenian filmmakers instinctively propagate only certain aspects of the national narrative. The majority of documentarists and many feature filmmakers fall into this category. Others challenge the truthfulness of the collective memory and

question how it is transmitted. For example, we have seen the process of selective recollection revealed in *588 rue Paradis*, an ambiguous and partial disclosure of truth in *Family Viewing*, and the different truths contained in the same event, according to the manner of its viewing, in *Pinched Cheeks*.... The mutability of memory and the distorting effects of its mediation are central concerns of Egoyan's early works. He, in particular, is concerned with the problems of 'transmission errors'; how memories may be deformed as they are passed on from one generation to the next.[41]

However, there is also an ethical and moral dimension to the preservation of memory. Margalit recalls his parents' argument about how the Holocaust should be remembered. His mother suggested the remaining Jews should form 'communities of memory' in honour of the dead, whereas his father insisted that this would repeat the 'terrible mistake' of the Armenians – to live 'just for the sake of retaining the memory of the dead'. Better, he said, to think about the future and not become a community 'governed from mass graves'.[42] An implication of this debate is that, while there is a general obligation on society to maintain the memories of its past, there is a point at which it is right to forget. Margalit goes on to argue that those who are involved in the transmission of memory, who tell stories of the past, have a moral duty to consider what they do and how they do it.[43]

Those who have been traumatised – who exhibit a pathological response to trauma – seem incapable of separating the need to preserve memories of the past from the need for renewal and healing. Some though, such as Malyan in Soviet Armenia with *Nahapet*, Verneuil in his last films, and Bastajian with *Jagadakeer* ..., find ways of using film to show how to work through trauma to a resolution. Malyan's explicit shots of murder and rape, shown in flash-back, and the image of the assassination of Armenians, symbolised by apple-trees, perpetuate the story of the genocide. But rather than calling for retribution, he suggests a new beginning is possible. Verneuil even more explicitly recounts the horrors and suffering of the genocide in *Mayrig*, and also includes and applauds the revenge killing of Talaat Pasha. However, the final images of his mother installed in 588 rue Paradis, the house and garden replicating her former life in Armenia, seem to argue for a kind of acceptance. His Armenians will survive and their culture will be maintained even though forced into exile. Bastajian has a more mixed message. *Jagadakeer* ...

keeps the trauma in the present through the quiz show and oral history that talk of extermination, forced exile, and the denial of genocide. Her metaphor of musical chairs, with its accompanying text 'if you see an empty chair in your dream you will never be content wherever you are', seems to preclude healing. Even the pre-genocide family photograph, with its implication of inestimable loss, is the memory she seems to want passed from one generation to the next. Yet, there is a form of apology for 'this calamity, this crime', delivered in Turkish, that hints at potential reconciliation.

However, Egoyan remains the Armenian filmmaker most troubled by the ethics of the representation of memory. In his second decade of film-making, from *Calendar* to *Ararat*, he deals with the Diasporan condition, identity, the trauma of loss, and our access to the past. It has been frequently noted elsewhere that the three main characters of *Calendar* represent three aspects of Armenian identity: the Driver, an Armenian living in Armenia; the Photographer, a second-generation, assimilated Canadian-Armenian; and the Translator, his wife, a first-generation, Armenian-speaking Canadian-Armenian. The couple are both visiting the country for the first time after the founding of the newly formed Third Republic. Through the central character of the Photographer – it is his point-of-view that we most often see – Egoyan explores the relationship of a Diasporan Armenian to the newly available homeland. This relationship is uncertain: the Photographer lacks understanding about what he observes; he has no 'natural' feeling for the land and its history; he is alienated and retreats behind the comforting barrier of his camera. We are given to understand that he suffers the loss of his wife, not only to the other man but also to this foreign country.

