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THE MEMORY OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE P. BALAKIAN’S “BLACK DOG OF FATE”

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The present article touches upon the mnemonic functions of literature in terms of shaping collective memory. P. Balakian’s novel “Black Dog of Fate” recounts family history of the Armenian Genocide survivors. In the novel the author constructs the narrative of memory via portraying the sufferings and pain of people who firsthand suffered the atrocities committed by Turks. The author with retrospection recollects his experience as a third generation of Genocide survivor. Various recurrent concepts like “old country”, Western Armenian food, the etymology of personal names are constant reminders of unbearable trauma and pain that Diaspora Armenians feel for their lost homeland. Even the title of the novel represents one of the underlying topics of the novel i.e. the fate (pakht) of Armenians is different from everyone else’s as the Genocide has left an indelible trace on each and every survivor of the Armenian Genocide. The novel also dwells on the issue of the identity crisis, since when the country that you come from is lost forever, any Armenian from the Diaspora doesn’t seem to have a sense of belonging. The main characters of the novel are Balakian’s family who suffer the trauma in their own way. Balakian’s narrative is constructed in a way that family history helps the readers understand the history in general. Each survivor’s story is part of a jigsaw puzzle at the end of which the reader envisages all the horrors of the Armenian Genocide.

Keywords: *the Armenian Genocide, Diaspora fiction, trauma, lost homeland, literature, reconstruction of the lost identity, memory.*

Introduction

The unimaginable atrocities perpetrated by Turks during the WWI are ever present in the memory of all Armenians who, however hard they might try, will

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never be able to erase those horrendous events from their cognitive system. Turkey's constant denial of the Armenian Genocide along with its blatant lies and falsification of the historical events make the matters far worse. Since even a late apology on the Turkish part would somehow serve as a panacea for the wounds of the past. The question is how the survivors of the Armenian Genocide are supposed to cope with the unspeakable trauma that even the third and fourth generations of Armenians are still experiencing. Armenians who have found shelter in different corners of the world face such diverse issues as searching for their identity and longing for their lost homeland. In this regard literature is seen as a powerful way of self-expression, the ulterior goal being voicing the unvoiced trauma and its subsequent healing. Through words the Diaspora writers materialize the pain lying deep in their sub-consciousness, as only in this way can they share the horrendous experiences that their ancestors were subjected to. This article touches upon how literature can help in dealing with the traumatic memories of various generations of the Armenian Diaspora who have shared these memories since the execution of the Turkish inhumane plan, i.e. the Armenian Genocide. In this regard it should be noted that with the help of the psychoanalytical approach to literature we try to understand how the unspoken trauma has impacted the construction of the narrative in the novel. The analysis of the factual data extracted from Peter Balakian's "Black Dog of Fate" aims at shedding light upon the issues discussed above, namely the traumatic memories of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide, their quest of self-identification and the omnipresent homeland lost forever.

Memory and trauma in literature

The role of literature in terms of shaping common memory is pivotal as, according to Renate Lachman, the latter appears to be the mnemonic art par excellence. The author notes that literature is a culture's memory as not only does it record important events and experiences, but also is an entity aimed at commemorating actions that encompass knowledge stored by a culture. Thus, one of the important aspects of literature comes to the fore: its rich mnemonic paradigms that are fundamental for any culture (Lachmann, 2008, p. 301). Dwelling on the mnemonic aptitudes of literature we can assert that its main capacity is that of representing and transmitting knowledge. In R. Lachmann's view literature is both the bearer of actual knowledge and the transmitter of the

historical knowledge as it elucidates the intertextual links between literary and non-literary texts (ibid, p. 306).

