

IDENTITY, ART AND PROPAGANDA

The Armenian Film Industry As A Case-Study

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Abstract:

As the effects of globalisation have increased, almost any issue has become a part of international politics. As relations became more intricate, it has become impossible to prevail with the classic defence tools. This trend increased the importance of the role of art and literature in propaganda. Cinema in particular has become an effective part of propaganda machines of the states. Turkish-Armenian relations provide a significant example for art's role in propaganda. In this context the study examines the Armenian cinema and its connections with the problems in Armenian-Turkish relations. The study argues that the Diaspora Armenians facing a strong assimilation process in the West has seen 1915 events as the only uniting factor for the Armenian community and this feed the hatred among the Armenians against the Turks. The author says that the Armenian identity crisis created an anti-Turkish campaign encouraged by the Armenian Church and political parties. As a natural result of this the political aims reflected on the Armenian art (cinema, theatre, literature etc.). In another word art has become a partner of politics and propaganda as seen in many cases. The study further gives examples to show the relations between the Armenian art and politics.

Keywords:

Armenians, Armenian Art, Armenian Identity Crisis, Armenians In The U.S., Art And Propaganda, Diaspora, Turkey.

INTRODUCTION

When movies and anti-Turkish stance are discussed in Turkey, mostly *Midnight Express* and another few movies are remembered. But it should be noted that in the last three decades, this has become a significant part of the movie business, in particular of the Armenian film industry. Even though the Turkish media presents that there are only a few movies made

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by the Armenians dealing with the Armenian allegations, documentaries, television shows and movies dealing with the subject are widely broadcast in the Western countries, and this kind of

For the preservation of Armenian national identity, the genocide myth has been as important as their religion

works make a significant effect on the Armenian mind. Therefore Turkish-Armenian relations and the Armenian public's ideas regarding Turkey and Turks cannot be understood without referring the connections between the Armenian art and the propaganda activities. In this context the Armenian identity crisis in Diaspora is another key issue since this problem determine the Armenian Diaspora art and its attitude about the Turkish – Armenian relations.

In this framework, this propaganda network and its strength will be examined by the author. The study also focuses on the identity, art and propaganda triangle.

A. ARMENIAN PROPAGANDA NETWORK AND ITS MOTIVATION

Before examining the Armenian cinema and the publishing sector, the reason why Armenians spent so much time and resources in order to make anti-Turkish movies should be investigated. Some in Turkey claim that the Armenians' bad intentions against Turks are the real reason, however it is understood that the radical Armenians' real strength lies in their belief and sincerity about the Turkish people's so-called hostility against the Armenians. The communication between Turks and the Armenian Diaspora are close to naught and for these Armenians the 'fact' that their ancestors were massacred by the Turks is unquestionable. For the preservation of Armenian national identity, the genocide myth has been as important as their religion, Gregorian Christianity. This myth symbolies their 'Armenianness' and most probably is the only bond that hold them together in a foreign land. The fact that Armenians unlike Greeks, have not been able to get back at Turks, and this feeds their hate and anger. Many Armenians obsessively believe that they were massacred by the Turks and do not understand why the Turkish State and people do not recognise this 'simple' fact. For Armenians this is the point that makes them angry most. According to them Turks, 'with blood of millions of Armenians on

their hands, can still strut as a respectable member of the international society'. They view this as a blatant insult to their ancestors. The genocide myth is so strong among the Armenians of the Diaspora that they usually give names to their businesses in the most remote places in Canada and the United States (U.S.) that remind them of the genocide myth. For example Mount Ararat is one of the most used shop and product names in Canada and the U.S. Many construction companies, restaurants, schools or catering firms are named 'Ararat'. The most popular jam among the Armenians for instance is also named 'Ararat'. Similarly many firms have chosen their names from among the town names in Anatolia. This demonstrates how firm their convictions and beliefs are with respect to the events of 1915 and the Turks. In other words, it cannot be said that Armenians, just to disparage Turks, are proclaiming opinions and beliefs that they really do not believe in.¹ Their strength comes from their conviction. While the Turkish people cannot understand the hate against themselves, on the other side there are millions of people who identify themselves with the so-called Armenian Genocide and anti-Turkish feelings.² It is difficult not to think that in an environment such as this, these deep emotions will not be translated onto the black screen or other fields of art.

The Diaspora's Negative Impact and the Identity Problem

One other point to consider is that Armenians mostly have lived in Diaspora environment. Several generations have seen neither Armenia nor the Turkish lands and have found their identities within the community they have been living. *Ararat's* director Atom Egoyan is a typical example of such a person. As he expressed, for Egoyan one of the most important problem was his

¹ It is expected that after a certain stage, propaganda creators distort some of the truth. It is common among the radical Armenian groups to falsifications and forgery of historical documents. The statements attributed to Atatürk and Hitler are obvious examples. But even for these, Armenians are sincere in their objectives. They are just trying to prove to the world, what they believe to be the facts. For examples of the forgeries and falsification made by Armenians look: Türkkaya, Ataöv, *The Andonian 'Documents' Attributed To Talat Paşa Are Forgeries*, (Ankara: Sistem Ofset, 1984); Türkkaya, Ataöv, *A 'Statement Wrongly Attributed To Mustafa Kemal Atatürk*, (Ankara: Sistem Ofset, 1984).

² As known, in the recent years, some marginal groups are voicing the Armenian case and translating Armenian Authors studies in Turkey. Among Armenians, leftists and rightists both unite on the issue of Turkey. This is because Turk and Armenian identity are founded on different principles. The events of 1915 are like cement that holds Armenians together. Turks, on the other hand have not based their identity on hating anyone. A Turk, no matter if he likes or hates Armenians, is still a Turk, cannot be assimilated and will not have an identity crisis. In other words, Turks being less fanatic than Armenians in voicing their opinions, is not a weakness but a richness.

national identity. He felt himself as alien until his youth. Atom Egoyan found opportunity to feel his Armenianness when he was a college student. In another word he was an identity convert. Egoyan was no exception. Most of the Armenians in diaspora discover their ethnic identity with the help of others and not in natural ways.

The most unfortunate side, with respect to the Turkish and Armenian question arises in the context of finding on identity in diaspora. Armenians, who emigrated from Sudan, Russia, Egypt or Cyprus to Paris, London, or Los Angeles, had almost nothing in common. Languages and traditions have been diversified. The lands they have originated from are so diverse that these people who call themselves Armenian are hard to call a single nation. The host countries' (U.S., Canada, France and etc.) culture, language and etc. had a relatively stronger cultural and national identity than the Armenians had. In this way, assimilation has been unavoidable. Although the old generation is less susceptible to this force, younger generations are more open to outside influences. For example, in London, the younger generation celebrates their Christmas on the 25th of December instead of January 6th according to the Armenian customs.³ Younger generation feels that the British culture is stronger than Armenian culture and realize that they live in a new society, where to be different also means to be apart. This process continues until assimilation is completed and the Diaspora loses its characteristics that differentiate it from the society in which it lives. This is actually an undesirable horrific development for the Armenian people who live outside their motherland, who constitute most of the Armenian population in the world. The assimilation of overseas Armenians means the dying out of the Armenian nation.

It is obvious that Armenians living in Armenia, who are only 2.5 to 3 million, cannot be the future of the Armenian nation. First of all Armenia is a poor country. Its population is constantly emigrating and consequently its population is falling.⁴ Another

³ For Armenians in London and similar examples see: Sedat Laçiner, 'Armenian Diaspora in Britain And The Armenian Question', *Armenian Studies*, Vol.: 1, No.: 3, September-October-November 2001, pp. 233-257, 'The UK Armenian Community', *Exile*, February 2001, Karnik Taverdi, 'A History of Armenians in Britain', *Armenian Voice*, 2001.

⁴ As a result of the Karabakh war, economic catastrophe and corruption many Armenians have immigrated from Armenia to European, North American and CIS countries since 1991. Despite the current official figu-

handicap for Armenia is that it is surrounded by the Turkish and Muslim neighbours except Georgia.⁵ In this context, it is apparent how alarming this assimilation process-taking place outside Armenia is.

In addition to the problems stated above, it seem that the bonds that hold the Armenian nation are not that strong. As known, the most important components that hold a nation together are common successes and pains experienced in a nation's past. If the Armenian history is examined, it can be seen no great empires or states, political or legal successes. Apart from a short period (Cilicia Armenian State)⁶ Armenians have always been ruled by other nations. Their successes in many fields like medicine and music cannot be overstated, but these successes were recorded in history not as Armenian successes but successes of the dominant nations. Armenian society could not recognize these accomplishments as a part of their national consciousness. For example, there were many Armenian musicians in the Ottoman Empire, but the music they created has been branded as Turkish music, not as Armenian music. The situation in Russia and Iran is not so different. Moreover their financial and commercial successes were on a personal and local level.