Told retrospectively, *Calendar* proceeds programmatically to show how, by working through his personal memories in a series of meetings with women from an escort agency, piecing together the events that led to this rupture, the Photographer comes to comprehend his grief. Fixed photographic images from a calendar, which punctuate the scenes, correspond not only to real places and real things in Armenian history, but also to places where events occur in the lives of the fictional characters. The film of the Photographer, making images of real places that are part of Armenian historical memory, is interleaved with film of 'false' events, denoted by the different escorts (false relationships), performing an erotic service (the falsity of pornography), in languages he doesn't understand.

As he creates the true images, the Driver provides him with a history, a set of stories about each place, mediated through the Translator. These stories intrude upon the simple reality of the place, and the Photographer is always trying to suppress them.

The false events are also interspersed with 'memories', captured on video tape, that may or may not be true. Some are typical Diasporan views of the homeland – churches, Mt. Ararat, *khatchkars*, the rural idyl; some are more personal reactions to what he observes. He focuses on the body of his wife in the countryside, notes how she becomes closer to the Driver (their shadows cross, they sing together), and shows her becoming more distant and torn between himself and the Driver. The Photographer is able to relinquish his need for myths and lies when he finally uncovers the truth of his complicity in the loss of his wife and their eventual separation.

Margalit argues that the personal use of 'remember' is akin to 'know', whereas the collective use is closer to 'believe'.[44] But Egoyan shows that personal memories can be manipulated, reversed, replayed, and suppressed. It is only when the Photographer confronts his loss, that the memories fall into place and he can be reconciled; it is only then that he 'knows' what really happened. On the other hand, collective memories, constructed in this film from images of historical ruins set in their physical context, should gain additional authenticity by being displayed in a calendar, one of the canonical forms for conveying belief in a common history. But Egoyan challenges this belief, arguing that 'all that's bound to protect us', that is, all that's bound to protect the Armenian identity in the Diaspora, is 'bound to isolate' Armenians and is 'bound to hurt'. These explorations of the nature of memory seem to be a call, not to relinquish Armenian identity, but neither to let it become a barrier to successful integration in the host nation.

Nearly a decade later, Egoyan released *Ararat*, a film that also has excited much critical and academic attention, and in which he has continued to elaborate his formal and thematic concerns with identity and memory. The fragmented stories, disjointed image and sound, non-linear time sequences, and variety of media, which are characteristic of his previous essays, serve their purpose in depicting the main protagonists' search for truth about themselves and their pasts. But, central to this work is an exploration of the *ethical* issue of the transmission of collective memory, in particular memory of massacres and the genocide, which

Egoyan chooses to do through two artfully linked stories: 'his' film, and a film-within-the-film, both called *Ararat*.

The elements of his method are carefully laid out in the opening sequence. The camera focuses, and lingers, on a coat button hanging by a thread from a pin on a wall, then tracks slowly across an old, torn, black-and-white photograph of a boy standing next to a seated woman, and on to an image of the photo, transferred in pencil onto squared paper. The title in Armenian flows into the English *Ararat* (a hint at the 'interpretations' we will witness). Still tracking, the lens picks out a model carved *khatchkar*, brushes, oils and paints, before settling momentarily on different painted versions of the sketch. Finally, we see the back of a man's head, to the right of the frame, staring out of a misted window. A blur of moving shapes resolves slowly into people walking through an airport lobby and then a matching shot of the character, Edward Saroyan, in full face to the left of the frame. The two could be staring at each other across time.

The meaning of the sequence is only slowly revealed, though we learn quite quickly that the artist is Gorky and the photograph is the basis of *The Artist and His Mother*. However, the notion of transfer and multiple mediations of memory is deeply embedded in the opening. An event (the photographic sitting in Van around 1912) has been transformed into an image on paper by a camera, then into a large sketch using squared paper and pencil, then into different representations with brushes and paint, and finally into the recreation of Gorky's studio in Egoyan's film. The collage, behind the artist as he stares out of the window, is a complex representation of his memory of loss transformed into art. On the other hand, Saroyan, whom we learn later is a film-director visiting Canada to make an epic film about the defence of Van, is framed by highly symbolic representations of Armenia – Mt. Ararat and the pomegranate. Thus, we are introduced to Egoyan's way of representing memory and Saroyan's, linked not only by the suture across the opening scenes, but also by the figure of Gorky and the button that appears prominently in both films and ends Saroyan's film.