Tackling the interconnection between cultural memory¹ and literature, R. Lachmann refers to Russian poet O. Mandelstam's² theory on cultural memory according to which past is perceived as becoming, as deferred meaning that neither was nor is, but is always projected into the future (Lachmann, 2008, p. 308). Otherwise stated, Mandelstam conceived culture as a type of macro-consciousness, adopting Begson's doctrines according to which human consciousness is inextricably intertwined with culture as a whole (ibid, p. 308). Thus, retrospection is an approach to history which is realized via writing. Through retrospection we try to experience historical, cultural events in general. Memory preserved in writing is aimed at maintaining the historical, cultural experience intact.

As mentioned above, literature is of paramount importance in terms of remembering and constructing one's identity. B. Neumann, dwelling on the interconnection between the memory and literatures, states the following: "Memory and processes of remembering have been an important, indeed, a dominant topic in literature. Numerous texts portray how individuals and groups remember their past and how they construct identities on the basis of recollected memories. They are concerned with the mnemonic presence of the past in the present, they re-examine the relationship between the past and the present and they illuminate the manifold functions that memories fulfill for the construction of identity" (Neumann, 200, p. 333). The dominant existence of memory in the literature pertaining to different epochs has prompted the literary critics to put forward the term fictions of memory. The term refers to texts that include texts of remembering retrospection (ibid., p. 334). In Neumann's view, in fictions of memory the act of remembering is elicited by the so-called "mimesis of memory" which refers to the array of narrative forms and aesthetic techniques used by authors to represent the characteristic peculiarities of memory (ibid, p. 334). Neumann goes on to suggest that the term "mimesis of memory" does not point to the mimetic characteristics of the literature, quite the contrary, it stresses its constructive feature. Authors writing works of fiction do not imitate the existing memory but in the act of discourse, create the past experiences that they want to portray (ibid, p. 334). In literary studies the common concept is that literature is not a closed system but rather an integral part of any culture as its main goal consists in shaping meanings, interacting

with the existent concepts. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that analyzing literary representations of memory can uncover the prevalent memorial concepts of any culture (Neumann, 2008). Literature as such is inextricably intertwined with other systems like psychology, historiography, law, religion, thus relying on the concepts of these areas. Literature introduces these prevalent concepts of memory in the aforementioned areas more aesthetically via a wide range of literary techniques.

Fictions of memory are introduced by a narrator or a figure that looks back on his/her past trying to construct the past from a present perspective. In regard to the specifics of fiction of memory B. Neumann states that the latter can shape an overview of coexisting collective memories (Neumann, 2008). B. Neumann goes on to claim that the confluence of individual viewpoints connects with the stability of the shared creation of meaning. The intersubjective validation of the individual perspectives offers an integrative image of the collective past and underscores the commonality of experience in terms of a collective identity (Ibid, p. 339).

As far as the collective memory is concerned, it should be noted that there is an absolutely opposite view put forward by S. Sontag: “Strictly speaking there is no such thing as collective memory – part of the same family of spurious notions as collective guilt. But there is collective instruction. All memory is individual, unreproducible – it dies with each person. What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that *this* (emphasis in the original) is important and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds” (Sontag, 2003p. 85 as cited in Giantsidis, 2018, p. 12).

S. Suleiman questions this viewpoint emphasizing that “memories are communicable”. She states that “if enough people consider a given set of individual memories significant then those memories contribute to the formation of collective memory precisely as the stipulation of what is important to a group at a given time” (Suleiman Rubin, 2006, p. 4 as cited in. Giantsidis, 2018, p. 12). Moreover S. Suleiman is adamant in stating that “the historical memoir that recounts an individual’s experiences in a time of collective crisis or trauma, memory or memorialization continue to be central preoccupations” (Suleiman Rubin, 2006, p. 8 as cited in Giantsidis, 2018, p. 13).

This viewpoint leads us to the question what trauma is and how it can be represented in a piece of fiction. In her work “Unclaimed Experience. Trauma

Narrative and History” Caruth touching upon the issue of traumatic experiences refers to the Freudian doctrine according to which, traumatic experiences are of recurrent nature and these repetitions of traumatic recollection are of special interest since the latter “seem not to be initiated by the individual’s own acts but rather appear as the possession of some people by a sort of fate, a series of painful events to which they are subjected, and which seem to be outside their wish or control” (Caruth, 1996, p. 2 as cited in Giantsidis, 2018, p. 14).