In this environment, the only thing that can hold them together is a common pain. From this perspective, there does not seem to be any valid subject matter apart from the events of 1915. For nearly a thousand years, Armenians had lived quite comfortably under the Seljuki and Ottoman governance. Armenians, who lived mainly in the commercial centers or interior regions, can be said

re which shows the population of Armenia as 3.2 million the reality is quite different. The Western embassies in Armenia argue that Armenia's real population is less than 2 million. Even one of these embassies claimed that the number of permanent residents in Armenia is about 750.000. Hugh Pope from the Wall Street Journal describes the situation as "a country without people". That is to say the independence of Armenia could not change the trend and the Armenians have continue to be a diaspora nation until now. For the details of the population figures of Armenia see: Sedat Laçiner, 'Ermenistan Dış Politikası ve Belirleyici Temel Faktörler, 1991-2002', (Armenian Foreign Policy and the Determinants Factors, 1991-2002), *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, Vol. 2, No. 5, Spring 2002, pp. 168-221, p. 175; 'Sayılar Kafa Karıştırdı' (The Figures Confused the People), *Agos*, Armenian weekly, 22 February 2002; Hugh Pope, 'Armenia After a Decade of Statehood, Suffers Rapid Loss of Human Capital', *The Wall Street Journal*, 6 July 2001.

⁵ Armenia has no good relations with Georgia as well, while Georgia has developed close relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan. The main reason behind this is Armenia's support for the Russian Caucasasia policies and the radical Armenians' irredentist declaration which claim some parts of Georgia as an Armenian territory. For a detailed analysis see: Sedat Laçiner, 'Ermenistan Dış Politikası ve Belirleyici Temel Faktörler, 1991 – 2002' (Armenia's Foreign Policy and It's Main Determinants, 1991 – 2002), *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, Vol. 2, No. 5, Spring 2002, pp. 168-221.

⁶ Though it is named as 'state' in the modern times, this 'state' was actually a regional administration in very restricted area.

to have experienced not a single serious military invasion in the Ottoman period. Armenians, who lived in the eastern border regions, did not suffer like the Balkan Turks or Jews by the Russian invasions, because they were both Orthodox Christians. Especially in the 19th century and in the last periods of the Ottoman Empire, they cooperated with the foreign powers and attracted significant support of the Western and Russian powers. It is not a coincidence that during this period, Armenians and Greeks were dominant in the trade with the U.S., Britain and France.⁷ In an environment like this, it is difficult to find a common national moment, apart from the uprisings instigated by the radical Armenian groups. We are not going to give details about these uprisings here apart from saying that these uprisings instigated by some nationalist and Marxist groups over a period of 50 years caused a lot of Muslim and Armenian deaths. The year that these events reached their climax was 1915, when the empire was fighting on many fronts in the First World War. Compounded with forcible migration, these events caused a lot of deaths on both sides. Many Muslims lost their life as a result of the armed Armenian attacks with assistance of the invading Russians. Similarly many Armenians lost their life as a result of the communal clashes, the cold, illness and economic shortcomings. The soundness of the decision to forcibly migrate tens of thousands of people under very hard conditions can be questioned. But it is obvious that to call it 'genocide' is not accurate. The numbers of death being very high on both sides can be explained by the circumstances of the time. If we consider that in Sarıkamış, near the Russian border, 100,000 Turkish soldiers died of cold and illness, around that time, it is obvious how civilians, without similar equipments and under very cold conditions, would cope.⁸ Whatever the extent of the events,

⁷ For the details see: Sedat Laçiner, 'Armenia's Jewish Scepticism and Its Impact on Armenia – Israel Relations', *Armenian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4, December 2001-January-February 2002, pp. 297-300; Stanford J. Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic*, (New York: New York University Press, 1991).

⁸ For more information on the resettlement of the Armenians see: Azmi Süslü, *Ermeniler ve 1915 Tehcir Olayı* (Armenians and the 1915 Resettlement), (Van: Yüzüncü Yıl University, 1990); Kamuran Gürün, *Ermeni Dosyası* (The Armenian File), (Ankara, 1983); Mim Kemal Öke, *Uluslararası Boyutlarıyla Anadolu – Kafkasya Ekseninde Ermeni Sorunu, 1914 - 1923* (The Armenian Question In The Anatolia – Caucasus With The International Context, 1914 – 1923) (İstanbul: İz, 1996); Hüsamettin Yıldırım, *Ermeni İddiaları Ve Gerçekler* (Armenian Accusations And The Truth), (Ankara: Sistem Ofset, 2000); Türkkaya Ataöv (ed.), *The Armenians In The Late Ottoman Period*, (Ankara: TTK and the Turkish Grand National Parliament publication, 2001); Ergünöz Akçora, *Armenian Uprisings In And Around Van (1886-1916)*, (İstanbul: TDAV, 1994); Halil Metin, *Türkiye'nin Siyasi Tarihinde Ermeniler ve Ermeni Olayları* (Armenians And Armenian Events In Turkey's Political History, (Ankara: MEB, National Education Ministry publication, 2001, 3rd Edition).

Armenians considered the disaster only from their own point of view. Those who were attacked by armed bandits; those who suffered hunger and illness and those who lost their loved ones on the road to relocation always accused Turks for their misery. If the current population of Armenians is considered, it seems that most of those who forcibly migrated reached their destination and then went on to migrate to third countries.⁹ The real problem arises here. In other words, if there had been a genocide that wiped out 75 percent of the Armenian population, there would not have been the strong Armenian population in the Western countries. Most of them reached their destinations in Syria or Lebanon and then moved to third countries. Another interesting point is that, among the first generation Armenian migrants, anti-Ottoman and anti-Turkish attitudes were much less than today. If we separate radical nationalist and Marxist Armenians, ordinary Armenian was upset with the Ottoman state and the Turks and missed his or her country of origin. Especially those that were forced to migrate from big cities miss their neighbours and their old life styles. Among these people, it is difficult to see a strong hate towards the Turkish people. In other words, forcible migration was less important to those who lived through it than to the second or third generation Armenian migrants who did not live through it. It is hardly possible to understand how an event that happened a century ago, could still be an issue that generates hatred and hostility between two peoples. If this was the norm, no country in Europe should have good relations with any other European country, and Turks should have reasons to hate all their neighbours.

It can be said that the period that the hate of Armenians reached today's level was in the 1950s and 1960s. These years

⁹ According to the Armenian claims the Ottomans killed 1.5 million Armenians during that period and also according to the Armenian argument this number constituted about 75 percent of the Armenian population. If we make a calculation, we find out that only 500 thousand Armenians were left after 1915. If we consider that the current Armenian population, again according to Armenian statistics, is 9 million, we start wondering how, in less than a century, the number of Armenians grew by 18 times its original population. If the Turkish population grew by the same rate, its current population would have been over 200 million. If we do the same calculations for China's population, their population should reach 20 billion in the next century. It is known that the Turkish population growth rate is much greater than the Armenian rate. Consequently it can be seen that Armenian allegations have no basis. Armenia has had a negative population growth rate for a long time. Armenians living in the USA and France, due to low growth rates and high rate of assimilation, cannot bring about a high grow rate. As a result, a nation cannot grow by 18 times within a century.

Another clue is the surnames of today's Armenians. Most have surnames that originated from Turkish. This proves that, contrary to the Armenian allegations, most of the Armenians survived from the 1915 events. It should be also noted that about a million of Turks were massacred as a result of the armed Armenians' attacks in these events.

If the 1915 is taken away, Armenian Churches would not be able to collect donations, and many parties and organizations would not be able to justify their existence. Additionally, for many Armenians, the distinction of being Armenian would steadily erode

were also the period when the Armenian Diaspora attained its final shape. Rising nationalist movements and economic difficulties in the Middle East forced Armenians in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Cyprus and many other Middle Eastern countries to move to the Western states. This can be named as Second Relocation movement, because as will be seen it's impact on the Armenian people was more important than the 1915 relocation. While these migrations created new organizations, the need for a new Armenian identity became acute. Both the Armenian Church and the ideologically radical Armenian groups reached the conclusion that the only way to overcome this impasse was religious and ideological radicalism. As explained above, they found that the best tool in their hands was the events of 1915. As a result, in order to justify their existence and the Armenian nation's separate identity in a foreign society they strengthened the propaganda network, that was weak in the previous generations and created a legend around the events of 1915. With the use of publications and meetings in Armenian, they succeeded in generating hatred towards Turks in the second and third generation Armenians. This 'education' process (if not a brain washing), which started at very young ages, was transformed into a lifelong 'education' and as a result of this process the Armenian young generations have accepted the myth as an unquestionable fact. This network of hate consists of hundreds of Armenian Churches and thousands of organizations in America, Asia, Europe and Australia, and has become a permanent part of the Armenian identity since the 1960s. **If the 1915 is taken away, Armenian Churches would not be able to collect donations, and many parties and organizations would not be able to justify their existence. Additionally, for many Armenians, the distinction of being Armenian would steadily erode.**

In conclusion, the problems the first generation Armenians experienced with their Turkish and Kurdish neighbours have been

transformed into an uncontrollable hate in the second and third generation Armenians, who have never met a Turk or visited Turkey. This hate naturally fed many fields of art and an exceptional propaganda mechanism arose as a network of hate.