Saroyan and Rouben, his writer, make much of the 'truth' of their story. Perhaps in a reference to *Mayrig*, Saroyan claims the film is his mother's story and reproduces everything she told him, while Rouben asserts that his script is the result of 'five years research', that every scene is based on the contemporary journals of Clarence Ussher. Yet, they are both unashamed to distort the truth, to use 'poetic licence', to exaggerate young Gorky's role in the defence of Van, and to imply at least that he took

part in the death march after withdrawal. Saroyan's motivation becomes clear halfway through shooting, when he explains:

> Do you know what causes so much pain? Not the people we lost, not the land, but to know we could be so hated. Who *are* these people who could hate us so much? How can they still deny their hatred ... and so hate us even more?

For him, it is not so much truth that matters as a representation of this hatred and a challenge to the denial of the genocide. His version of the truth, rendered in vivid colour and appalling detail, leaves no room for doubt, no space for detachment, and no scope for reconciliation.

Where Saroyan's film is a one-dimensional recreation (as far as we are allowed to view it) of events at Van and the massacre of refugees, Egoyan's is a multi-layered inquiry into the transmission of memory, told mainly through the historic character of the adult Gorky and the fictional characters of an Armenian art-historian, Ani, her son, Raffi, and her step-daughter (and Raffi's lover) Celia. A series of scenes links Gorky and his painting *The Artist ...* to the fictional characters and to Saroyan's film. First, Egoyan creates a highly-charged vision of Gorky's studio through close framing and misty filtering. As the artist reverently paints the face of his mother, Armenia is recalled on the soundtrack, and the camera tracks in to the photograph that is his model. There is a cut to Saroyan's film, where young Gorky and his mother walk through what is plainly a studio set of Van and pose together for a photographer. Another cut takes us to a hall where Ani is giving a lecture, next to the projected image of the photograph. This sequence, containing three changes of time and space, from 1930s New York, to 1912 Van, to the present day in Toronto, raises questions of interpretation. Egoyan interprets Gorky interpreting the photograph, the taking of which is interpreted by Saroyan. Finally, the photograph is interpreted by the art historian: the flowers the young Gorky holds are 'a fragrant gift to his absent father'; he is 'prematurely solemn'; and his mother, Shushan, 'looks bravely at the camera, challenging her absent husband'.

Celia, in the audience, contests Ani's speculative explanation, arguing she is confusing history with her personal story. After a pause for thought, Ani continues her lecture with a slide of the painting which she emphasises is not just a reproduction but a 'work of art' with which 'Gorky had saved his mother from oblivion – snatching her out of a pile of corpses to place her on a pedestal of life'.[45] Back in his studio, Gorky stands back from his

painting and picks up the button, an action that takes us back to the photographer. The button missing from young Gorky's coat causes them to pose for a second photo.

Egoyan presents us with an animation of the circumstances of the taking of a photograph, something we have seen earlier in Bastajian's *Jagadakeer* .... In that film, it is designed to give a new 'history' to an evocative artefact. Here, it stands in as a critique of the type of film Saroyan is making – heartfelt, but 'crippled' by memories passed on to him by his mother. Egoyan contrasts this with 'his own' animation of the circumstances of making the painting, which he continues in a subsequent scene where Gorky, in a highly emotional state, erases the hands of his mother. Though this is also a speculative interpretation,[46] by its very indirection, it says more about the pain of loss and the horror of the genocide than all of Saroyan's film. Egoyan seems to argue that this work of art, like the genocide memorial in Yerevan, is a way of remembering *and* forgetting. The importance of this becomes apparent in the stories of Celia and Raffi.