C. Caruth goes on to claim that Freud’s recourse to literature to illustrate traumatic experience is not random, quite the contrary, in Caruth’s opinion, “literature like psychoanalysis is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is indeed at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet” (Caruth, 1995, p. 3).

Drawing on the theoretical premises that literary texts and psychoanalysis can somehow converge, it becomes apparent that verbal or written recount of traumatic experiences can help an individual (or a whole nation) to come to terms with their painful past after which a healing process may begin. The Armenian Diaspora writers of second or third generation of Genocide survivors despite the fact that they have not been the immediate eyewitnesses of the Turkish massacres still suffer equally, as not only have they heard excruciating stories and experiences of their relatives but also, they suffer from the syndrome of lost faraway homeland, which in their mind symbolizes both horror and beauty. These writers’ attempts to depict the horrors that their ancestors were subjected to because of Turkish heinous modus operandi are conditioned by the fact that traumatic experiences are passed on from generation to generation, as unlike Germany, modern Turkey, being the direct inheritor of the Ottoman Empire has not recognized the atrocities of the Armenian genocide. The modern Turkish republic resorts to unorthodox methods to avert any possible action aimed at acknowledging the undeniable fact that the Armenian Genocide was indeed carefully planned and executed by the Ottoman authorities.

Trauma of the Armenian Genocide and the lost homeland in P. Balakian’s novel “Black Dog of Fate”

As mentioned above literature does serve as a powerful means of coping with trauma or shaping a collective identity. In this regard, it should be noted that P.

Balakian's novel is a vivid example of how even the third generations of the Armenian Genocide survivors try to find answers to the horrendous events that took place at the beginning of the 20th century. In his novel P. Balakian re-evaluates his family history and recounts the horrors of Genocide through his grandmother's memories. The matriarch of the family is a powerful figure in the novel as she is the connecting dot between the present and past, the one who is the bearer of the ancient Armenian civilization. It is thanks to his grandmother that P. Balakian comes to learn about his roots, the habits and lifestyle that Western Armenians had back in the time. As a child the author was rattled by certain things that seemed strange to him. In the first part of the novel the author discovers his grandmother smoking a pipe and finds it to be a strange habit. Trying to find out the reasons for this habit he asks his mother about it and his mother explains: "Oh in the old country, at a certain age, women smoke pipes at a certain age once in a while" (Balakian, 2009, p. 16). What follows is that the small boy is even more intrigued: "the answer unfurled more questions. *The old country*. That phrase came up now and then. A phrase that seemed to have a *lock* on it. I knew it meant Armenia, but it made me *uneasy*" (Balakian, 2009, p. 16). The author's wording of describing the *old country* is not random; old country in this case is a taboo topic as it has a lock on it and many survivors of the genocide try to avoid discussing the topic, moreover, they try not to traumatize the child by not dwelling on the painful past, i.e. Genocide. The use of the adjective "*uneasy*" indicates that even as a child Balakian knew that something terrible was connected with the *old country*.

Through rhetorical questions the author wants to understand what happened to the *old country*, why they cannot go there, etc., "If I lived in a house where the old country had still a presence, why wasn't there a map or photograph or a beautiful drawing of it somewhere like Zandonellas had of Milan in their TV room?" (Balakian, 2009, pp. 16-17). Even as child the author is baffled by the fact that there seems to be no trace of the old country which is his homeland. The comparison with the Italian family makes him even more bewildered, why isn't there a material piece of evidence i.e. a map, drawing for him to relate to his homeland? He's anxious to find answers to these questions, because to him the concept of the *old country* is too remote and vague. Not being able to understand the complexities of his nation's traumatic past he comes up with a solution on his own, "Since there was no picture of the old