B. ART AS A TOOL FOR ARMENIAN POLITICAL GOALS

After considering the pattern above, it is natural to expect anti-Turkish propaganda, wherever an Armenian is present. In fact, ever since the beginning Armenians have described their 'pains' to the Western public in a one-sided and sometimes untrue manner. These descriptions through media, literature and almost all fields of art, were accepted by the "prejudicial" Western Media without any doubt or questions. Armenians, even as early as the 1920s and 1930s, taking heart from the Greeks similar activities, portrayed the Turks to the British, Americans and the French as a race who enjoy killing those people who they govern. The books and memoirs of Armenians published at that time, in the U.S. are especially interesting. Tens of Armenians, who safely made their way to abroad, wrote their memoirs that considerably exaggerated the events. These books were translated into other languages and were promoted by various Armenian organizations. These books eventually became a part of university and public libraries. Additionally, Armenians, who shifted from trade to education¹⁰ and media, rose in these sectors and become important tools for the Armenian accusations. One of the most important tools in this process is definitely art.

Theatre, movies, music and literature have always been popular among Armenians. Rouben Mamoulyan, Sergei Parajanov and Saroyan are just a few to name. This interest became even more pronounced for Armenians of diaspora, because it could be used to make the public opinion. In other words, Armenians became more artistic and this made it easier for the society to accept them. Without doubt, the principal sufferer of this development is the Turkish – Armenian relations because the most popular topics of Armenian art were the events of 1915 and 'Turkish barbarity'.

¹⁰ Since many Armenians were employed at the education sector, a special importance was given to the higher education of younger Armenians. The Church and the political parties, with the scholarships they granted, succeeded in Armenian and Western researchers to study the Armenian question from the Armenian point of view. As a result, a large collection of pro-Armenian publications was produced. Armenians, compared to Turks, were very successful in the education field. It can be said that, they hold a monopoly in the USA and Canada. They also rose in educational fields other than political science.

The biggest incentive to chose these topics were personal emotions, belief in 'genocide' and public pressure. Artists who produced works of art that dealt with 'genocide' were eulogized, and were given financial and emotional encouragement. Armenian organizations, the Church and the political parties were the biggest contributors. As a result political objectives became an integral part of Armenian art. Armenian artists, referred to the Armenian question in every platform and event. Armenian photographers reserved part of their exhibitions in London or New York to the 'genocide', Armenian classical musicians dedicated their songs to those who died in the 'genocide' and asked for support from their admirers. Some exhibitions, concerts and plays were solely dedicated to the so-called genocide and the influence on the spectators was considerable. In the movie and television business the outlook is even more depressing for the Turks.

The movie and television sector, in particular, became a powerful and conscious propaganda mechanism. After the partial ending of the Armenian terror campaign (post 1984 and the following period) Armenian lobby was reorganized and begun to use more 'peaceful' methods of persuasion. In this context, wealthy Armenian organizations in the USA and Europe started to set up budgets for propaganda and lobbying. On the one hand, full time political lobbyists were hired and on the other hand organizations, which would support and direct Armenian artists were founded. It is thought that this propaganda arm alone has a budget close to 100 million dollars. Moreover this budget does not include gifts or donations. For example, when Atom Egoyan decided to shoot the movie 'Ararat' in Canada, Canada based Armenians donated tens of thousand Canadian dollars worth of objects related to the period of the movie. As a result, it became possible to do more with a smaller budget. Works of art, which supported the Armenian cause, not only received financial backing but were also honored by Armenian organizations as the 'movie of the year', 'photograph of the year' or 'song of the year' and the artists were proclaimed as 'heroes'. The professional evolution of Canada based Armenian theatre director Hrant Alianak is an obvious example. Alianak, who is originally from Sudan, came to Canada in 1967. After his play, which dealt with the 'Armenian genocide', presented in 1997 he said that he realized that most of the guests were Armenian and that he received significant support for producing more play dealing with the same topic.

*"I decided for my company, Alyanak Theatre Productions, to exhibit a play about Armenians at least once every two years. I could also request funds from the Armenian population. Armenians were very supportive."*¹¹

We can say that artistic activities of Armenians became professional in and around the 1960s. Before this, they had some personal successes, but to become influential as a group took time. There are two main reasons behind this development. The first is that Armenian Diaspora in the West became an effective force. While Armenians have been a migrant people for hundreds of years, their population being small impeded them from becoming an important minority in the West. During this time, majority of Armenians were living in eastern countries. Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Cyprus and Iran had significant numbers of Armenians. Third World nationalism that was awakened after the Second World War affected the stability of the region and caused reprisals against minorities. Armenian migration started in Cyprus and Lebanon around the 1960s due to rising tensions, and intensified in the 1970s, and as a result, a considerable number of Armenians established themselves in the Western capitals. With these migrations, Armenians who left Middle East, Africa and Asia for a better life in Europe and North America started to feel more Armenian in the Armenian quarters of the cities. Especially in the Anglo-Saxon countries (U.K., U.S., Canada, Australia and etc.) they received support from central and local governments for preserving and developing their identity. Consequently, Armenians gave more emphasis to artistic endeavors. The other reason for the developments in the 1960s is that Armenian groups started to bring up the Armenian question as a political problem more frequently. Increase of communications within Armenians, expanding financial well-being and the ideological environment of the time caused these groups to view art as an important tool for their goals.

If we look at the beginning, we see that art at first for the Armenians in Diaspora was in Armenian and for the Armenian population. As they adapted to their parent society and mastered the language, the number of Armenian artists increased. As success was attained, it became easier to install the topic of

¹¹ Hrag Vartanian, 'The Armenian Stars of the Canadian Cultural Universe, Hrant Alianak', in *Feature Articles on Canada*, www.agbu.org

'genocide' onto the movie screens, stage or exhibitions. So, this process, which at first grew on its own, became a conscious well-maintained system after the encouragement of the Armenian political groups in the diaspora.

When the link between Armenian artistic and political activities during the Soviet period is examined such a picture surfaces: Armenian allegations frequently appeared in the media during and after the Soviet period. There are also a few movie projects considered. These projects, due to being in either Russian or Armenian, were overlooked by the Turkish media. But, due to Russian language being spoken in a large part of the Eurasian mass, nations living in this region have been developing considerable anti-Turkish attitudes. These regions also include the Central Asian Turkic Republics. The most important handicap for these projects is that they are not in English and cannot reach the Western media. Additionally, having small budgets causes the projects to have low quality and limited exposure. On the other hand, cooperation between Armenian companies established in America and Europe and Armenia based companies, shows that in the future many anti-Turkish movies might appear in Russia and Armenia. Furthermore, it is observed that many Armenian and Russian movies have been dubbed or subtitled in the diaspora. Right now, many Armenians who have been moderately acclaimed in the U.S., France or Canada dream of the day when they can produce an art object that deals with the Armenian 'genocide' and collaborate with Armenia. After Armenia declared its independence, these activities intensified. Armenians became more confident and relaxed after the appearance of a country that would bestow unreserved support.

Indirect Propaganda

In addition to the direct propaganda tools we investigated above, there exist Armenian artists and art objects that do not deal with the Armenian allegations, which are perceived as a part of the propaganda mechanism. These artists, while making movies or other art about universal topics or about their parent nations' problems, bring up the Armenian problem even at the most awkward moments and use their status for political objectives. While admittedly direct propaganda is more obvious, we can say that indirect propaganda is more effective. Because the society trusts an actor who is not known to be as a political activist. For

instance, when the U.S. Congress or another parliament starts debating on the Armenian problem, such names sending letters or giving out short statements might be very influential. Politicians and their need for vote might cause them to appease the artists' fan base. Additionally, it is interesting to note that some well-known Armenian artists, while not being perceived as political, support the Armenian artists in their environment. Arthur Sarkissian can be given as an example for Armenian artists who deal in universal topics. Sarkissian, who co-produced the popular movie *Rush Hour*, had not seemed to be interested in the Armenian problem until he announced that he would like to be involved in the making of projects like *Forty Days Of Musa Dagh*.¹²

C. IMPORTANT PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS IN ARMENIAN PROPAGANDA MECHANISM

After summarizing how Armenian propaganda network uses visual arts for their own purposes, we can concentrate on its most popular tools namely movies, theatre and television programs.

The Armenian Film Foundation

This might be the most important organization, which uses art as a tool for Armenian political goals. Armenian Film Foundation was established in 1979 and provides support for recording and distribution of movies without handing any financial assistance. Its founder is J. Michael Hagopian. If the movies are examined an obvious anti-Turkish bias can be seen. His apparent fanaticism can be noticed in most of his work.

Being a non-profit organization makes the foundation eligible for considerable tax benefits. Additionally, because its vocation covers art, education and culture, it gets substantial state and national grants. It also can be said that it performs an intermediary role for the Armenian society's donations to be spent on 'artistic' endeavors. While the foundation receives financial support from all of the Armenian society, the largest contribution comes from the south of the State of California.