Celia tries to discover the cause of her father's suicide – to 'make it matter'. Her method is disruptive, manic, and ultimately destructive as she attempts to slash Gorky's painting in a gallery. In terms of my earlier discussion, her response is melancholic or pathological, she cannot let go this loss of the unavailable loved one. More significant is Raffi's quest, to uncover the reason behind his father's death while attempting to assassinate a Turkish diplomat. Was he a terrorist or a freedom-fighter? What was his cause and why did it matter? In an attempt to answer these questions, he travels to Eastern Anatolia and returns with sealed cans of film (a hidden story) and videos (a visible one). As Raffi explains the history of the Armenian people while being interrogated by David, a customs officer, we realise he has imbibed his facts and opinions through observing the making of Saroyan's film and its historical sources. His is an unquestioning account. The videos, however, show ancient ruined sites and not much else. They prove nothing and, at first, provide no explanation of his father's anger. As David's probings continue and more of the video is revealed, Raffi, like Saroyan before him, provides an explanation for his pain

> When I see these places, I realise how much we've lost, not just the land, and the lives, but the loss of any way to remember it – there is nothing here to prove that anything ever happened.

It is then that he discovers the carvings at Aghtamar of a Madonna and child, making a link to Gorky's painting. Finally, he understands the lineage from ancient Armenian religious carvings, to the photograph, to the sketch, to the painting. What is hidden in the cans of film is no longer relevant. David's interrogation has revealed the truth embodied in Gorky's art, allowing Raffi to put aside the painful history knowing it will never be forgotten.

Torossian uses the Gorky studio scenes from *Ararat* in her film, *Garden in Khorkhom* (2004), together with readings from his letters and Matossian's book, to recreate this 'sinew of identity' between his painting and ancient Armenian history. This, and Egoyan's resolution to *Ararat*, suggests there is a way to remember the past without being incapacitated by those memories.

CONCLUSIONS

When Renan argued that national memory – the collective memory – is at the heart of national identity, he was, of course, writing in the context of the nation-state. He had in mind a canonical memorialisation of the past embedded in monuments, flags, national heroes, histories, and so on. Many Diasporan communities organise institutions to serve similar functions in a trans-national context, that is, they try to preserve common language, religion, and traditions, separate from those of their respective host nations. In these circumstances it is more appropriate to think in terms of what Margalit calls, 'communities of memory' (akin to Panossian's 'Diasporan nation') rather than nation-states.

This paper has focused on Armenian cinema in the Diaspora, a cinema which operates across national boundaries and which finds an audience wherever there are Armenians. I have concentrated on the way this cinema contributes to the survival of an Armenian community of memory. I have argued that the documentaries, and many of the feature films examined, are largely nationalist and aim to convey a homogenous Armenian identity. While highlighting the glory and importance of Armenian culture, they remain vaguely uneasy in the knowledge that it is essentially irretrievable and unsustainable. Their representation of the homeland is flecked with ambiguity, given the possibility that homeland might have different meanings for different parts of the community. The question, 'Where is my homeland?', is never addressed satisfactorily. The exception is Verneuil,

who appears reconciled to preserving facets of his Armenian identity in his adopted country.

Art cinema, on the other hand, challenges the concept of a fixed, unchangeable Armenian identity. It has tried to avoid the calcification of old ideas and old symbols in addressing the question, 'Who am I?' Instead, the work of Egoyan, and to a lesser extent, Bastajian and Torossian, is filled with notions of rupture and displacement, instability, and fear of the erosion of identity. They have all exploited the use of different media to explore the relationship between false and true representations of events. Egoyan features video as a mutable and fragile record of the past, something that can be altered or overlaid with false images (pornography) as in *Family Viewing*, or that exposes what he calls 'the selective process of memory', as in *Calendar*.[47] Torossian and Bastajian, in addition to Egoyan, highlight the participation of media in the narrative. Film-within-film, superimposed film, video, home movies, and still images provide a questioning counterpoint to their examinations of memory and identity.