country in our house and since I didn't have one etched in my mind, the old country CAME TO MEAN MY GRANDMOTHER. Wherever it was, she was. Whatever she was, it was". (Balakian, 2009, p. 17 capitalization by A. Madoyan). The child's association of lost homeland is with his grandma, because it is she who embodies the life and culture of Western Armenia. Thus, the grandmother's figure is omnipresent in the novel as the author identifies her with the "old country". Grandmother tells stories about Armenia she wants her grandchild to have a mental image of the lost homeland. The author himself states that her stories have dreamlike qualities about them. Again, the concept of homeland isn't a concrete one, but rather something abstract or even fictitious, "In Armenia, the elk is magic. With its horns like wild candelabra the elk was Adam's first partner in the Garden of Eden". (Balakian, 2009, p. 20). If we read between the lines of the narrative, we can say that like the Garden of Eden Armenia is lost forever. The country itself seems too far away and magical to exist for both the grandmother and the grandchild. His grandmother's stories help him to envisage his homeland, to learn some Armenian words e.g. "Mairig Asdvadzadzeen. It was a phrase that stuck with me. Mairig is "mother" in Armenian, and Asdvadzadzeen means of God" (Balakian, 2009, p. 23). The grandmother who was an eyewitness of the Armenian Genocide tries to cope with the trauma by telling tales about elk that comes every night to take her liver. Here evil elk can be identified with Turks who instill terrible fear in the woman. Moreover, as a child Balakian wouldn't understand the true meaning of elk and his grandmother's constant fear of being subjected to tortures, but as he himself mentions, "In time I would come to understand them as part of my grandmother's story, but only after I came to understand what had happened to her in 1915" (Balakian, 2009 p. 25). In this passage with retrospection Balakian reconstructs the family history, thus through the narrative of memory he communicates his nation's history and the atrocities it has been subjected to.

Balakian, reminiscing about the past, states that there are two types of memory - one of suburban bliss, "IN THE YEARS AFTER MY GRANDMOTHER'S DEATH I CAME TO DISCOVER there were two kinds of memory. One was a personal web of sensations. That was suburbia: good times, romance, sex, friendship and the body in motion. But I learned that there was another kind of memory too. A kind of memory that was connected to something larger than my life" (Balakian, 2009, pp. 28-30). The passage

introduced clearly indicates that the survivors of the Genocide do inherit the trauma of the atrocities despite the fact that they themselves haven't been an eyewitness or a direct sufferer of these actions. As a descendant of the Armenian Genocide survivor, he cannot live the suburban bliss, in this respect his grandmother's figure is a constant reminder that he needs to learn more about his past, "She imploded my present at the strangest moments, without constant provocation. She had become my *pakht* - the force of fate that called on me, whether I was ready or not, and who, like Lady Fate, was indifferent to my present moment, my station in life or my need for SECURITY and COMFORT. She was history knocking on the door of the heart" (Balakian, 2009, p. 31 capitalization by A. Madoyan). Balakian's grandmother represents the inevitability of learning about your own roots no matter how traumatizing it might be. The title of the book is not random either as it embodies the cruel fate that we Armenians have. In the passage above the concept of fate is associated with Balakian's grandmother- a survivor of the Armenian Genocide. Thus, in his memoirs the author perceives an Armenian's fate (*pakht*) as something inescapable that is always present.

The people who have inherited trauma may relive it under unexpected circumstances. Some unknown factors may trigger traumatic experiences. A case in point is the author's recollection of an incident when he was eleven years old. In the passage the author and his girlfriend are at the cinema and suddenly he remembers a time when he was ill and his grandmother was looking after him. Grandmother starts talking to herself reliving the gut-wrenching moments of her ordeal where every possible detail is etched in her mind: the horrible experience of violence and abuse (see Balakian, 2009, pp. 34-36). Certain words were clearly stored in his memory *Souk* (mourning in Armenian), *Turkish bath*, *Diarbekir*³, *Der Voghormya* (Lord have mercy in Arm.). As a young adult Balakian tries to figure out whether the excruciating details of his grandmother's torture are true, "Had I been a witness to a MEMORY of hers that it could only be said to me, an eleven-year-old half delirious with fever, lying in bed between darkness and light?" (Balakian, 2009, p. 36) The given extract evidences that traumatic memories like that of witnessing genocide and having been subjected to torture and abuse cannot be wiped out from a person's subconsciousness. Being a descendant of the Genocide survivor, Balakian himself is traumatized as the horrible memories are to be passed down from generation to generation and every one of them will