The principle beneficiaries of the funds collected are film students. While majority of those who receive these grants are

¹² 'Armenians in Hollywood', *USANOGH* (Armenian students association publication), 12 September 2001.

Armenian students, some students with similar ethnic background have also benefited. The foundation itself also produces movies. Movie projects supported by American organizations are given priority. The foundation furthermore sets up campaigns in order to promote Armenian films in the West. Its activities on the internet are very successful, and it is also trying to establish a distribution network for its own and for some other films. Moreover it gives special importance to the distribution of videocassettes.

Armenian directors with limited funds obtain technical and financial support from the Armenian Film Foundation. The foundation, moreover, has created an Armenian Movie Archive. The archive is open to all media organizations and researchers. The archive also supports many cinema and media organizations. Some countries, which have contacts with the foundation, are Britain, Japan, Australia, Brazil and Israel among others. As to be expected, all movies that are sent to these countries are pro-Armenian.

Officials of the foundation or experts invited by it attend conferences all over the U.S. At these conferences movies are shown to create a more pleasing visual atmosphere. Speeches highlighted with visual demonstrations are obviously more effective.

The foundation also organises a biannual Armenian Film festival.

Film International

A Los Angeles based video distribution firm that deals mostly with the sale of Armenian movies.

MGN / Paradise, Inc.

MGN / Paradise is an important firm in the Armenian show business. Besides Los Angeles, it has offices in Moscow and Yerevan. It deals with both movie distribution and promotion. Some important television channels collaborate with this firm.

Arc Film

It is a film company established by Roger Kupelian in 1994. Kupelian's, who worked in the digital production of the movie of

Lord of the Rings, most important work is a documentary called *Dark Forest of the Mountains*. The firm, which mostly concentrates on distribution, currently is working on the movie project *'Fugitive Prince'*. We can say that the firm mostly deals with marketing over the internet. The links it gives on its internet site are all sites, which represent the most radical segment of anti-Turkish Armenian accusation.

Bars Media

A documentary film studio based in Yerevan, Armenia. It mostly deals with Azerbaijan – Armenia ethnic conflict from an Armenian perspective. The studio, which has links with Television channels, produces its works in cooperation with both ex-Soviet block and the Armenian Diaspora. Additionally, it has successfully completed many projects in collaboration with international agencies like UN, UNDP, UNICEF and etc. Among its productions are *Winter Melody*, *To be and Never to Forget*, *Prison Art* and *Non-Stop*.

NAREK

It is a firm that markets Armenian books, video and music. Its activities are most done over the internet. It markets all the movies that are described below.

AIM (Armenian International Magazine)

It is published in English and is widely read by the Armenian Diaspora. While the magazine includes cultural and political articles, it describes and markets movies by at least three Armenian directors in each issue. In almost all the articles about the films authors touch the so-called genocide issue and use an aggressive style.

Local Governments

In the West, local governments are the largest contributors to Armenian visual arts. Because Armenians usually are concentrated in particular neighborhoods and regions, it is easier for them to be influential in that region. During election periods they use their power to act as a group to dictate their opinion. Normally, people close to governments are used. Additionally, in some regions of

France, the U.S., and Canada number of Armenians involved in politics is quite large. These people use the prestige of their positions in order to help Armenian artists. Especially the free use of municipality concert, exhibition or cinema halls by Armenian artists provide substantial opportunities for all that are involved. The assistance the local governments provide in the promotion of the artists cannot be overstated. Municipalities, which have the opportunity to publicize a person all around the city, sometimes set the ground for Armenian artists to become famous. Additionally, local government sponsored exhibitions and plays, lend a lot of credibility to Armenian artists. While the number of supportive local governments is very high, the most supportive are Paris (France), Toronto, some cities in Quebec, (Canada), Boston, Los Angeles and some other cities in California (U.S.). Especially in Anglo-Saxon countries small groups of immigrants are encouraged to cultivate ethnic identities. For example in London, local government encourages all ethnic groups, including Armenians, to publish at least one newspaper or magazine and lends financial and residential support for them to continue their cultural activities. Local Armenian population, which is about 10 thousand, makes full use of this assistance. Armenians in London have established their association (CAIA) in a building supplied by the government and use the financial support given to offer lessons to children, social functions for the elderly and to create political or social contacts with the Armenians and the British public. Armenians publish books in both Armenian and English languages and as a result, use the funds they get from the British government to inculcate their version of events to the British public. The latest example is CAIA's statement giving total support to the movie *Ararat* and its director Atom Egoyan, and requesting its members to do the same. The same association decided to hold a London Armenian Film Festival on the last five days of June 2002. During the festival, Armenian films in both English and Armenian were shown but priority was given to films made by Armenians in diaspora.¹³ In these activities a large promotional campaign for the movie was arranged during the festival similar to the other festivals.

¹³ 'In Sight Of Ararat: London Armenian Film Festival 2002', *Armenian Voice*, Winter 2002, No. 45.

Armenian Student Associations

Armenian student associations have become very important in the last few years in bringing Armenian propaganda films to the viewer. Armenian associations present in most Western universities have been organizing single film screenings and film festivals with the financial support of they get. The most recent example was at the California State University in 2001. At the Armenian Film Festival, organized by the Armenian Student Association and with the financial help of the university, a number of short-films were shown. Mostly young directors were chosen to show their work, while the topics were carefully chosen among mostly universal subjects. But some still included the typical Armenian accusations of 'genocide and massacre'. While some readers might find this as a positive development, in reality diversity of subjects would make the festival more interesting, as opposed to a number of boring political movies, and make the Armenian problem appear more credible and real.¹⁴

Armenian Media in Diaspora

Armenian media in diaspora plays a very important role in using the Armenian movies in order to reach their political objectives. Especially Armenian newspapers and magazines that are published in English, French and Russian languages provide page spaces for the promotion of movies made by Armenian directors, and they work like missionaries in marketing the movies to the Western media. The first stage of the strategy concocted by the Armenian media is to mention the so-called Armenian genocide, no matter how political the movie they are promoting is. We see that the word 'genocide' is included in the review, even when the movie or other artistic events are about love or financial problems. Another stage is to make non-Armenian persons say what need to be said. Armenian media acknowledges the positive feedback made about Armenian movies; it either ignores negative criticisms or uses them to fill in gaps in pages just to make their stories more credible. A third stage is to examine the home country of the Armenian director introduced in the magazine. That's why the headlines usually are like 'A nice film from Germany', 'A French movie narrates the Armenian genocide' even though all of these

¹⁴ Primarily new generation Armenian Directors' movies were screened during the festival. Some of the directors are, Vem Yenovkian, Ara Ebra, Armen Titizian, Andrew Simonian and Jason Kartalian.

movies are done by Armenians and most of the actors are Armenians. Lastly, they immediately translate articles published in Armenian and Russian into English and French. Some news articles are even translated into Turkish.

With the help of communication and information technologies, internet and other IT media's use as a propaganda tool has become more widespread. The fact that the number of web sites about the movie *Ararat* and director Egoyan has exceeded 100 gives an idea about the Armenian propaganda.

Armenian Associations and Political Parties

We briefly mentioned above that some extremist Armenian groups and associations justify their existence solely by the continuation of the Armenian problem. These groups promote Armenian movies and do everything in their power to make these films a success in the West. Furthermore, some moderate groups, in a nationalist passion, also help in the distribution and promotion of Armenian movies. In almost all the Armenian social activities in diaspora these films are shown. Additionally, during fund raising the cassettes of these movies are sold at prices much higher than their market value. It's known that campaigns held for generating funds for furthering the cause of 'genocide' accusations are also done by such groups.

Hellenic Associations

One of the groups that give the most support to Armenian propaganda in the West is the Greeks. Especially, the Hellenic nationalists and the radical Cypriot Greeks consider Armenians having a common cause and support every activity that belittles or criticize Turkey or the Turkish people. In this context, local governments controlled by the Greeks give considerable support to productions of Armenian artists.

Festivals

The festivals held by the Armenian associations that promote Armenian movies in the West were mentioned earlier. Another tool, as influential as this, is international festivals. While, festivals held at cities with an Armenian population are usually attended, Armenian artists also attend some festivals that are concerned

about cultural variety, minority rights and political divisions. We can list the festivals that regularly have Armenian movies as: Toronto Film Festival (Canada), Cannes Film Festival (France), New York Film Festival, The Philadelphia Festival of World Cinema (the U.S.), International Rotterdam Film Festival (the Netherlands), Gothenburg Film Festival (Denmark), Canada Film and Video Festival, Cine-World Film Festival and etc.

The Armenian Church

The Armenian Church is very influential in the use of Armenian movie industry for political purposes. Especially in the USA, the Church is prominent in the promotion of political movies. In addition to promotion, it also finds theatres for the movies to be screened. The screening of the movie *Voices from the Lake* in the Armenian Church in Richmond (Virginia, the U.S.) is such an example. Another reason for screening a movie in a church is to legitimize the accusations made in a movie in a house of worship.

The Armenian Church can also use its connections all around the world with other religious organizations in order to request the screening of a movie. It is unfortunate that the role of the Church presents the Armenian-Turkish problem as a religious or civilization problem.

Important Personalities, Theatre and Movie Halls

We encounter certain names when we investigate who is involved with the production of movies spreading Armenian accusations. Among these, some actors, directors and theatre personalities will be introduced, when individual movies are examined. Additionally, there are people who are involved in the technical production and financing of these movies. In the USA, Canada and Europe established Armenian businessmen support the Armenian Cinema. If the movie is about the Armenian political claims, then more funding can be collected from these businessmen. This is also another incentive for Armenian actors and directors to make anti-Turkish movies.

Additionally, movie and theatre halls owned by Armenians make the screening of Armenian movies in the West so much easier. Georgia Krikorian is a good example of an Armenian from the diaspora who invests in movie business. His family is originally

from Bursa (Turkey). He is based in California and owns many movie halls. Each of these movie halls, which mean an investment of millions of dollars, can be and is utilized to the benefit of the Armenian political cinema.¹⁵

Other Firms and Organizations

Some of the other organisations can be listed as follow: Don Film (Armenia), Askarian Film (Germany) and Molorak Films Inc.

D. EXAMPLES OF 'ANTI-TURKISH' ARMENIAN FILMS

Voices from the Lake: A Film About the Secret Genocide

This movie was completed in 2000, and is one of the most well known Armenian movies of the recent years. It is 86 minutes, in English and was produced by J. Michael Hagopian. The Armenian Film Foundation produced the movie. The story of the movie is like a summary of the Armenian allegations. It continuously states that the events of 1915 were "the first genocide of the 20th century" and claims that "it is still a secret". It is asserted in the introductory leaflets of the movie that, the *Voices from the Lake* is "the first documentary movie about the Armenian Genocide". While this assertion can be justified as an marketing strategy, this documentary movie is latest and one of the most 'successful' documentary that deals with the Armenian allegations. The movie claims that the film is based on documents and observations of Western witnesses, though it avoids any questioning of its accusations by the viewer. It stresses the use of the memoirs of the people who lived through these events. Film's booklet states that the film uncovers many secret documents and reports that were unknown until now. Considering that some of the radical nationalist-Armenians have falsified many documents in the past, we can't be sure how authentic these "new" revelations might be.

It can be said that the movie is one of the most popular among the Armenian videos. The movie is sold either with or without an introductory booklet. The booklet restates the Armenian allegations in the movie in a more acceptable way.

¹⁵ Janet, Samuel, 'George Krikorian, Reviving Hollywood Glamour at the Movies', AIM, *Armenian International Magazine*, January-February 2002, p.65.

Forty Days of Musa Dagh

This 120-minute movie is one of the most important films that present Armenian allegations. The language is English and Independent Production produced it. The movie tells the story how Turks committed 'genocide' and massacres against Armenians. The movie portrays that Turkish soldiers like to torture them. The movie is based on a book by Austrian author Franz Wertel.

The Turkish and the U.S. governments were blamed for trying to stop the recording and distribution of the movie. However no evidence has been produced about that. Some Armenian researchers claim "the book was to be made into a movie in the 1940s but Turkish lobbying stopped it from becoming reality".¹⁶

The videocassettes of the movie are still on the shelves. Additionally, Armenian organizations show this movie to a large number of viewers on every 24 April.¹⁷

Assignment Berlin

The director and producer of Assignment Berlin is Hrayr (Peter) Toukhanian, who is based in Detroit (U.S.). The movie portrays the assassination of Talat Pasha in Berlin, solely from an Armenian perspective. The assassin is shown as a 'hero' of the Armenian people, not a terrorist who committed one of the earliest terrorist acts of the 20th century, while the terror victims, Talat Pasha and his friends are described as 'the real terrorists'. In the introductions, it is stated that the objective of the film is to immortalize the assassin. After watching such a film, it is only natural for the Armenian youth to think that terrorism is a tool to reach their cause.

Assignment Berlin is said to be the first full sized movie that was made about this subject. All posters of the movie state that Talat Pasha was the main architect behind the so-called massacres. The most used phrase on the posters is "an actual history event". Additionally, the popular claim of massacre of 1.5 million Armenians is repeated both in the movie and in the introductions. The director first thought of recording the movie in

¹⁶ For studies related to Armenian claim look: Ed Minassian, 'The Forty Years of Musa Dagh - The Film That Was Denied', *Journal of Armenian Studies*, Vol. 2 (2), Autumn-Winter 1985-86.

¹⁷ As happened on the Virginia University campus on April 24, 2000, the movie is shown in large halls where respected personalities and large groups can be accommodated.

Berlin, but after visiting the place saw that most historic buildings were destroyed during the Second World War, and decided on to record the movie in Detroit.¹⁸ The majority of the movie was recorded in Masonic Temple in Detroit.¹⁹ The première of the movie was also made before 1500 'enthusiastic' viewers in the Masonic Temple on 19 February 1982. As can be guessed, most viewers were Armenians and they transformed the occasion in to a spectacle. The West Side première of the movie was on 14 and 21 October 1982 before 2000 viewers. These screenings widely promoted by Armenians and tickets for the event were sold out.²⁰

The shooting of Toukhanian's film took the course of a typical political Armenian movie. Firstly, Armenian population in the U.S. gave considerable help and some Armenians accepted to work at lower wages. However, the real assistance came from the U.S. based organizations. Because the film was shot in Detroit, Toukhanian received funding from the firm New Detroit, the Mayor, local media and other companies for his help to the local economy. Additionally, Detroit City Art Council also contributed to the funding of the movie. Some of this assistance might have political connotations, but Toukhanian used funds that are accessible to any American citizen in order to further his ethnic cause. In conclusion, the director gathered more than 1 million dollars of funding for his movie. While it is modest compared to today's figures in film industry, when considered difference of inflation and the value of donations for the film, we can say that the assistance he received is more than 1 million dollars at today's value.

Another feature that this 94-minute movie shares with Ararat is that the movie came to fruition as a result of the labours of both the director and his wife. Hrayr Toukhanian, who portrayed the movie as an outcome of their love and marriage, said that his wife Sona Toukhanian wrote the script of the film.²¹ The movie Ararat is also a product of combined labours of Atom Egoyan and his wife Arsinée Khanjian. In short, both movies are a product of professional assistance, amateur instincts and idealism. In other

¹⁸ The Director gave this explanation. But in reality, to record the movie in Detroit would allow him the use of considerable funds from the local government.

¹⁹ We have no proof that the director has any links with the Masonic Order. Old Detroit Bar is another location where the movie was recorded.

²⁰ George Robertson, 'A 17-Year Overnight Success', *Michigan Vue Magazine*, March-April 2000.

²¹ Sona Toukhanina died in 1997.

words, most people on the front line of the propaganda mechanism are those who are amateur in heart and think that they are doing something worthwhile. Another point to consider is that the wives are more idealist and nationalist than their husbands. Both directors stated that when they were worn out their wives were a driving force pushing them on.

While some moderately well known actors played the lead parts in the movie, Toukhanian let some local and Armenian actors play the lesser parts.²² Similar to Egoyan's political choices in casting Canadian actors, Toukhanian tried to guarantee the success of the movie by casting moderately well known actors and actresses from Detroit. This achieves both objectives of making the movie a part of the U.S. and Detroit cultural landscape and assist in the careers of Armenian actors.

The movie received enthusiastic appraisal from the Armenian audience and almost every Armenian in the West watched it. At the regions, where Armenians are an important minority, local population also was interested in the movie. The firm, which distributed the movie, International Releasing Corporation, states that the movie was screened in France, Italy, Spain, Greece, the U.S.S.R., Australia, Thailand, Taiwan and all South American countries. Additionally, the copies of the movie were distributed in videocassettes and other recording tools. The distribution firm stated that in spite of all the efforts of Armenian groups, they did not make profit from the movie. However, this statement does not seem to convey the truth, because the movie is still being sold all around the world in DVD and videocassette formats and over the internet. Additionally, Armenian organizations through mass screenings during festivals have been showing the movie to new members and the young generation. Obviously the other ethnic groups in the neighbourhoods where the organizations are located also view these movies. The latest such example is the mass screening held by ARFYOC in the Armenian Community Center. On the 25th January 2002 Assignment Berlin was shown free of charge to a large audience and the all costs were covered by ARFYOC Armenian organization. This incident shows that the movie still has not lost its effectiveness.

²² Important names who played in the movie are: Eddie Mekka, Val Avery, Roger Jackson, Michael Carroll, James Reynolds, Michael Kermoyan, Herand Markarian, Gayne Hovsepien, Gerald Papp and Joe Penberthy.

Mother (Mayrig)

Henri Verneuil produced this movie and Omar Sharif (Hagop) and Claudia Cardinale (Araxi-Anne) played. Some other actors who played in this movie are Gerard Torikian (Zaven), Nocolos Silberg (Defence Lawyer), Stephane Servais (Azad). This movie, which was recorded in 1991, is seen as one of the most important movies that puts forward Armenian 'genocide' claims. The main story of the movie is the difficulties faced by an Armenian family, which migrated to France in 1921. Turks are shown as the bad guys in this movie. The movie was praised for highlighting the role of Armenian women in the family.

While the movie disappointed its producers at the box office in terms of financial considerations, Mayrig has been a focus point for Armenian activities in the movie business. The movie is still shown in French with English subtitles in most countries. The mass screening of this movie is still continued by Armenian organizations. The latest screening took place in London at the Gulbekian Hall on the 5 of February 2002. The distribution of the movie is done by M Pathe (Switzerland) and AMLF (France).

The real name of French citizen Henri Verneuil is Ashot Malakian and was born in 1920 in the Ottoman State. He is seen as one of the most important figures of French cinema. In 1996, he received an honorary Cesar Awards, which is considered France's Oscar, for his contribution to cinema. His most successful movie is considered as *La Vashe et le Prisonnier* (1959). He worked with the most famous personalities of the French Cinema, like Jean-Paul Belmondo and Alan Delon. In spite of his considerable success, his most cherished dream was to make a movie about the 'Armenian genocide' and he accomplished this with *Mayrig*. The director died on 11 of January 2002.²³

The Yearning, Karot

This movie was produced in Armenia in 1990 and is 137 minutes-long. It is promoted and distributed by the Armenian

²³ Some other important movies by the director are: *Escale au Soleil* (1947), *La Table aux Crevés* (1952); *Le Fruit Défendu* (1952); *Carnaval* (1953); *L'Ennemi Public No 1* (1953); *Le Mouton a Cinq Pattes* (1954), *Les Amants du Tage* (1955); *Des Gens Sans Importance* (1955); *Maxime* (1958); *Le Grand Chef* (1959); *La Vache et le Prisonnier* (1959); *Le Président* (1961); *La Clan des Siciliens* (1969); *Le Casse* (1972); *Le Serpent* (1973); *I. Comme Icare* (1979); *Mille Millions de Dollars* (1981); *Les Mortalooous* (1984); *Mayrig* (1991); *588 Rue Paradis* (1992).

organizations in the Armenian diaspora in the West. Levon Sdharafyan, Rafayel Atoyan and Galia Novents played in the film and Frunze Dovlatyan directed it. The story of the film is quite dramatic:

“An Armenian named Arakel Aloyan’s village is burnt down and the Turks rape all women of the village. As a result Aloyan moves to the U.S.S.R. but he still misses his village. Later, Aloyan cannot overcome his emotions and goes back to Turkey in a wholly caring outlook. His aim is to visit the graves of his family and to kiss the walls of the burnt church, which he was married at. However, the government of the USSR perceives this as a spying attempt” and the story follows on from there.

The beginning of the movie shows in detail the ‘Turkish brutality’ Aloyan witnessed. Additionally, Armenian nation is revealed as a nation divided between East and West, where Turkey is repeatedly portrayed as “Western Armenia”.

The movie is in Armenian but has subtitles and is widely promoted in the U.S.A.

The Armenian Genocide, Annihilation of the Armenian Population of the Ottoman Empire 1915-1923

It is a documentary produced by the Atlantis Productions in 1991 and is 25 minutes. It is sold in the videocassette and VCD forms and is aimed to ‘educate’ school children. A tutorial booklet is given with the videocassette. A teacher’s edition was produced for instructors. Armenian organizations in the U.S.A. give this video as a reference for ‘history of genocide’. We can say that besides Armenians, mostly Americans sensitive about genocide and Jews are interested in the documentary. We can easily guess those American and Jewish teachers who want to instruct their pupils about the subject of genocide might show this documentary in order to better explain the Jewish Holocaust without really knowing the subject of the Armenian case. As a result, this documentary not only forms an anti-Turkish bias but also tries to draw apart the young Jews and Turks in the U.S. The Atlantis Productions claim that the documentary was produced for The Curriculum Development and Supplement Materials Commission of the State of California.

An Armenian Journey

It was first screened in 1987 and was produced by WGBH Boston. In this 56-minute documentary, Theodore Bogosian visits places where the so-called 'massacres' took place with a survivor of the 'genocide'.

The Armenian Case

This documentary was written and produced by J. Michael Hagopian and was first screened in 1975. It is 45 minutes. The documentary consists of interviews with people claiming to have survived the events of 1915, in a totally Armenian perspective. The story begins with the start of the First World War, apart from showing many examples of the 'terrible Turk', it explains how Armenians migrated to all over the world and started a new life in diaspora. Another interesting point is that most evidence provided comes from Western and especially the U.S. resources. The American President Wilson's plan on minorities and Armenians form an important base for the arguments advanced in the film. The producer Hagopian is an important personality in the Armenian film industry. He is also the founder of the Armenian Film Foundation and the chairman of the Atlantis Productions, which produces many Armenian movies. Since 1954 Hagopian has aimed to spread his nationalist political opinions via art and one of his main objective is to integrate cinema and education. That might be the reason why he concentrates more on movies similar to 'The Armenian Case'. In other words, he produces movies that can be shown in the American schools. It is obvious that as the age of the viewer decreases, the movies' affects on him or her increases. Michael Hagopian, who has produced over 70 films, has also given lectures at various universities. It is also important to mention that the U.S. Office of Education and Ethnic Heritage Program, California Endowment for Humanities and California Ministry of Education, have funded most movies of Hagopian.

A Wall of Silence, The Unspoken Fate of the Armenians

It was made in 1997 and was directed by Dorothee Forma. It is in English and is a 54-minute documentary. The accusation that, "the first genocide of the 20th century was committed against Armenians" is repeated in this documentary. The documentary is based on the life stories of two people, Taner Akçam and Vahakn

Dadrian. The producer introduces Taner Akçam as a "Turkish historian", which is false. As known, Taner Akçam is a graduate of the Middle Eastern Technical University, Economics and Management Sciences Faculty, Ankara who later completed a Sociology Doctorate in Germany. In his research, his main handicap is to ignore the historical facts and to concentrate on his personal observations and opinion.²⁴ Taner Akçam is included in the film as a balancing influence, but his representative power can be easily questioned.²⁵ However, the director does not really trouble himself with these arguments. His objective is to prove that the Armenian genocide really happened by using Akçam and Dadrian's opinions. Akçam states here that Turkey has to face its past and has to reassess the 'wrongs' it did in its history. The name of the film implies that Armenian allegations do not receive the attention it deserves. The production of this documentary is made by the HBF.

The Forgotten Genocide

This is another J. Michael Hagopian film. The narrator is the famous actor Mike Connors. While it is a 28-minute documentary, its influence has been broader than much longer movies. The documentary was nominated for two Emmy Awards and this clearly shows how much interest it had generated. Its name alone was inspirational for many pro-Armenian people. It is claimed that in the movie, interviews with witnesses and archival documents prove that Armenian accusations are factual. Later, a 17-minute extension was made to the movie.

From Bitlis to Fresno: 100 Years of an Armenian Family in California, the Karabians of Fresno

It is a 56-minute documentary film. J. Michael Hagopian both wrote and directed the film. The most important objective of this type of movies is to both prove that Armenians are integrated to the American society and that Armenian homeland is Anatolia.

²⁴ For Taner Akçam's studies see: Akçam, Taner, *Diyalogtan Başka Çözüm Var mı?* (Is There a Solution Except Dialogue?), (İstanbul: Su Yayınları, 2001); Akçam, Taner, *Türk Ulusal Kimliği ve Ermeni Sorunu* (Turkish National Identity and the Armenian Problem), (İstanbul: Su Yayınları, 2001).

²⁵ As a well-known fact that Taner Akçam represents one of the most marginal opinions in Turkey. As a radical leftist he shares the radical Armenian groups' arguments.

Everyone's Not Here: Families of the Armenian Genocide

This documentary, produced by the Armenian Assembly of America, mostly targets educational institutions. A tutorial booklet is given with the videocassette of this 28-minute film. The well-known allegations are repeated in this film and the most sensitive part of American psyche, separation of families, is emphasised.

The Hidden Holocaust: The First Genocide of the 20th Century

It is a 45-minute documentary produced by A & E Home Video.

Cilicia... Rebirth

It is a 27-minute documentary, sold in videocassette form. It is produced and written by J. Michael Hagopian, who was funded by the Armenian Film Foundation. Historical consultant of the documentary is Prof. Avedis K. Sanjian from the UCLA. The documentary claims that Armenians had created a great civilization in South-Eastern Anatolia and some parts of Syria. According to the claims made in the movie, Armenians who survived the massacres of the First World War arose again in the city of Aleppo (Syria). It is a typical Hagopian movie, portraying the Armenian people as a nation that was never overwhelmed by the tragedies it suffered and found the strength to rise again. It will be seen later that Ararat has a similar premise. This belief is widely accepted among the Armenians, who relate their torment to the myth of Noah's Ark.

Historical Armenia

This film is a 53-minute documentary written and directed by J. Michael Hagopian. It is narrated by Guy Runnion. It is interesting to note that, while it is claimed that the homeland of Armenians is visited, the cities visited are Istanbul, Ankara, Gaziantep, Van and Bitlis, purely Turkish cities. A person who watches this film would think that the homeland of Armenians is these cities. The film, just like the others, tries to prove the similar arguments by using only the 'Armenian sources'. In the introduction of the film, we are informed that the film crew is following the path taken by the US mission sent to Turkey (The film says 'to Turkey and Armenia') in 1919. Consequently, an emotional bond between the film and the viewer is cultivated.

Komitas

It's a 96-minute movie produced in West Germany. It is one of the most internationally renowned Armenian movies. The director is a Soviet Armenian, Don Askarian, who is based in Germany. Some see Askarian as the most important Armenian director after Sergei Paradjanov.²⁶ He was born in 1949 in the region of Upper Nagorno-Karabakh and found success during the Soviet era. While working as an associate-director in Moscow, he was jailed for his seditious remarks. He then migrated to West Berlin (West Germany) in 1978 and has been living there ever since. Don Askarian is one of the most popular Armenian directors in the world.

In *Komitas*, with Samvel Ovasapian as the lead actor, 'the Turks massacring millions of Armenians' is accepted as a fact and the story goes on from there. According to the movie the main character, Komitas is a Kütahya-born Armenian monk, who lost his mind after witnessing the 1915 massacres the Turks perpetrated.²⁷

The biggest success of *Komitas* is receiving the Interfilm prize. The reason why the jury, which had close links with the religious establishment, gives us an idea how political this choice was.

*"We share in the pain of the monk and composer Komitas, who kept silent and the Armenian nation, who still grieves, after the mass killings of 1915."*²⁸

Some other actors who took part in the movie are Onig Saadatian and Margarita Woskanjan. The movie is in German but has English subtitles. The movie is still acknowledged with the phrase of "The Armenian genocide perpetrated by the Turks."²⁹

²⁶ 'Directors in Focus, Hieroglyphs of Armenia: Film By Don Askarian', *The Harvard Film Review*, 21 January-23 January ?.

²⁷ Interestingly, in almost all of the films the Armenian directors use 'Turks' and 'Turkey' words instead of 'Ottoman', 'Muslim' or 'Ottoman State' words. In fact the communal clashes in 1915 occurred between the Muslim population of the Empire and the armed Armenian groups and there was no state in that years as called 'Turkey'. Even some of the directors use the flag of Turkish Republic as if it was the same flag during the Ottoman years. Atom Egoyan for instance used the modern Turkish Republic's flag instead of the flag of the Ottoman State in his film *Ararat* about the 1915 Van revolt. Ironically, Egoyan claims that he does not accuse Turkey for the Ottoman years, yet his film does not confirm these words. It is obvious that such an attitude cannot be considered as accidental.

²⁸ 'Screening of the West German Film *Komitas*', *Nor Gyank*, Los Angeles, 2 March 1989.

²⁹ For other reviews of '*Komitas*' see: '*Komitas*', *Asbarez*, 25 February 1989; Paul Sherman, 'Armenia Subject of MTA Films', *The Boston Herald*, 8 June 1993; Mansel Stimpson, 'Uncompromising', *What's on in London*, 18 April 1990.

Avetik

It is another Don Askarian movie. It was made in 1992 as a German-Armenian collaborative project. It is in Armenian but has English subtitles. It is in colour and is 84 minutes long. The leading man of the movie is an Armenian director who is exiled to Berlin, just like Askarian himself. The movie mentions sad events like German racism, 1989 earthquake and the 1915 episode.³⁰ As can be expected, the events of 1915 are told from the Armenian perspective. Because the movie portrays many events like the 1915 incidents, Nazi soldiers and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, concurrently, viewers might have made a correlation between Hitler's Fascism and "Turkish barbarity". Since all reviews of the movie mention the "genocide perpetrated by Turks", this conclusion is easy to reach. A paragraph from a review from the Japan Times sets a good example about such impressions:

*"...These convey Avetik's thought during his exile. German Racism, Armenian genocide in 1915 perpetrated by Turks (an terrible episode comparable in extent to the Holocaust), 1989 earthquake which cause great devastation (Armenian's believe the earthquake was caused by Russian seismic devises),..."*³¹

The movie is not an easy one due to the flashbacks, dreams and unusual dialogue and music. Askarian, as with his other movies, reach only a very restricted audience. However, the audience he reaches is the upper echelons of the society. We see that the film reaches the widest possible audience with considerable efforts of the Diaspora organizations.

Nagorno-Karabakh; The Third and Fourth Volume of the Armenian History

The film is a 1988 Germany production made by the Armenians in diaspora. This 60-minute-long movie was directed by Don Askarian and produced by both Don Askarian and Margarita Woskanian. The language is Armenian and Russian but the movie was screened on German Television with German and English subtitles. The documentary, which is currently sold in the

³⁰ Davis Rooney, *Variety*, 19-25 September 1994.

³¹ Giovanni Fazio, 'Through the Doors of Perception', *The Japan Times*, 25 March 1995.

videocassette format, portrays the state of Azerbaijan as an unlawful and oppressive regime.

Some claim that Askarian secretly recorded the large demonstrations for Nagorny-Karabakh that took place in Armenia in 1988 and produced this documentary. Naturally, the film consists of more than recordings of the demonstrations. There are some accusations against Azerbaijani Turks. Even though Armenians are currently forcefully occupying a large part of Azerbaijan, Armenians are shown as the victims. The movie includes many rape, torture and murder scenes, which are all attributed to the Turks. The effects of the movie, which was shown in many international festivals, can be surmised if one looks at one of the reviews that said, "A depiction of the dirty truth of ethnic cleansing".³²

The film is one of the most important creations of the Armenian lobby in the last decade that targets the German media.

On the Old Roman Road

This is another Don Askarian movie that describes an exiled artist. It was made in 2001 and lasts 76 minutes. The movie takes place in Rotterdam (Netherlands) and is about an Armenian author Levon, who struggles between his past and present life. He remembers some many inconsistencies about his past like a Turkish Policeman, a woman with red hair, a relative who is robbing dead Turks, pressure, tears, camels, dogs and etc. The director portrays these as a consequence of the contradictions between esthetic and political pressures bearing on the character. Later the director ties all these happenings to today's Netherlands. In this part of the movie we witness the tragedies of a Kurd and an Armenian terrorist.

The movie is in both English and Armenian. Additionally, when necessary, English subtitles are used.

Dark Forest in the Mountains

The issue of Nagorny-Karabakh is maybe the last subject that Armenians can claim any moral authority. To defend the Armenian

³² Desmond Ryan, 'Nagorno-Karabakh': Depicting Dirty Truth of 'Ethnic Cleansing', *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 7 May 1993.

military aggression that currently occupies one fifth of another nations territory, turns one million people into refugees against every international rule of law, is very hard to justify. However, cinema is a magical tool. Cameras sometimes do not show the truth, but the reverse. Silver screen does not show the righteous. The latest Armenian political movies are the best examples of such a distortion of this tool. Dark Forest in the Mountain is a case in point. In this Roger Kupelian film, the victim and the captor have traded places. This movie, which has been shown in many university and cinema halls, proves that Armenian political cinema also uses current topics for its own political benefit.

Director Kupelian expresses the reason why he made this documentary:

*"At that time, there was an unknown war waged between Azerbaijan and newly established Armenia. There was a Bosnia issue. The government of Azerbaijan was trying to banish Armenians living within the borders of the country draw by Stalin. The media was writing things about the issue but it had no influence. As a person who had a blood connection with the region, I took upon myself to go there and record the true story."*³³

Mandate for Armenia

It is claimed in this 25-minute documentary that some very secret US documents are brought to light. The story is about American President Woodrow Wilson sending General James G. Harbord to Anatolia for investigations, and the same Armenian accusations are repeated. We frequently see Ankara, Istanbul, Harput, Diyarbakır, Mardin, Erzincan, Erzurum and Yerevan in the film. The narrator and historical advisor of the film is Richard G. Hovannisian (UCLA).

Where are My People?

This is a classic 28-minute J. Michael Hagopian production. The period during and after the First World War is studied from an Armenian perspective. This 1965 film is considered as the first film that put forward the Armenian accusations of 'genocide'.

³³ John B. Virata, 'Documentary Filmmaker Roger Kupelian', *Digital Producer.com*, www.arcfilm.net/virata.html, 2002.

The Armenian Americans

One of the most interesting features of American and Canadian Armenians are their closeness to each other. As a significant character of diaspora communities can easily be seen among the Armenian Diaspora: They co-operate closely and assist each other since they see this co-operation as part of their ethnic cause. This film proves a similar understanding.

The film *The Armenian Americans*, which consists of the life stories of famous Armenians who live in the U.S., tries to show how much they have contributed to American culture and become a permanent part of the American cultural landscape. Turks, of course, do not receive many praises in this film.

This 90-minute movie was made in 2000 and is in colour. The dialog is in English. Producer and director is Andrew Goldberg. Some names included in this film are the tennis player Andre Agassi, author Peter Balakian, actor Mike Connors, actor-author Eric Bogossian, actress-author Andre Martin and NCAA basketball coach Jerry Tarkanian. Additionally, some familiar faces are also included. Some of the names included in this film have collaborated in many other cinema projects, which prove their professional and private links to each other.

California Armenians: The First Generation

This is another Michael Hagopian production. It is a 30-minute documentary. It tells the story of how Armenians came to California from the Ottoman Empire lands (In the movie "Turkey" is insistently used instead of the proper "Ottoman Empire" word) and what hardships they endured. As always 'genocide' allegations 'pepper' this film. The videocassettes and VCDs of this movie are still being sold in the U.S.A.

Ararat Beckons

This movie informs us how important Mount Ararat is for Armenians as a 49-minute documentary. Art and Armenian allegations are joined in this film. This is also a 1995 Hagopian production and is narrated by Mike Connors. The Atlantis Productions Inc. produced it. The language is English, but an Armenian version was also made.³⁴ In the introduction, it is claimed that the movie was secretly smuggled out of Turkey.

³⁴ Other actors who played in this movie are, Masis Parseghian, Gregory Parseghian and Hamlet Nersesian.

Back to Ararat

This movie repeats the genocide accusations of Armenians and is strangely introduced as the 'first movie that deals with the issue'. This movie was made in 1988. The director is Swedish producer Pea Holmquist. This 100-minute film, which is still being sold, can be found in most local libraries in the United States. The review of the movie in *The Boston Globe* on 8th of June 1989 shows how effective this movie has been on the national psyche:

"Back to Ararat is at its best when it interviews survivors of 1915 (children then. they are now In their 80s) and when it takes us to the beautiful but empty countryside in Turkey that once was Armenia. An old woman who still lives there describes herself as "a refugee in my own country." Survivors who now live in Germany and New York describe how Armenians were shot, thrown down wells, stabbed or forced on death march to Syria that, for many, ended In being burned alive in caves. The government of Turkey still denies that massacres of three-quarters of the civilian population took place and talks Instead about "resettlement" and wartime Inhumanities that oc-curred on both sides. In the film, a spokesman for a Turkish-American group waved away the suggestion of genocide as "hearsay." The film would have done well to stick to straight historical documen-tary. Instead, it loses its focus by shifting to present-day politics. There's an Interview with an Armenian extremist who shot a Turkish diplomat, and a lengthy portrait of a young Armenian couple living in New York who quixotically hope their homeland will be liberated from Turkey.³⁵

In a segment recorded in Turkey, there is an interview with a 92-year-old elderly woman. The elderly woman recalls those days with great sorrow. She says, "be careful. If the police hears of this, they'll take you away" to the camera crew. No one asks how an Armenian woman who utters these words could have lived in an Anatolian village for the decades. It is obvious that the journalists like to present an unknown country (Turkey) as a mysterious place under a 'fear and terror governance' and the Armenian propaganda machine provides what the newspapers like to report. Actually the reality is less exciting, less 'attractive': Now about 100.000 Armenians live in Turkey in peace. They have schools,

³⁵ Robert Garret, 'Two Films at MFA Evoke the Agony of Armenia', *The Boston Globe*, 8 June 1989.

churches, social foundations and all the rights as the other Turkish citizens have. Moreover their rights are protected not only by the Turkish laws, but also by the written agreements and the European legal system.

Legacy

This movie was produced, directed and written by Hagopian. Any event that can be used to blacken Turkey and the Turks is used in the 23-minute documentary. From burning of İzmir (Smyrna) to Armenian massacres in the deserts of Syria can be found in this film. The narrators are George Deukmejian, Mike Connors and Walter Karabian.

This is Armenia

This film is in English and lasts 60 minutes. It was directed by Arsen Aslanian as a 1988 MGN / Paradise production.

Films Made in Armenia

While the Armenians in diaspora make most of the Armenian movies, many movies are also made in Armenia. If any of the Armenia based movies are deemed good enough, they are translated into mainly English and French. For example *Our Fatherland Armenia* (1999)³⁶ has both an English and Armenian versions. Additionally, almost all Armenian films are presented with subtitles in a second language (English, Russian, German or French).

Conference Recordings

Apart from the movies and documentaries mentioned earlier, recordings of conferences held by Armenian lobby groups, are also sold in videocassette, VCD or DVD formats. For example, Prof. Ron Sunny and Vahakn Dadrian's speeches are sold separately as videocassettes. No detail will be given in this study about these recordings due to the space limitations.

³⁶ Director and Camera: Arsen Alanian. Music: Komitas, Aram Khachaturian, Sayat Nova and Tigran Mansourian. Language: Eastern Armenian and English.

E. THE EFFECTS OF THE POLITICAL ARMENIAN MOVIES IN THE WEST

This type of movies creates an environment where Armenian allegations are accepted as fact. Though art is the best tool in inter-communal communication, when it is used as a part of propaganda or political aims cinema, theatre or any other type of art become the most dangerous arm against stability, dialogue and peace. While it is hard to examine how influential these movies are on elite and administration, we can guess how effective they are on impressionable young children who are the future. Another consequence of these movies is to strengthen the already existing religious and historical prejudices of the West. The anti-Turkish activities of Greek and Armenian lobbies cause a deterioration of the image of Turkey and the Turks.

The most seriously affected group of all is the Turkish Diaspora. Especially those who live in France or the U.S. states where there is a significant Armenian minority have been suffering under the prejudices that result in these films. Some Turks even try to hide their nationality because of questions asked about Greeks or Armenians. Even more upsetting is the abuse Turkish children receive in states where the Armenian 'genocide' is accepted as a fact into the school curriculum. These children who are at a very impressionable age will take these memories to their deathbed. There are two consequences of these abuses on the Turkish youth. Majority reacts in an emotional and extreme way, which usually make the matter worse. Minority on the other hand ignore all the debate totally.

Additionally, it is hardly possible to guess how harmful these movies and propaganda is on the economic and political interests of Turkey. However, the only victims are not Turkey and the Turkish people. Maybe the most destructive harm is done on the Armenian nation itself. If a nation makes hate of another nation its ideal, it cannot be successful and hate becomes the defining characteristic of that nation. Unfortunately, we see the system of this hate among the Diaspora Armenians. Bilateral relations between Turkish and Armenian nations have also suffered. These movies and other activities of Armenians nourish the hate and poison the relations between the people.

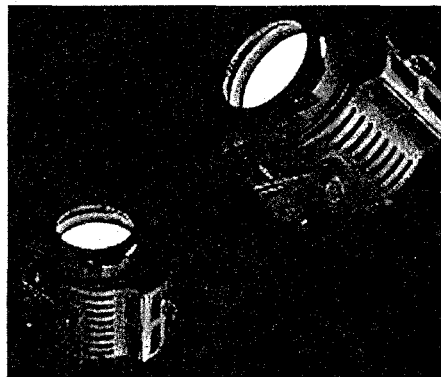
CONCLUSION

While Turkish and the world public are mostly unaware, Armenian art has become a useful tool in the hand of the Armenian political objectives. This is more clear-cut within the Armenian cinema and theatre. Extremist Armenian groups have convinced their generation of the 'truth' of the genocide and created a myth around the 1915 relocation event. Armenian groups dispersed all around the world have taken advantage of Turkey's silence, and have mostly convinced their host countries. The current objective is to transform political organizations and the international community into an anti-Turkish body. As the lobbying activities increased, Armenian propaganda network has become more and more professional. Financial incentives included into this network have drawn both members from the Armenian and other ethnic communities. This network has developed beyond worst nightmare of Turkish politicians and has caused considerable harm to Turkey. While the Turkish media and the government took into account these developments only at a crisis point, this network in cooperation with art has developed into a very powerful force.

As discussed this propaganda web is a direct result of the Armenian identity crisis in the diaspora. The Armenian Church and the radical political groups saw the problems with Turkey as the only solution to assimilation of the Armenians in the Western cultures, and used the anti-Turkish feelings as a uniting factor. However by doing this, the Armenian elite established an identity, which is based on hostility against another identity. That is to say the Armenian identity in the diaspora has been based on hostility. The Armenian terror in the 1970s and 80s and the violence in the Armenian Parliament showed that this kind of identity-making not only damage Armenians' relations with the other peoples but also undermine stability and peace among the Armenians. The history has clearly showed that these two peoples, **Armenians and Turkish people, must be in co-operation, and art or literature should not be used in order to build new walls between the peoples. Art as the most perfect way of communication, should be in service of peace.** In another word the Armenian artists and the diaspora organisations should focus on the common problems and problem of lack of communication instead of deepening the prejudices in both sides.



J. Michael HAGOPIAN: Founder of the
Armenian Film Foundation



Cinema: Not always innocent,
not always shows the truth