Above all these concerns, however, the genocide and its associated repression and denial shape much of the Diasporan cinema. There is a sense of timelessness, almost the paralysis of trauma, where past events continue to infect the present. Egoyan in particular seems to have noted the danger raised by Margalit of living always in memory of the dead. Tentatively, in *Calendar* and then more forcefully in *Ararat*, he advocates constructing a memorial to take the burden of remembering the past. In this he seems to argue that not to forget, but to forgive, is the way to create a new national narrative that avoids always looking to the past.

ENDNOTES

[1] Lorne Shirinian, "The Representation of Armenia in Armenian-American Poetry." *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 9 (1999), pp. 79-80.

[2] Ibid, p. 80.

[3] My contextual discussion on the Armenian Diaspora is mainly drawn from Razmik Panossian, "Between Ambivalence and Intrusion: Politics and Identity in Armenia-Diaspora Relations." *Diaspora* 7, no. 2 (1998); George A. Bournoutian, *A History of the Armenian People. Volume II 1500 A.D. To the Present*. Costa Mesa, Ca: Mazda Publications, 1994; Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking Towards Ararat: Armenia in Modern History*. Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press, 1993; and Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times (Volume 2)*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 2004.

[4] Lorne Shirinian, *The Republic of Armenia and the Re-Thinking of the North-American Diaspora in Literature*. Lampeter, Wales: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992, p. 3.

[5] Suny, op.cit., p. 3.
[6] Panossian, op.cit., pp. 156-7.
[7] Ibid., p. 162.
[8] Margaret Bedrosian, "Expressions of Cultural Marginality in Armenian American Literature." *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 5 (1990/91), p. 125.
[9] Lisa Siraganian, "'Is This My Mother's Grave?' Genocide and Diaspora in Atom Egoyan's Family Viewing." *Diaspora* 6, no. 2 (1997), p. 133.
[10] Nora N. Nercessian, "Beyond the Armenian Self-Image: The Art of Minas Avetisian and Arshile Gorky." In *The Armenian Image in History and Literature*. Malibu, Ca: Udena Publications, 1981, pp. 222-4.
[11] Kristin Platt, "Zeichen Des Überlebens." In *Armenien: 5000 Jahre Kunst Und Kultur*. Tübingen, Germany: Ernst Wasmuth, 1995, pp. 440-43.
[12] For discussion of Gorky's life and work see William C. Seitz, 1972, *Arshile Gorky: Paintings, Drawings, Studies*, 1972; John Golding, Arshile Gorky, and Arts Council of Great Britain. *Arshile Gorky: Paintings and Drawings*, 1975; Harry Rand, "Arshile Gorky's Armenian Sources." *Journal of Armenian Studies* III, no. 1 and 2 (1986-87); Nercessian, op.cit.; Jim M. Jordan and Robert Goldwater, *The Paintings of Arshile Gorky: A Critical Catalogue*, New York: New York University Press, 1982; and Nouritza Matossian, *Black Angel: A Life of Arshile Gorky*. London: Pimlico, 2001.
[13] Rand, op.cit., p. 1.
[14] Mark Spergel, *Reinventing Reality: The Art and Life of Rouben Mamoulian*. Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1993, p. 1.
[15] Ibid., p. 139.
[16] Artsvi Bakhchinyan, "Ruben Mamulyan i Armyanskoe Kino." *Kino* 10 (1995), p. 5.
[17] Leonardo P. Alishan, "Crucifixion without 'the Cross': The Impact of the Genocide on Armenian Literature." *Armenian Review* 38, no. 1-149 (1985), pp. 48-50.
[18] Another immigrant to America, Setrag Vartian, also started in the theatre, but, unlike Mamoulian, he made no secret of his Armenian origins. His first film, a musical in Armenian, *Archin Mal Alan* (1937), was based on one of his stage productions. He later completed two full-length films, also in Armenian: the first, a film of the opera, *Anoush* (1945), and the second, a drama-documentary, *The Life and Songs of Gomidas Vartabed* (1946). See Dickran Kouymjian, "Les Arméniens Et Le Cinéma Américain." In *Le Cinéma Arménien*. Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1993, p. 2.
[19] Robert Mirak, "The Armenians in America." In *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times (Volume 2)*. New York: St Martin's Press, 2004, pp. 406-7.
[20] Rubina Peroomian, "Literary Responses to Catastrophe: A Comparison of the Armenian and Jewish Experience." *Studies in Near Eastern Culture and Society*, 1993, p. 139.
[21] Richard Hrair Dekmejian, "The Armenian Diaspora." In *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times (Volume 2)*. New York: St Martin's Press, 2004, pp. 418-9.
[22] Christopher Walker, *Armenia: The Survival of a Nation*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1990, pp. 379-80.
[23] Anahid Kassabian and David Kazanjian, "Melancholic Memories and Manic Politics: Feminism, Documentary, and the Armenian Diaspora." In *Feminism and Documentary*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, pp. 207-210.
[24] These include a series of films by Hagopian; Theodore Boghosian, *An Armenian Journey* (1988); PeÁ Holmquist, *Back to Ararat* (1988); Thomas Ohanian, *The Armenian*