be trying to find answers to a simple question: “Why would a human being commit such atrocities make another human being suffer all the possible tortures in the world?”

As the narrative unfolds and Balakian gets older his family willingly or unwillingly talk to him about his background about the symbol of Armenia (Mt Ararat), but again none of them are capable to tell him about the GREAT TRAGEDY that his ancestors suffered. He as a young boy doesn't understand who Armenian is, where he comes from (Balakian, 2009, pp. 45-47).

Balakian's poem dedicated to his late Grandmother is an outburst of emotions expressed in the lines “I stared as always at the skin of your hands still discolored by the arid Turkish plain” (Balakian, 2009, p. 149). He himself is baffled by the last phrase of the poem the “arid Turkish plain” as he still doesn't know anything about the Armenian Genocide. The author explains it as an echo of the past that any bearer of trauma has. “This poem, then was a tremor from the unconscious - the historical unconscious the deep shared place of ancestral pain ... (Balakian, 2009, p. 149)”.

The Concept of food as an embodiment of the lost homeland in the novel

The memory of the Lost Homeland is also materialized with the help of food. In fact, the author refers to various Western Armenian dishes which embody the longing for the Old Country, and the horrendous events of the Armenian Genocide, “Food for us was a complex cultural emblem, and encoded script that embodies the long history and collective history of our Near Eastern culture. I didn't know that eating was also a drama whose meaning was entwined in Armenia's bitter history. In 1960 I hadn't even heard the phrase “starving Armenians...” (Balakian, 2009, pp. 52-53).

Food as such is a double-edged concept in Balakian's novel. On one hand Western Armenian dishes are scrumptious and enjoyable, on the other hand, they are the constant reminders of the starvation that victims of the Armenian Genocide experienced. Food also represents longing for the Lost Homeland as Armenian dishes (dolma) and beverages (tahn), dinner rituals are always there in the novel to rekindle the cultural memory of the family (Balakian, 2009, pp. 53-54). Balakian dedicates lengthy paragraphs to his mother's cooking who, in the author's opinion, remembered and retained her cultural past with the help of cooking, “At certain moments her unacknowledged cultural past became an

irrepressible force, a statement of beauty and sometimes rage that asserted itself in the name of things culinary, in the name of the kitchen, the inviolable sanctuary of a culture that had barely escaped extinction” (Balakian, 2009, p. 56). Balakian proceeds with the description of his mother’s cooking as a means of reconnecting to her past, to the things that help them remember who they are. In another passage of the novel the differences found in the eating habits of Armenians and Americans again lead the author to search for an answer to the question: “Who is he, where does he come from?” When he asks his mother why they don’t have casseroles for dinner his mother snaps, telling him that this is an American eating habit, nothing to do with them (Balakian, 2009, p. 57). Thus, as he states, “The old question had been dropped in my lap again? Weren’t we Americans?” (Balakian, 2009, p. 57) The author constructs his narrative in a way that trivial, ordinary things may trigger an identity crisis, since for his mother Armenian dishes, eating rituals materialize their homeland, but for Peter, who doesn’t know anything about his ancestors and homeland, they are merely things to be enjoyed, as he is still to discover the tragic truth about Armenia and his compatriots.