Genocide 1894-1896, 1915-1919 (1982), Razmik Grigorian, *Missing One* (1984); and Harpik Avedian, *The Armenian Genocide* (1987).

[25] Anahid Kassabian and David Kazanjian, "You Have to Want to Be Armenian Here." *Armenian Forum* 1, no. 1 (1998 Spring), pp. 19-36.

[26] Arlene Voski Avakian, "Validated and Back to Ararat." *Armenian Forum* 1, no. 1 (1998), p. 62.

[27] H. Aram Veeser, "International Nationalism: Living Lack, Muzzled Cohort: Most at Home When Farthest Abroad." *Armenian Forum* 1, no. 1 (1998), p. 55.

[28] See the detailed description of the production history of this film and the attempts by Turkish authorities to have it suppressed in Edward Minasian, "The Forty Years of Musa Dagh: The Film That Was Denied." *Journal of Armenian Studies* II, no. 2 (1985-6), pp. 63-73..

[29] Veeser, op.cit., p. 55.

[30] Letter to his sister, Vartoosh, quoted in Rand, op. cit., p. 188.

[31] Siraganian, op. cit., p. 147.

[32] The composition is based on photographer Florence Henri's *Self Portrait* (1928) in a mirror. http://dsc.gc.cuny.edu/part/part8/articles/davis.html

[33] Siraganian, op.cit., pp. 127-8.

[34] Laura Marks, "A Deleuzian Politics of Hybrid Cinema." *Screen* 35, no. 3 (1994), p. 247-249.

[35] Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 10.

[36] Deleuze draws on Bergson's philosophy to create the notion of bifurcation of time. At the moment an image is made (and this includes photographic images), time splits: reality continues and the past can never be re-lived, but the image remains an 'institutionalized representation of the moment' (see Marks, op. cit., p. 251.

[37] Naficy likens this scrutiny of the image to a lover's scrutiny of letters, looking for a clue to the loved one's state of mind, op. cit., p. 137.

[38] Quoted in an interview with François Ramasse, *Ciné Bulle*, 1990, p. 14.

[39] Naficy, op. cit., p. 4.

[40] Ernest Renan, "What Is a Nation?" In *Becoming National*, edited by Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

[41] Richard Porton, "Family Romances: An Interview with Atom Egoyan." *Cineaste* 23, no. 2 (1997), p. 8.

[42] Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002, pp. viii-ix.

[43] Ibid., pp. 104-6.

[44] Ibid., p. 59.

[45] Matossian, op. cit., pp. 217-8.

[46] Gorky frequently left the hands unfinished or unresolved in his paintings (including a self-portrait, c.1937). Some art historians argue this was an indirect reference to his uncertainty as an artist, others to his desire not to finish a painting completely. I have not seen any references to deliberate erasure as suggested by this film.

[47] Carole Desbarats, Danièle Rivière, Jacinto Lageira, and Paul Virilio. *Atom Egoyan*. Paris: Editions Dis Voir, 1993, p. 22.

ՅԻՇԵԼ ՈՒ ՄՈՌՆԱԼ. ՀԱՑԿԱԿԱՆ ՍՓԻՒՌՔԻ ՍԻՆԵՄԱՆ
(Ամփոփում)

ԹԻՄ ՔԵՆԸՏԻ

Հեղինակը կը քննարկէ ինքնութեան եւ ցեղասպանութեան ժառանգումի հարցերուն հայոց պատասխանը՝ սինեմարուեստի միջոցով։

Յօդուածին մէջ հեղինակը նախ կը ներկայացնէ ինքնութեան այն տագնապը, զոր կ՚ապրին չատերը Սփիւռքի մէջ։ Քենըտի այդ ելակէտով կը բացատրէ թէ ինչպէս կը յառաջանայ սփիւռքացած ազգի մը հասկացութիւնը։

Հաւատելով որ ցեղասպանութիւնն ու անոր առնչուած ճնշումն ու ժխտումը կը ձեւաւորեն Սփիւռքի սինեմային մեծ մասը, հեղինակը ընդհանուր մատնանշումներու ծիրին մէջ, կը հաստատէ որ սփիւռքահայ սինեման կը գործէ պետութեան սահմաններէն ներս, եւ ակնդիրներ կ՚ունենայ ուր որ հայ կայ (այլ խօսքով՝ պետութեան սահմաններէն ներս եւ դուրս)։

Հեղինակը կ՚ընէ շրջանաբաժանում-պատմութիւնը սփիւռքահայ սինեմային՝ հայ ինքնութեան արտայայտումի հայեցակարգի ելակէտով։ Այսպէս, 1915-1965 յիսնամեակը ան կը նկատէ թաքուցում-ժխտումի հանգրուան, 1965-1983 շրջանը՝ զարթնումի, ազգայնականութեան վերածլումի հանգրուան, իսկ 1983ը յաջորդող շրջանը՝ վերարծարծումի հանգրուան։

Յօդուածի երկրորդ բաժնով, հեղինակը մանրամասնօրէն կը վերլուծէ թէ ինչպէս ժամանակակից սփիւռքահայ ֆիլմարեմադրիչները մօտեցած են ջարդին՝ հայոց վրայ ունեցած հոգեբանական ներգործութեան։ Հեղինակը կը ներկայացնէ նաեւ այդ բեմադրիչներուն պրպտումները՝ ազգային ինքնութեան եւ յիշողութեան մէջ։

Ան կ՚անդրադառնայ նաեւ սփիւռքահայ սինեմային վարած դերին՝ հայութեան գոյատեւման գործին մէջ եւ տարբերակում մը կը դնէ մէկ կողմէն փաստագրական ու նկարագրողական ֆիլմերու եւ միւս կողմէն՝ գեղարուեստական բնոյթի ֆիլմերուն միջեւ։ Եւ եթէ, ըստ հեղինակին, առաջինները մեծ մասամբ ազգայնական են եւ կը ձգտին փոխանցել միատարր հայկական ինքնութեան մը հասկացութիւնը, ուր չենք գտներ "Ո՞ւր է իմ տունս" հարցումին բաւարարող պատասխանը, ապա գեղարուեստական ֆիլմերը հարցականի տակ կ՚առնեն անփոփոխ հայ ինքնութեան հասկացութիւնը մեկնելով "Ո՞վ եմ ես" հարցումէն։ Այս առումով, Քենըտի կը ներկայացնէ բեմադրիչներ Եկոյեանի, Պասթաճեանի ու Թորոսեանի տարբեր պատասխան-մօտեցումները այդ հարցումին։