Family accounts of the Armenian genocide in “Black Dog of Fate”

P. Balakian carefully portrays the history of his family, closely intertwining it with the Armenian history as a whole. Firstly, he starts divulging the origin of his mother’s name which, “ARAX AROOSIAN. MY MOTHER’S NAME. A name of eastern Anatolia and the Southern Caucasus where the Araxes River flows from the Ararat plateau eastward” (Balakian, 2009, p. 64)

Balakian intentionally introduces etymological explanation of his mother’s name and family name for emphasizing his national identity. Here names are again a means to preserve the memory of the LOST HOMELAND. Balakian’s parents didn’t assimilate their name for the latter to sound pleasanter to the American ears, they didn’t want to lose touch with their past. Balakian depicts his relations with his family members, underscoring that each of them suffered the impact of the Armenian Genocide in their own way. Grandmother experienced torture and abuse firsthand, so her memory and trauma of those atrocities are the most vivid ones. However, Balakian’s mother does suffer too. She finds refuge in the kitchen as it is there that she finds peace and rekindles memories about her cultural past. Balakian’s father is described as cold and aloof. Both of them fail to bond which may be explained by the fact that his

father was a silent carrier of the burden that all Genocide victims suffered. In his novel, he describes him as someone who had several selves, which is also symptomatic of people with trauma (Balakian, 2009, pp. 94-95).

As a person, Balakian deeply felt the family tragedy, even without understanding its roots he senses pathological fear in his grandmother, who doesn't stop asking him about his well-being. (Balakian, 2009, p. 95). His grandmother, a victim and survivor of the Armenian Genocide, is the pillar of constructing the narrative of memory, as her trauma is always there. The passage exemplifies that those who experienced such unimaginable traumas never recover. In this respect C. Caruth mentions: "Is the trauma the encounter with death or the ongoing experience of having survived it?" In her view, "there is a double telling of traumatic events, the oscillation between the *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of survival?" (Caruth, 1996, p. 7). The incessant questions about her grandson's well-being, and pathological sense of fear are symptomatic of the fact that she retains the memory of the "unwitting" traumatic events of one's past (Ibid., p. 8).

The implications of the undiscussed trauma are ever present in the novel. On the one hand, the Balakians never discuss the topic of the Armenian Genocide, on the other hand, when Peter decides to write a paper on Turkey, it leads to an argument with his father. Balakian's father resents the idea of his son's paper on Turkey, but again no one seems to be capable of telling the truth as many victims find it impossible to do so (Balakian, 2009, p. 100). The Balakians' inability to voice their trauma is conditioned by the fact that none of them fully assimilated the tragic experience and were still haunted by them.

"Black Dog of Fate" is not just an account of a family history of Genocide survivors, but also the endowing victims of the Armenian genocide with voices to tell their stories posthumously. These people are not just one of the "lucky" survivors they have a story to tell, each of them has lost at least one or two family members. In the novel, each family member isn't just a faceless and vague "number" who somehow against all the odds managed to survive. They are human beings several of the "lucky survivors" who lost everything and had to live with indescribable trauma for the rest of their lives. In this case the author via family history narrates the history of the Armenian Genocide i.e. his technique is from specific (family history of the survivors of the Armenian genocide) to general (the Armenian Genocide as a horrendous historical event).

Thus, P. Balakian includes almost all his family members in his book. Each account is a painful and traumatic fragment of the ones who directly or indirectly were affected by the Armenian Genocide. Balakian, step by step reconstructs the horrible picture of the Armenian Genocide like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Dovey's account is one of the most horrible pieces of the jigsaw puzzle. Dovey starts her story with the graphic portrayal of the Armenian girls' torture by the Turkish gendarmes (Balakian, 2009, pp. 224-225), Dovey recalls the ordeal of deportation, the death of her mother who was unable to survive the inhumane treatment of Turks on their death road, how Turkish gendarmes raped and tortured her, how on the desert with her shredded dress and festering cuts she fell asleep (Balakian, 2009, p. 231) later to be abducted by a Kurdish nomad with whom she was forced to live for five years only later to escape and find freedom in New York.

Balakian's grandfather is another witness of the Armenian Genocide. He, as a doctor, had taken Hippocrates' oath and had to treat the same Turkish soldiers who were exterminating a whole nation: "A physician who had witnessed this century's first racial mass murder, who aided the victims in Adana in 1909 and served in the Turkish army during the war" (Balakian, 2009, p. 255). Another survivor of the Armenian Genocide who saw and experienced all the horrors firsthand would also be scarred for life. Later in his life Diran Balakian would develop an obsession with hand washing which is indicative of ever-present trauma: "I recalled what Freud said about hand washing – a compulsive reaction to death. A ritual to ward off death" (Balakian, 2009, p. 236).

Another influential figure in Balakian's novel is his aunt, an extremely intelligent woman who was really fascinated by French vanguard poetry. Balakian explains his aunt's fascination with the French poetry as follows: "Was my aunt's passion for French vanguard poetry of the 1920s and 30s separable from the Balakian voyage out of Turkey through Vienna, Geneva and Collonges? The Swiss wouldn't give us a visa, but the French took us in, she said" (Balakian, 2009, p. 257). The passage itself illustrates how the unspoken trauma can influence even a person's choice of professional interests. Balakian's aunt is always grateful to the French. For her they are true heroes who didn't hesitate to shelter so many survivors of the Armenian Genocide. Thus, not only does she like French but also anything that is connected with the French, in this particular case the French literature. Balakian himself ascribes

his aunt's infatuation with the French literature to their benevolent and kind treatment of Western Armenians.

In the novel many are the characters whose accounts of the Armenian Genocide leave the reader wondering about how such crimes against humanity remain unpunished even to this day. The author's personal memories vividly reflect that of the whole nation. Hence, the survivors' personal accounts of the genocide highlight the collective memory of all Armenians.

Conclusion

The role of literature in terms of shaping collective memory cannot be underestimated. The mnemonic paradigms of literature are of great importance as it is the literature that transmits historical knowledge to future generation. In this regard it should be stated that literary representations of memory can divulge the common concepts of any culture. Within the frames of the given article, we can see that literature is a powerful means for shaping a collective memory and discussing traumatic experiences. The underlying topic of the novel "Black Dog of a Fate" by P. Balakian is the Armenian Genocide, unspeakable trauma, identity crisis. Balakian's narrative is constructed in a way that via various stories that the survivors of the Armenian Genocide recount, the reader comes to have an insight into a general historical event i.e. the Armenian Genocide and its repercussions. As a young boy P. Balakian never understood the significance of the "old country" (*Armenia*) as his family were unable to talk about the unspeakable traumatic experience that they suffered. Moreover, the author always knew that there was something tragic about the "old country", a taboo that seemed to have a lock on it. His grandmother is one of the main characters of the novel, shaping the narrative. In fact, P. Balakian's fiction of memory unravels with the portrayal of his grandmother who firsthand suffered all the atrocities of Turks. The concept of the lost homeland i.e. the old country is omnipresent in the novel as, P. Balakian tries to find a material piece of evidence that will testify to its existence, being unable to find anything he finds refuge in his grandmother who embodies the lost homeland and is a link between the present and the past.

One of the remarkable highlights of the novel is that via trivial everyday situations the author communicates all the pain and suffering that the survivors of the Armenian Genocide experienced. Food as such is a double-edged sword as on the one hand Western Armenian cuisine is delicious, on the other hand it

reminds the Balakians of the “*old country*”, i.e. lost homeland and the Armenians’ starvation who died on the death marches. The title of the novel itself is symbolic as it alludes to the Armenians’ inescapable fate. The author himself clearly understands that as a descendant of the Armenian Genocide survivor his fate is different from that of other people.

Dwelling on the memories of the Genocide survivors, the author endows both the survivors and the victims with human voices, i.e. they aren’t just faceless figures whom Turks mercilessly tortured and killed, they are human beings whose stories are to be told and who are to be remembered by future generations. Balakian with retrospection narrates the excruciating details that the survivors of the Armenian Genocide experienced. The characters, be they close family members such as his grandmother, aunt and grandfather or a distant relative like Dovey) construct the narrative of the Armenian Genocide in the novel. Some of them suffer in silence, others have nervous meltdown triggered by some events. Furthermore, it becomes evident that even the second and third generations of the Genocide survivors are haunted by these unspeakable atrocities, e.g. Balakian’s mother finds refuge in the kitchen as Western Armenian food rekindles the memories of the lost homeland, whereas his father, as Balakian himself describes, has got different selves - a common feature among people with traumatic experience.

As the narrative of the novel unfolds, we realize that no trauma is cured unless the perpetrator has admitted to committing the atrocities, no survivor is capable of coming to terms with their tragic past if the “executioner” still denies the historical truth.

Notes

1. Jan Asmann defines cultural memory as the characteristic store of repeatedly used texts, images and rituals in the cultivation of which each society and epoch stabilizes and imports its self-image, a collectively shared knowledge of preferably (yet not exclusively) the past, on which a group bases its awareness of unity and character. Asmann J. “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity.” Trans. John Czaplicka. *New German Critique* 65 1995: 125-133.
2. Mandelstam himself adhered to Bergson’s notions of time, duration, evolution and memory.

3. A former Armenian province of Tigranakert in Ottoman Turkey. Many Armenians were forcibly relocated from other Ottoman vilayets to Diarbekir to be massacred there (Bablumyan, 2022).

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**ՀԱՅՈՑ ՑԵՂԱՍՊԱՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՀԻՇՈՂՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԸ
Փ. ԲԱԼԱՔՅԱՆԻ «ՃԱԿԱՏԱԳՐԻ ՍԵՎ ՇՈՒՆԸ»
ՀՈՒՇԱԳՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՈՒՄ**

Արփինե Մադոյան

Սույն հոդվածի խնդրո առարկան գրականության մենտնիկական գործառնությունների քննությունն է կոլեկտիվ հիշողություններ ստեղծելու համատեքստում: Փ. Բալաքյանի «Ճակատագրի սև շունը» հուշագրության հիմնական հերոսները Հայոց Ցեղասպանությունը վերապրած սփյուռքահայերն են, որոնք անասելի հոգեբանական տրավման հաղթահարելու ելք են փնտրում: Հուշագրության հիմնական թեմաներից են նաև կարոտը կորցրած հայրենիքի հանդեպ և ազգային ինքնության փնտրտուրը: Հուշագրության մեջ Փ. Բալաքյանը, ներկայացնելով իր ընտանիքի պատմությունը, նկարագրում է Հայոց Ցեղասպանության անասելի ոճիրները, որն իրականացրել է Օսմանյան Թուրքիան: Վեպի ուշագրավ առանձնահատկություններից է այն, որ ընթերցողը մեկ ընտանիքի մասին կարդալով՝ հասկանում է ամբողջ հայության ողբերգական ճակատագիրը: Հենց այստեղ է, որ իրացվում է գրականության համընդհանուր հիշողություն կերտելու գործառնությունը: Հեղինակի հերոսները անդեմ թվեր չեն, որոնք զոհ են դարձել թուրքական յաթաղանին, նրանցից յուրաքանչյուրը ունի պատմություն, որը երբեք մոռացության չպետք է մատնվի: Սույն աշխատանքով Փ. Բալաքյանը եկող սերունդներին է պատմում թուրքական կառավորության ոճիրները՝ այսպիսով ստեղծելով համընդհանուր հիշողություն ապագա սերունդների համար:

Բանալի բառեր՝ Հայոց Ցեղասպանություն, սփյուռքահայ արձակ, տրավմա, կորցրած հայրենիք, գրականություն, կորցրած ինքնության վերականգնում, համընդհանուր հիշողություն: