Collective Memory and Diasporic Articulations of Imagined Homes: Armenian Community Centres in Montréal

Lalai Manjikian
Graduate Program in Communication Studies
McGill University, Montréal
June 2005

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts

©Lalai Manjikian, 2005

Library and Archives Canada

Published Heritage Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque et Archives Canada

Direction du Patrimoine de l'édition

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-22608-7
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-22608-7

NOTICE:
The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:
L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

Abstract

This thesis examines the role of Armenian community centres, in relation to the local dwelling place of Montréal, the distant homeland, and the rest of the Armenian diaspora. Due to the staggering increase in migration and to the proliferation of transnational flows throughout the globe, our conception of home has substantially changed. Thus, what motivates immigrants to build and attend "diasporic dwellings" representative of their ethnicity in their new dwelling places? By describing the characteristics of the two largest Armenian community centres in Montréal, (the Armenian Community Centre and the ABGU Centre), I analyse how these mediated social spaces embody elements that represent a distant home, a diaspora, and the local dwelling place—complete with organizations, symbols, imagery, iconography, and language. Utilizing the methodology of participant observation and through conducting interviews, I demonstrate how members of the Armenian community living in Montréal, negotiate their multiple cultural identities through their involvement with Armenian community centres. Moreover, I discuss how the community centres articulate a collective memory in the present within Montréal's public sphere.

Cette thèse examine le rôle que les centres communautaires arméniens occupent, par rapport à la ville de Montréal, à la patrie éloignée et au reste de la diaspora arménienne. En raison d'une hausse remarquable de la migration et de la prolifération des liens transnationaux à travers le monde, la conception de notre lieu d'habitation a subi des changements considérables. Cette thèse examine pourquoi les immigrés sentent la nécessité de créer et de fréquenter ces demeures alternatives dans leurs nouvelles localités. En décrivant les caractéristiques des deux plus grands centres communautaires arméniens à Montréal, (le centre communautaire arménien de Montréal et le centre d'UGAB), j'analyse comment ces espaces sociaux négocient et incarnent les éléments qui représentent une patrie éloignée, une diaspora et la nouvelle localité- munis d'organismes, de symboles, d'iconographie, et de la langue. En utilisant la méthode de l'observation participative et par l'intermédiaire d'entrevues, je démontre comment les Arméniens qui vivent à Montréal, négocient de multiples identités culturelles, à travers leur participation à la vie communautaire. De plus, j'explique comment les centres communautaires expriment une mémoire collective dans la sphère publique de Montréal.

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Jenny Burman, my supervisor, for her unwavering support, patience, and guidance over the past two years. I have learned from her insightful knowledge and from the constructive comments she has provided regarding my work. She gave me solid direction and motivation throughout my coursework and thesis preparation. I deeply appreciated her ability to listen, her valuable perspectives, while providing me ample space to evolve. I am also grateful to Professor Burman for offering me the opportunity to work with her, as a research assistant. Not only did this experience expose me to exciting new facets of research, but provided financial support to pursue my studies through a research assistantship, that was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Standard Research Grant.

I would like to thank the six individuals I interviewed, for their willingness and time. Dr. Artin Arzoumanian, Ms. Lory Boudjikanian, Ms. Dania Ohanian, Mr. Azad Chichmanian, Mr. Roupen Kouyoumdjian, and Mr. Raffi Donabedian. Every single one of you graciously shared your views, allowing me to include a human dimension to my work. Also, I would like to thank the executive boards of the Montréal Armenian Community Centre and the AGBU Centre for their cooperation.

Finally, I am indebted towards my family for their unfaltering support, understanding, and love. Mom, Dad, you are truly remarkable individuals! Thank you so much for always being so supportive in all that I take on, for your constant encouragement, for always believing in me, and for showing me the value of hard work and perseverance. I would like to thank my brothers, Naraig and Sevak, and my sister-in-law, Margo, for their continuous support and for being such inspiring academic "role models!" In addition, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Naraig, for always being there for me, despite the distance and all his work.

I dedicate this thesis to anyone is this world who has been forced to leave their home(s) and especially to Mr. Khatcher Menakian, my grandfather, a survivor of the Armenian Genocide, born in Tomarza, 1910.

Table of Contents

Introduction- Evoking home	**1**
Chapter 1- Home	**14**
Chapter 2- Migration roots	**33**
Chapter 3- Community	**43**
Chapter 4- Extended homes	**76**
Chapter 5- Collective memory	**117**
Conclusion- Revisiting home	**130**
Bibliography	**136**

Introduction: Evoking home

It seems to me that I would always be better off where I am not, and this question of moving is one of those I discuss incessantly with my soul.

-Charles Baudelaire

I remember being invaded by a sense of bewilderment at the age of 8 when I read the words "Parc de l'Arménie"[1] inscribed on a municipal sign carrying the City of Montréal's emblematic red logo. I was accustomed to seeing such signs standing tall at the edges of green spaces across this new city, typically bearing names like "Parc Lafontaine" or "Parc Jeanne-Mance" on them. That particular spring day in 1988, as the park was being inaugurated, I was surprised to see "Armenia"— a far away mythic land I vaguely knew of— right in my own neighborhood. Although I had never been to my so-called homeland at the time and had only encountered Armenia through mediated images and narratives, it felt as though the City of Montréal had, in a sense, acknowledged my ethnic existence by virtue of naming a park after Armenia. I was not capable of fully grasping my astonishment at the time; but I now explain the park's inauguration as a gesture of multicultural recognition on behalf on the City of Montréal. The inauguration of the park reincarnates Charles Taylor's perception of recognition, explored in his essay *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition,* (1992) where he stresses how, "Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence." (p.25). Having immigrated to Canada only a year before in 1987, Montréal had become my new

home, and I recall my transition being seasoned with both ambivalence and excitement. Leaving people and a former home behind surely created a rupture. Nonetheless, I needed to start feeling a part of this new and seemingly welcoming society, while grappling with my inherited "Armenianness." Perhaps this gesture of dedicating a city park after a country that supposedly carries some sort of ethnic belonging, contributed to making me feel more at home in this city shortly after my arrival, as it fulfilled my need, in a Taylorian sense, to feel recognized in a new dwelling place.

Through this thesis, I seek to comprehend the dynamics of Armenian community centres in Montréal, and whether the perception of them representing extended homes is still valid within the current transnational context. Furthermore, one of my objectives is to outline how these spaces reconcile the local dwelling place of Montréal with other diasporic communities and Armenia. Finally, I seek to examine the ways, in which these mediated spaces, or diasporic dwellings, embody collective memory.

Questioning my own identity, negotiating a sense of belonging, and attempting to determine my home have become elements that are intrinsically inscribed in me. My roots are Armenian, but my immediate attachments and my day-to-day reality are in Montréal. Therefore, I suppose I am Canadian-Armenian, or perhaps Armenian-Canadian. On the other-hand Québecois-Armenian may define me more adequately. I was not born here, however, and the hyphens I apply are inconclusive. My place in the disapora fluctuates, leaving me to wonder if establishing myself back in the motherland— *Mayr Hayasdan* as it is referred to in Armenian— would stabilize my identity, if such a thing is even possible.

How do immigrants and individuals with ethnic backgrounds interact with the city of Montréal? More particularly, what role do ethnic community centres play in Montréal in relation to the local dwelling place of Montréal, to the distant homeland and to the rest of the Armenian diaspora? Through this thesis, I will examine how the mediated spaces of Armenian community centres allow individuals to interact between various temporal instances and spatial locales on a daily basis. After portraying these diasporic dwellings or centres, I will then discuss the dynamics of collective memory and how it is articulated within Montréal's public sphere. In order to instigate this discussion, I must rely on definitions of cultural identity, it being the groundwork I will build on.

Stuart Hall (1996) perceives "identity" as going beyond the constructed notion based on recognition of common origin or shared characteristics with another group or person, resulting in a natural closure of solidarity and allegiance based on this premise. Instead, he explains the construction of identity as being an ongoing process. According to Hall, identities are the names we give the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past.[2] "Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past," he contends, "they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power."[3] In elaborating on Caribbean identity, Hall defines "cultural identity" through two perspectives. His first definition consists of understanding identity as a collective, a shared history among individuals affiliated by race or ethnicity that is considered to be fixed or stable. In his own words, Hall (1996) posits:

> 'Cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. [...] our

> cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes, which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging, and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. (p.234)

As a second definition, Hall suggests that cultural identity is seen as "unstable, metaphoric, and even contradictory- an identity marked by multiple points of similarities as well as differences" (p.233). Hall writes: "Cultural identity in the second sense is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'" (p.236). A stagnant cultural identity is unthinkable under the circumstances of movement, displacement and relocation we live in. Hall is always careful to point out that cultural identities stem from history and contends that like everything which is historical, these identities undergo constant transformations. The notion of cultural identity within the diaspora suggested by Hall may explain why I feel the need to define myself in relation to the past. He insists that cultural identity is not an essence, but rather a *positioning*. (Hall, 1996, p.237). I was born in a surrogate country to which I have no affective connections, leaving me to oscillate in a diaspora. Therefore, I turn to the past in order to understand. Positioning myself vis-à-vis this past has allowed me to gain insight as to who I am and where I come from. Hall stipulates that "cultural identities are the points of identification, or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture" (p.237). The cultural and historical rhetoric most Armenians grow up with is tainted by a history of uprootedness, displacement, and genocide that has led to human, cultural, and territorial loss. Therefore, Armenian cultural identity remains highly intertwined with the past, with loss appearing on the foreground of cultural identity, complemented with a desire to survive and rebuild.

In terms of defining cultural identity within a diaspora, Hall elaborates on why we cannot speak of Caribbean identities with any exactness, about "one experience, one identity" without recognizing its other side: the ruptures and discontinuities, which precisely constitute the Caribbean "uniqueness" (p.236). Two axes characterize this dialogic relationship according to him: the first axis is comprised of *similarity* and *continuity*; and second axis is comprised of *difference* and *rupture* (Hall, 1996, p.237).

Armenian identity is also marked by continuity and similarity, due to a strong attachment to the past. At the same time, however, discontinuity surfaces as a result of the massacres, deportation, and loss suffered by Armenians following the Genocide at the beginning of the 20th century. In fact, "the genocide of the Armenians in 1915 was the first of the modern ideologically-motivated genocides" (Hovanessian, 1990, p. 249). During the post-Genocide period, the ensuing creation of Armenian communities, which can be considered to be the pillars of the Armenian diaspora, did create a sense of dispersed continuity, marked by differences as well as similarities, due to the different parts of the world Armenians live in throughout the diaspora. This nuance is crucial, because it positions an Armenian living in Marseilles, in Montréal, and in Yerevan[4], as being "*both* the same *and* different" (Hall, 1996, p.238). They have a similar history in common, with the Genocide as one of the central destabilizing elements (at least during this past century), yet the living conditions, diverse day-to-day realities, and external societal influences of their respective current dwelling places create a rupture. As a result, continuity and discontinuity are in constant tension throughout the Armenian disapora.

Why is it that I tend to identify myself as an Armenian who is a member of the diaspora, which is a perspective that simultaneously limits and enriches my identity? I cannot deny, however, that I speak, read, and write Armenian, this obscure Indo-European language. Nor can I claim to remain unmoved when the mysticism of a liturgy conceived during the 4th century AD leaves me feeling completely entranced. What is to be said about the few lines I can recite from dead Armenian poets about the splendor of a legendary lost land and about a yearning to return? Finally, why does my sense of time and space become oblivious when my body articulates ancestral dances?

For countless immigrants, such expressions of cultural, spiritual, and national belonging that are linked to home and that take place within diasporic dimensions tend to be deeply inscribed within nostalgic figurations because they are performed miles away from either real or imagined homes. These "performances" of home that entail geographic distance and tensions between the past and present can be viewed through Andreas Huyssen's (2003) paradigm of memory, when he writes, "today we think of memory as a mode of re-presentation and as belonging ever more to the present" (p.3). Intrigued by the cultural expressions and performances of a simultaneously local and distant home within a diasporic context, I will consider how these performances delineate the creation of ethnic boundaries and are expressed through cultural interactions and localizations within new dwelling places, such as Montréal. The diasporic predicament, after all, does entail a theatrical aspect pertaining to home, with representations of distant places and pasts unfolding in the local present. Jenny Burman (2001) describes such diasporic representations as follows:

> The language of scenes works insofar as diasporic public spheres involve the theatricality of what we think of as ethnicity. They stage the scene of another place, but at the same time create the scene of intertextuality—though, for instance, codes addressing the boundary between inside and outside, belonging and unbelonging (p.196).

In this sense, as Montréal becomes a new dwelling place for immigrants, the city cannot simply serve as a passive backdrop for citizens constructing their new lives. Rather, it is essential to consider Montréal's participation as a primary actor in these performances. In doing so, uncovering the nature of these expressions of home can also be instrumental in understanding how these performances interact with the new society in question. Are these performances calls for recognition, resistance, or simply remembrance? Perhaps in certain cases, the answer lies in a combination of all three elements. Despite this ongoing struggle for recognition of the past, Armenians are no longer under a direct threat of physical annihilation in North America as they were during the beginning of the 20th century in their ancestral lands. Therefore, what is the *raison d'être* of these ethnic community centres in Montréal today? Are they simply acting as fortresses against assimilation or do these spaces actually engage with host society?

According to Pnina Werbner (2002), "traditionally, diasporas derive their imaginative unity from sacred time-space chronotopes of shared genesis, homelands, sacred centres and cataclysmic events of suffering (dispersion, genocide, slavery)" (p.11). In this sense, one can perceive the loss and trauma brought on by the Armenian Genocide and the continual denial by its perpetrators as being a uniting factor for Armenians dispersed around the world and thus

recognizable through similar performances throughout the Armenian diaspora.

Building community centres in Middle Eastern cities was an initial response to the loss and uprootnedess resulting from the massacres and deportations carried out by the authorities of the Ottoman Empire. In fact, once the Armenian survivors gradually moved out of refugee camps in Aleppo and Beirut, from the 1920s and on, they embarked on a process of rebuilding their lives and homes. Besides losing family members and belongings, they no longer inhabited their ancestral lands and homes. As a result, Armenians began to establish community centres, which revolved around churches and schools, in host societies that granted asylum to Armenian refugees. This trend of establishing community centres initially began in the Middle East, thus creating a considerable diaspora, that later spread to European and North American cities, with increasing immigration to the West due to the political and economic upheavals in the Middle East. Such community centres created microcosms of "Armenianness" that served as a support system and coping mechanism during the mournful period following the Genocide. After the 1960s, however, the purpose of these centres shifted from being a symbol of survival to being a home that encompassed Armenian spiritual, educational, and cultural preservation, and especially political activism. The aim of this political struggle was primarily for host countries to recognize the Armenian Genocide, which Turkey continues to refute to this day.

Amid the constructions and performances of cultural identity, as well as the reality of belonging to multiple geographic locations, I speculate that most Canadians of Armenian origin and especially Armenian immigrants perhaps do

encounter some hesitation when attempting to determine where home is located. Immigrants, particularly those belonging to a diaspora, constantly travel and maintain emotional as well as economic ties with their land of origin, thereby accentuating this paradoxical condition of "in-betweenness."

In this regard, Pierre Bourdieu (2004) writes the following on the place of the immigrant in society:

> Like Socrates as described by Plato, the immigrant is *atopos*, has no place, and is displaced and unclassifiable. The comparison is not simply to ennoble the immigrant by virtue of the reference. Neither citizen nor foreigner, not truly on the Same nor really on the side of the Other, he exists within that "bastard" place, of being. (p.xiv)

Bourdieu's harsh categorization reflects a certain reality for a number of immigrants who find themselves caught between a previous dwelling place and a potentially hostile new home. In reality, they belong to neither one, thus experiencing a *double absence* (Sayad, 1974/2004), or I would add, perhaps even a *double existence*. To increase the ambivalence, the vague official Canadian multiculturalism rhetoric introduces a self-defeating manner of assimilation. Multicultural models encourage integration and the establishment of a sense of belonging to Canadian society, while fostering cultural retention, which can contribute to the creation of cultural ghettos. Inevitably, however, all depends on an individual's effort and willingness to integrate, as well as the welcoming and/or assimilative policies of any given new dwelling place. In any event, with the increasing convenience of travel and the speed of communication technologies, maintaining several homes around the world has become a natural trend, whether in the diasporic sense or not. Still, can immigrants who belong to a diaspora easily

abandon their allegiances to their homeland? To what extent is this possible, considering that Canada tends to welcome various non-threatening expressions of ethnicity, such as folkloric festivals and the establishment of ethnic community centres that foster these allegiances? Besides personal and emotional attachments to a country of origin, nationalistic as well as nostalgic discourses usually come to fuel feelings of attachment to the country left behind.

Furthermore, when we address the phenomenon of "immigration," we tend to focus solely on the entry of immigrants into a new country, leaving the motivations and circumstances of departure in the shadow. In the 1970s, however, in reference to Algerians immigrating to France, Abdelmalek Sayad acknowledges the holistic approach to studying immigration in a book entitled *The Suffering of the Immigrant*. This work assembles his research results compiled over the years, which consists of countless interviews recording immigrants' experiences. According to Sayad (1974/2004), "one cannot write on the sociology of immigration without, at the same time and by that very fact, outlining sociology of emigration. [...] The two are indissociable aspects of a single reality, and one cannot be explained without reference to the other."(p.1) In this regard, Sayad's dialectical model sheds light on why immigrants, tend to construct model "dwellings" within the cultural, ethnic, religious and racial realms throughout urban centres of new locales— as these spaces physically and emotionally compensate for distant homes left behind. Having established this fact, does an immigrant belonging to a disapora ever succeed in resolving this negotiation between homeland and new dwelling place, considering the inherent tensions between the two spatial and temporal realities? Marshall McLuhan's

projected notion of the global village has become a reality and surely has contributed to modifying our understanding of time and space, due to the increase of speed in communication technologies, information, and transportation. This global village nonetheless, encompasses the precise "homes" that are part of complex diasporic networks and configurations that transcend boundaries. Thus, there is an unprecedented multiplication of dwellings taking place, along with considerable reinforcements between new dwelling places and homeland, regardless of distance. Naturally, this multiplication of homes only complicates the matter, when one is faced with having to negotiate where they belong, because each dwelling entails a new set of networks, dynamics, and realities.

In order to gain tangible insight into immigrant realities and how a number of them retain ties to ancestral origins and homelands while negotiating belongings to a new dwelling place, I have chosen to examine Armenian community centres in Montréal and how Armenians negotiate a sense of belonging through performances of collective memory that are channeled through the specific sites of their community centres. The two specific centres studied here are the Montréal Armenian Community Centre and the Armenian General Benevolent Union Centre (AGBU). By understanding the local diasporic practices, I wish to then understand the larger picture of the Armenian diaspora. In fact, David Morley argues, "it is precisely through such detailed "local" studies that we will most effectively grasp the significance of the processes of globalization and internalization that have been widely identified as central to contemporary culture" (p.319). This view coincides with Arjun Appadurai's (1996) proposed vision of ethnography that aims to capture the impact of

deterritorialization on the imaginative resources of lived experiences. In other words, he suggests that ethnography unravels the nature of locality as a lived experience in a globalized, deterritorialized world. Thus, the global flows of symbols, people, information, and finance do, in fact, characterize the local; which in turn, can then create repercussions on a global level. This inevitable reciprocity echoes Anthony Giddens's view of globalization as he writes that this phenomenon "can thus be defined as the intensification of the world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (Giddens in Pries, 2001, p.13).

In order to engage in this discussion of dwellings across borders, I find Basch and Glick-Schiller's definition of transnationalism useful. They write:

> We define "transnationlism" as the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. We call these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders." (in Pries, 2001, p.18)

Thus, I examine how members of ethnic groups, particularly members of the Armenian community living in Montréal, attempt to make themselves "at home" through the creation of diasporic dwellings, as they negotiate both global and local realities. Within this sphere of transnationality, immigrants build new homes— spaces that recall their previous dwellings— and consequently "try to mould [them] in their own image" (Miller, 2000, p.1). Stuart Hall argues that we can perceive "mass media as vehicles of culture, as modes of imagining and imaging communities"(Ginsburg, 2002, p.360). It might be that spatial extensions

and embodiments of homeland, such as community centres, can also act as cultural vehicles within a diasporic context. Nonetheless, one cannot neglect the role that the new dwelling place plays in the construction of these “remodeled” homes.

Chapter 1: Home

> The worst feeling in the world is the homesickness that comes over a man occasionally when he is at home.
>
> -Edgar Watson Howe

Yearning for home

In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym (2001) writes that, "When we are home, we don't need to talk about it. To feel at home is to know that things are in their places and so are you; it is a state of mind that doesn't depend on an actual location" (p.251). While it is true that home remains independent of location, Boym's statement excludes the growing plurality of what home represents within a transnational context. Boym's formulation does not recognize the existence of more than one home. These multiplications of dwellings, which are a consequence of flows, add new intricacies to the notion of one's belonging. In order to better conceptualize the ethos of home, it is imperative to consider the flows of people that constitute the homes in question and to understand the social, economic, and historic factors behind the creation of these new dwellings.

We tend to ignore the complexities that home can entail for individuals who are constantly in transit, who have been uprooted, displaced or simply relocated. Regardless of where one designates their home(s), what does it mean to "feel at home" in a world where the location and the meaning of dwelling fluctuate amid transnational flows? These proliferating flows of individuals, capital, labour, and information have subsequently come to subvert these

oversimplified explanations and inscribe new dimensions and subjectivities to the notion of home on a global level.

Due to the continuing spread of mass migration that is motivated by political and economic instability, increasing ethnic cleansing, and refugee crises, millions of individuals have found themselves constructing new dwellings, either by choice or by force. Consequently, exiles and migrants with different religious, ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds find themselves living far away from their homelands. This distance inevitably compels them to establish alternative homes in their new locale.

This thesis will analyse the creation of such alternative homes in new dwelling places. More specifically, I will examine the establishment of Armenian community centres situated in Montréal and how these spaces physically and symbolically articulate home, while constructing collective memory within the public sphere. By analyzing how these mediated social spaces embody elements that represent a distant home—complete with organizations, symbols, imagery, iconography, and language—I will demonstrate how such spaces reconcile a community's local reality with a distant homeland, by simultaneously disseminating and reinforcing collective memory.

With the aim of deciphering some of my proposed questions, I will examine the two major Armenian community centres in Montréal. The first is the Armenian General Benevolent Union Centre that is located in Ville Saint-Laurent and the second is the Armenian Community Centre of Montréal that is situated in Ahuntsic-Cartierville. By analyzing the role of these two diasporic community centres, I attempt to conceptualize how Canadian-Armenians construct and

negotiate a sense of "belonging to a homeland" while residing in Montréal, Québec, Canada. I seek to understand how inclusive the Armenian community centres are in their inherent exclusivity. Put differently, what are some of the ways these ethnic centres interact with various facets of local Montréal life, while the principle of cultural retention tends to remain at the forefront of such spaces?

Methodology

To carry out this study, I have utilized participant observation as one of my main methods of research. Danny L. Jorgensen (1989) writes that participant observation methodology "aims to provide practical and theoretical truths about human existence" (p.16). Furthermore, this method requires that the researcher becomes "directly involved as a participant in people's daily lives. By doing so, this allows the researcher "to observe from the standpoint of a member or insider" (Jorgensen, 1989, p.20). Kathleen M. DeWalt and Billie R. DeWalt (2002) define this methodology as follows:

> Participant observation is a method in which the researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture. (p.1)

By adopting this particular methodology that is "accepted almost universally as the central and defining method of research in cultural anthropology" (K. & B. de Walt, 2002, p.1), I seek to have a better understanding of the Armenian community centres and the people who revolve around them. Although direct observation and experience are primary methods of data collection, a researcher also usually uses other strategies, such as conducting interviews, having informal

conversations, being exposed to life histories, collecting artifacts and various communication documents. (de Walt & de Walt, 2002, p.23)

One of the components in the participant observation methodology that I use consisted of conducting in-depth interviews, which adds a personal dimension to the theoretical research. Other components consist of visiting the centres, attending various formal and informal functions, collecting brochures that reveal the history, the mission, and the types of activities of the centres, as well as consulting the websites of the organizations working within the respective community centres.

In terms of the theoretical framework, I delve into various inter-related themes surrounding the Armenian community centres located in Montréal. These themes include the duality of "home"/homeland, migration, diaspora, notions of nostalgia, community, collective memory, and social space. In fact, I also explicitly address these notions throughout the interviews with community members and leaders. Thus, the theoretical framework, along with the results from the method of participant observation, will allow me to analyse the empirical data collected. I then revisit the main theories and juxtapose my findings with the qualitative research that I have compiled.

In *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, a book outlining research surrounding the sociology of immigrants, Pierre Bourdieu states in the preface that, "Epistemological principles and methodological precepts are, in this case, of little help unless they can be based upon more profound discourses that are, to some extent, bound up with both ***experience*** and a ***social trajectory*** (emphasis added)" (Sayad, 1974/2004, p.xiii). In this regard, I must also turn to Michel Foucault,

who makes the following argument "that our notions of 'experience' have themselves been constructed and that our very notion of the subject itself bespeaks subjection to forces of domination rather than autonomy and freedom" (Press, 1996, p.118).

Diasporic Performances of Home

In his book *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai (1996) offers useful insight into the realms of theory and methodology when discussing ethnography within a transnational context. While my method is not ethnography, I find his theories applicable to this particular research. He examines how we can turn to cultural representations as primary material to construct and interrogate our own representations. My proposed research therefore considers the space of community centres as a representation of culture, as it encompasses various cultural elements, while acting as a bridge between the homeland, other diasporic communities, and the new locale. Put differently, what are the social implications of these spaces as they mediate between the past and present and between local dwelling and a distant homeland? How do these elements overlap, contradict, or function in parallel to each other? Using the community centre as a source of primary material allows me to analyse various cultural elements that contribute to maintaining a collective memory within transnationality. Some of the elements I consider are the organizational formulations, architecture, symbols, imagery, and commemorative performances within these centres.

Arjun Appadurai (1996) calls the landscape of group identity "ethnoscape," and defines it as "the landscape of persons who constitute the

shifting world in which we live" (p.33). Thus, Armenians living in Montréal can be considered as constituting an ethnoscape, according to Appadurai's definition. In outlining the term "ethnoscape," however, he points out the dilemmas of perspective and representation that all ethnographers must face. He then goes on to state that traditions of perception and perspective, as well as the observer's situation, affect the process and product of representation. Appadurai provides various observations on the cultural reproduction of group identity and ethnography. He writes, "As groups migrate, regroup in new locations, reconstruct their histories and reconfigure their ethnic projects, the *ethno* in ethnography takes on a slippery and non-localized quality" (Appadurai, 1996, p.48). Contrary to Appadurai's point, I argue that the ethnic spaces of Armenian community centres in Montréal are sites where a localized quality *par excellence* exists and is firmly embedded. Put differently, the social space of a community centre embodies elements of a real or imagined homeland in a localized and materialized manner, because it contains organizational formulations and cultural artifacts that mediate between the home locally and the home abroad. This effort to solidify and concretize the abstract quality of diasporic identity is an important element for Armenians who are a people dispersed across the globe. Thus, the mediated spaces of community centres not only provide nostalgic comfort through reminiscent symbolism of a far away home, but such spaces also ease the anchoring process of individuals into the new dwelling place: the community members become a surrogate family and the space becomes an extension of home. I do not, however, perceive the *raison d'être* of these spaces limited to the expression of a home. Instead, I seek to complicate and challenge this clichéd

association of community centres.

To describe home as four walls with a roof is a narrow definition. Home can equally be a tent, a trailer, a mansion, a forest, or a container. It can be a park bench or virtually any location where a sense of belonging is established within the dimensions of space and time. For the sake of this thesis, however, I have defined "home" as the way an ethnicity bears concrete notions of cultural identity and how collective memory is embodied and channeled through the space of community centres. For decades, community centres have provided a physical space for people with similar religious, ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds to converge and interact with local reality as well as distant homelands. Various cultural markers are expressed through territorial and physical articulations. For example, the presence of an Armenian flag or a typical architectural structure that dates from a specific historical era delimits and identifies the space as being representationally different and, in this case, "Armenian."

In the making of any diaspora, there is a display of identification that echoes Tölölyan's call to analyse "the embeddedness of diasporic subjectivities," the sites of "double and multiple consciousness, in structures of diasporic polity and collective being" (Werbner, 2002, p.4). This can only be achieved, highlights Pnina Werbner (2002), through "doing" or more broadly through *performance* (p.11). Over the years, Armenian community centres have become a concrete site where many of these performances that reinforce individual and group identity come to life. Moreover, I perceive these performances in the numerous networks that have been established, and through the circulation of Armenian cultural and popular artifacts, intellectual property and media between the Republic of

Armenia and the diaspora. Ideologies of a common past and destiny are what connect the circuits of travelers and goods, link diasporic communities to each other and reinforce the imaginative characteristics of diaspora. Moreover, Avtar Brah and James Clifford (1996) write of historically contingent social formations that are experienced from different subject positions, such as class, gender, and political orientation, that comes into play when discussing diaspora.

Moreover, what Werbner (2002) proposes as a radical method of rethinking diaspora entails "a recognition that the imagination of diaspora is constituted not merely by aesthetic products—novels, poems or films—but also by a compelling sense of *moral co-responsibility* and *embodied performance,* extended through and across national boundaries." (p.11). An example cited by Werbner is the voluntary work and philanthropic gestures provided for over half a century by British Pakistani settler-citizens in the UK with the objective of building a diasporic community oriented towards its homeland, Pakistan. Similarly, the Armenian organizational structure throughout the diaspora mostly relies on this "sense of moral co-responsibility and embodied performance," whether by providing humanitarian aid to poverty-stricken orphans in Armenia, or by organizing the annual April 24th demonstration on Parliament Hill in Ottawa to commemorate the Armenian Genocide. By engaging in "constant practical ideological work," Werbner (2002) also describes how the invisible organic intellectuals of diasporic communities contribute to "marking boundaries, creating international networks, articulating dissenting voices, lobbying for local citizenship right or international human rights-while at the same time, they re-inscribe collective memories and utopian visions in their public ceremonials or

cultural works" (p.11).

Ancestral Homes

Underlying most ethnic communities are the ancestral ties that bind members to each other through a common history. In fact, some individuals bestow nostalgic characteristics on ancestral lands, inscribing them with mythical and romanticized aspects, inspired for instance either by the beauty of the landscape or the heroic history of a certain region. Nostalgic feelings toward ancestral lands continue to affect Armenians today, because they do not have access to these lands, but are conditioned by the history of these places. Nina Glick Schiller and Georges Fouron (2001) contend "Wherever their networks extend, transmigrants remain tied to their ancestral land by their actions as well as their thoughts". For the Armenians living throughout the diaspora, ancestral land is just one of the elements used to outline notions of homeland, subsequently consolidating attachments, providing orientation, as well as motivation for some of the activities conducted within community centres. Conveniently, some tales associated with ancestral lands are in the realms of myths that circulate with more ease and speed than ever, that nurture collective identity, and that reinforce belonging within communities in the transnational setting. Anthony Smith analyses the relationships between homeland and myth in his book entitled *Myths and Memories of the Nation*. He is interested in myths and symbols, particularly in their potential for group identity and collective action. Smith (1999) stipulates that both groups and individuals can "make sense" of their relocation only in terms of myth or ethnic descent. He writes,

> By placing the present in the context of the past and of the community, the myth of descent interprets present social and collective endeavours in a manner that satisfies the drive for meaning by providing new identities that seem to be also very old, and restoring locations, social and territorial, that allegedly were the crucibles of those identities. (p.57)

This archaic and essentialist perception of ancestral land is increasingly losing its validity within the context of everyday life practices in new dwelling places. Armenians living in the diaspora have more direct access to the contemporary social problems in present-day Armenia, which have a higher priority than the status of the unattainable ancestral lands that are currently in Turkey. Nonetheless, Smith does accord considerable importance to the distinction between different modes of ethnic myth-making and he highlights that it is useful to distinguish myths of genealogical ancestry from those that trace a more ideological descent. Myths stemming from a certain ideology can be perceived as fueling what Glick Schiller and Fouron refer to as "long-distance nationalism." This type of nationalism tends to generate an emotional attachment that is strong enough to compel people to engage in political action that ranges from displaying a flag of a home country to deciding to "return" to fight and die in a land they may have never seen.

Homesick

In her book *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym (2001) addresses the following perplexing question "How can one be homesick for a home that one never had?"(p.xiii) Many transmigrants, whether or not they relate to a real or imagined homeland, may encounter nostalgia, as they adjust to their new locale.

In fact, the community centre plays a pivotal role in reinforcing nostalgic feelings, through commemorative activities, imagery, cultural references and events that evoke the homeland. Eventually, when one does finally "return" to the imagined homeland, a striking discrepancy surfaces between myth and reality. While there is undoubtedly an indoctrinating discourse surrounding the notion of homeland, complete with songs, stories, and images that recall a "home" and a sense of belonging, the credibility of this homesickness is questionable. To what extent is this homesickness a concocted indoctrination, possibly fueling nationalist discourse? Does it differ from justifying our basic need to "belong"?

In an era when one constantly questions notions of belonging, there is an undeniable multiplication of "homes away from home," possibly amplified by the very notion of a circulating nostalgia. Paradoxically, the compression of time and space brought forth by the advent of new technologies has contributed to the increase in wanting to affiliate with more than one home. This phenomenon can be justified by what Boym (2001) calls "a global epidemic of nostalgia, an effective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world" (p.xiv). Just as cultural institutions, such as museums, and media, such as film, have been able to represent another time and space, ethnic community centres tangibly reduce time and space, as these centres articulate nostalgic representations of the distant homeland and various historical moments that feed into the community's collective memory. In an article pertaining to a Puerto Rican Cultural Centre in Chicago, Rachel Rinaldo (2002) writes, "The nostalgic image of a Puerto Rican homeland and its history animates cultural expressions in the United States and is a focal point for urban Puerto

Rican communities such as Humboldt Park"(p.161). Similarly, Armenian community centre space tend to exhibit nostalgic images of what can be called identity-forming symbols, such an images of Mount Ararat or portraits of Armenian literary figures who were killed during Genocide of 1915.

Although where we designate our homes to be is undoubtedly within the realm of individual choices and beliefs, it must be acknowledged that the notion of a single home is increasingly losing its permanency amid today's globalizing trends, a reality that Boym's formulations regarding home is lacking. This notion of a single home that Boym's formulation contends is obsolete and is being replaced by belonging to multiple locations amid growing transnational connections and trends of global citizenship. Community centres established by immigrants in new dwelling places emerge in counterpoint, as a permanent home for displaced people who have relocated in these regions, or who were born outside of their homeland.

The Necessity for Nostalgia

Nostalgia is an important, as well as personal element in the experience of immigrants, as Andreea Ritivoi (2002) outlines in her book *Yesterday's self: Nostalgia and the immigrant identity*. How does this cultural identity expressed within community centres throughout the diaspora emerge in relation to nostalgia towards a real or imagined homeland? From a linguistic standpoint, if we were to break up the word nostalgia, we can arrive at an initial definition. *Nostos* means "a return home" and *algia* means "longing." In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym (2001) defines nostalgia as "a longing for a home that no longer exists or

has never existed" (p.xiii). She expresses it as being a "sentiment of loss and displacement, but also a romance with one's own fantasy" (p.xiii). Boym points out the notoriously elusive nature of nostalgia as she questions: is it the longing of another place, another time or even a better life? She goes on to describe that individuals who experience nostalgia believe they long for a place (p.xiv). More than simply being a place, however, she points out that it is "a yearning for a different time—the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams." In a sense, nostalgia is a sort of rebellion against the anxiety of time, the time of history, progress, and its irreversability. Another important aspect that is part of nostalgic sentiment is the intrinsic long-distance relationship. Being dispersed throughout the world, Armenians find themselves choosing to nurture, reject, or vary the degree of involvement with the inherently long-distance relationship between their diasporic dwellings and Armenia. In fact, the majority of Armenians living in the diaspora, only visit and experience Armenia for the first time, much later in their lives (although since Armenia's Independence in 1991, younger generations are commuting to and from the homeland on a much regular basis). Nostalgia goes further than geographic boundaries and also entails the temporal aspect, specifically the past, present, and the future. Boym makes an eloquent analogy by using cinema to describe nostalgia. If we were to compare nostalgia to a cinematic image, it would be a double exposure or superimposition of two images: of home and abroad, of past and present, or of dream and everyday life. According to Boym, if we were to force the moment into a single image, this would break the frame or burn the surface (p.xiv). Similarly, considering the notion of a diasporic dwelling, as a single, isolated entity is futile, because it

constantly interacts with the original dwelling, usually a homeland, as well as the current locale. Furthermore, nostalgia is not always about the past; it can be retrospective, but it can also be prospective. Boym writes how "Fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present, have a direct impact on realities of the future" (p.xvi). I believe that this precept is useful in understanding the role of Armenian community centres, because in many diasporic communities, nostalgia seems to be omnipresent. For instance, nostalgic artifacts such as photographs depicting relics of the past adorn these spaces. In fact, the role of nostalgia is central in gathering members of the diaspora around these centres, complete with the infrastructure (its being) and a superstructure (its consciousness), nurturing a sense of belonging to the past and present, thereby fulfilling the urge we have as humans to belong to a collectivity consisting of others with whom we share common threads.

According to Boym, there are two kinds of nostalgia that characterize our relationship with the past, to the imagined community, to home, to one's own self-perception: restorative and reflective. These characteristics, writes Boym (2001), "do not explain the nature of our longing, instead, they are about ways in which we make sense of our seemingly ineffable homesickness and how we view our relationship to a collective home" (p.41).

Restorative nostalgia puts an emphasis on "nostos" and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up memory gaps. Restorative nostalgics do not believe they are nostalgics, and furthermore their project is about truth. Boym affirms that "this kind of nostalgia characterizes national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in the anti-modern mythmaking of

history—history by means of a return to national symbols and myths and occasionally through swapping conspiracy theories" (p.41).

Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, dwells in "algia", in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance (p.41). Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, whereas reflective nostalgia, "lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time" (p.50).

There is no doubt that the nostalgic component, especially nostalgia tied with loss, continues to linger in Armenian community centres that have been constructed throughout the diaspora. Armenians living in Montréal seem to be restorative nostalgics, with a drive to rebuild their homes and patch up the memory gaps, yet are also reflective nostalgics, caught in nostalgic patterns of loss and longing, largely due to a traumatic past. Why is it that nostalgia and a longing for home persist? Why this desire for specific homes when Svetlana Boym's notion of "diasporic intimacy" suggests our capacity for creating substitute homes, regardless of actual location? Is this seemingly inevitable nostalgia beneficial or can it cause stagnation within the community's identity? Boym describes why there continues to be a potential need for nostalgia. She writes,

> In counterpoint to our fascination with cyberspace and the virtual global village, there is a global epidemic of nostalgia, an effective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world. Nostalgia inevitably reappears as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals. (p.xiv)

The development of communication technologies and the increase of

speed and innovation in travel have contributed to reducing time and space between host countries and homelands. Although this argument has existed for some time now, nostalgia, more than ever, can be often cured by a trip back home via airplane, a home cooked meal, affordable phone plans, internet connections, as well as digital photography and video technology. One would imagine that these technological innovations would lead to a decrease in nostalgia. I would, however, argue that nostalgia is not disappearing on account of the increase in communication and mobility technologies. On the contrary, the compression of time and space brought forth by the advent of new technologies has contributed to the increase in wanting to affiliate with ancestral lands and/or figurative homes wherever they may be.

In an era when one constantly questions notions of belonging, could the undeniable multiplication of "homes away from home," possibly be amplified by the very notion of a circulating nostalgia? Regardless, Boym states that progress did not cure nostalgia, but exacerbated it, just as globalization brought forth tighter local attachments. This statement is applicable to the notion of nostalgia surrounding the politics of return faced by many Armenians throughout the diaspora.

Rethinking Return

Politics of return, or the movements that encourage members of the diaspora to return "home," are intrinsic to the diasporic discourse. Nostalgic dosages of "return" often fuel feelings of ethnicity within communities and are used to reinforce identity and belonging. For instance, diasporans who visit

Armenia for the first time characterise the experience using highly emotional language; for instance, one describing a trip to the motherland in the following manner: "it was like returning into your mother's womb."

I was a stranger to this notion of "return" to the homeland that I had never experienced in the first place, until I traveled to Armenia in the summer of 2004. Swept away by the excitement of arriving in this ancient land, discovering cultural and spiritual artifacts that date back to the medieval period, also blinded by preconceived nostalgia, I thought that I had made it "home." Only upon my return to Montréal, with sufficient spatial and temporal distance from my *touristic* trip, I realized that Armenia was, in reality, so far away from home. Once again, I was overcome by "transcendental homelessness," as defined by George Lukacs (Boym, 2001, p.24). Perhaps to surmount my anxiety of not having a stable dwelling place, increasingly, I was becoming comfortable with the idea of having more than one home around the world.

Lukacs writes:

> Happy are those ages when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths—ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars. Everything in such ages is new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own. The world is wide and yet it is like home, for the fire that burns in the soul is the same essential nature as the stars. (p.24-25)

Lukacs's idealistic and inherently nostalgic vision of nostalgia implies a feeling of being at home in the world, rather than simply being restricted to one's own local or distant home. Although Lukacs's revelation would, in theory, be the perfect vision, it would be naïve to ignore the countless conflicts surrounding homelands and calls to territorial ownership.

Nostalgia is inescapable in Armenia, perhaps due to the remnants left by a collapsed Soviet Union that included it for more than 70 years. Nostalgia is suspended in time and space inside every cement crack and inscribed in every movement of its raw landscape. The old collides with the new in unexpected ways, leaving us "foreign" flâneurs to languish in a time warp. It is hard to ignore the decrepit Russian Ladas racing through classic Soviet urban planning to keep up with the 2004- model-year Mercedes and BMWs. From the century-old stone churches tucked away in a barren mountainous landscape, to concrete architectural relics of the Soviet Union, juxtaposed with gigantic digital screens in the city's centre pumping Russian and European advertising campaigns— an omnipresent nostalgic energy lingers. This nostalgia desperately tries to transgress into the contemporary times— while Mount Ararat, (where Noah's Ark is said to have landed according to the Bible and which is undoubtedly the most significant symbol for Armenians)— placidly observes the frenzy from a distance.

This idyllic country was not what the books had depicted it to be, as the myth continues to slowly fade in me. I soon realized and witnessed that Armenia was like any other country, where corruption, prostitution, extreme poverty, and the enormous panoply of other social issues exist. The romanticized view of Armenia manufactured and propagated throughout the diaspora was no longer as convincing as it was destined to be.

At any rate, the rhetoric surrounding Armenia since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 is that of a free homeland. Armenians from the diaspora now freely return to visit, to volunteer, to repatriate, in the aim of helping rebuild the country. One would assume that now, with a greater accessibility to the

country, nostalgia would decrease. On the contrary, now more than ever, the nostalgia is readily consumable, with the considerable influx of diasporans pumping in money to flourish local economy and expecting to receive, in return nostalgia neatly packaged as a commodity.

How do daily activities in the diaspora that are linked to the community centres, with their omnipresence of nostalgia and collective memory, participate in this long-distance identity formation? I believe that there exists a system in place that allows for the expression of origins to converge and interact with local society. Spaces like ethnic community centres allow for identity and belonging to be negotiated in the diaspora. On this subject, Stuart Hall (Hall & du Gay, 1996) writes:

> Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity- an 'identity' in its traditional meaning. (p.4)

This very exclusion and difference that Hall refers to is what inevitably creates the tension between integration in local life and the distant homeland- a reality that characterizes most members of any given diaspora.

Chapter 2: Migration Roots

> A *self* does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before.
>
> -Jean-François Lyotard

It is crucial to address the phenomenon of migration in the context of my argument, as these movements are at the root of building new communities and re-inscribing the concept of home in unconventional places. According to UN figures from 2002, migration throughout the world has doubled in the past twenty-five years, attaining the number of 175 million migrants[5]. These individuals have had to re-establish a home (or homes) far away from their homeland, or from their origins (because not all come directly from "home"), due to political upheavals, a desire to improve their lives, economic inequalities, famine, war, genocide, natural catastrophes, and social oppression. Other types of migrants may include labour migrants, qualified specialists, entrepreneurs, students, refugees, or family members of previous migrants (Brah, 1996, p.178). Regardless of the reasons triggering the departure, advances in communication technology, as well as the increased mobility of capital and labour, have made it easier to maintain more than just one home that stretches beyond the arbitrary lines of a nation's boundaries. This phenomenon of transnationalism is frequently described as "the outcome of transformations in the technology of communication and transportation, a product of accessible air travel and telecommunications"

(Glick Schiller, Basch, & Blanc, 1994, p.4). To limit our understanding of the "transnational" to this definition, however, is overly confining because personal circumstances are often at the root of these migrations. Nevertheless, these technological advances are facilitating the process of establishing more than one dwelling for "transmigrants" who are also referred to as "people who live across borders" (Werbner, 2002, p.4), and who create new dynamic relationships within and between their communities. Simultaneously, the advent of technology is contributing to the homogenization of Armenians throughout the diaspora in terms of the circulation and diffusion of information, cultural artifacts, and politics. An example of this is a 24-hour Armenian television station produced in Los Angeles and picked up via satellite by households equipped all across North America, featuring programming from all over the diaspora and Armenia.[6] Pnina Werbner (2002) pushes this notion of transmigrant even further by elaborating on who she refers to as the "transnational." By this, she means "persons who sustain their home culture away from home" (p.4). She argues that transnationals create "surrogate cultural worlds" around them, "which serve to shield them from local culture into which migration or forced exile has inserted them" (Werbner, 2002, p.4). Community centres throughout the diaspora are a fitting example to Werbner's claim.

"Trans-Homing"

The word "immigrant" traditionally evokes imagery of rupture, the process of abandoning the old way of life and the painful learning of a new culture, and in many cases a new language. Immigrants have uprooted themselves

from their old society so that they can establish a new home and begin to pledge allegiance to a new country. Interestingly, the nation-state model, which assumes that each individual can be a citizen of only one state and identify with only one nation, is being modified with the advent of dual citizenships, multiple entry visas, and the increase in multiple dwellings. However, a considerable number of immigrants do, in fact, retain numerous intimate ties with multiple locations, including their homeland; a phenomenon that is referred to as transnationalism. Michel Laguerre (1998), author of *Diasporic Citizenship*, defines transnationalism as "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (p.8). These processes accentuate the fact that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. Laguerre stipulates that the immigrant community or the diaspora is located "in between and inside" the two social formations of both the homeland and the host country. Such relations are maintained by what he calls "transnational spatial flows" that manifest themselves through cultural, social, political, economic, religious, and communicational activities. In fact, due to these flows, immigrant life is no longer regarded by Laguerre (1998) as the traditional *up-rootedness* and *disruption* associated with this movement. Rather, he sees it as *continuity* and *re-rootedness* (p.8).

If we take into account the generational issue, the earlier generation of Armenians who immigrated to Canada, particularly after the Genocide, surely felt uprooted. The later generations of Canadian-Armenians however, especially those who were born in Canada, were subject to the continuity and re-rootedness Laguerre speaks of, and that the interviews that I conducted will reveal in later

chapters. Based on Laguerre's premise of rootedness and re-rootedness, I perceive the social space of Armenian community centres as the embodiment of continuity, as it mediates between the local host country and the home abroad. This continuum is an important element for exiled Armenians, dispersed on several continents of the world, struggling to determine where home is, as they strive to build new ones. In fact, when a considerable number of Armenians settle in a new city, they usually establish a community centre that tends to revolve around a church, political and social organizations, and an Armenian school.

"Scattered Beads"[7]

In order to better conceptualize how Armenian immigrants have come to construct representations of "home" in new dwelling places, it is crucial to discuss diasporic discourses, considering that Armenians are inherently scattered all over the world. The term diaspora derives from the Greek words "dia," *through,* and "speirein," *to scatter.* According to the US Webster's dictionary, diaspora refers to a "dispersion from" somewhere (Brah, 1996, p.181). Based on this definition, the word embodies a notion of a centre, a locus, a "home" from where the dispersion occurs. This home can be either an actual birthplace or a homeland.

Within the discourse of diaspora, Khatchig Tölölyan points out that there are two approaches to defining this elusive term. According to the classical approach, the prerequisite of a diaspora is to have been expelled by overwhelming force from a homeland. In another approach, he (Tölöyan & Beledian, 1998) writes:

> A diaspora is considered to be a mass of people who live outside a country of origin without

> necessarily having been expelled from it. The individual maintains ties with the mass, which engages in collective efforts to maintain an identity. This identity is no longer that of the homeland, nor that of a new country. It is a dually rooted identity. (p.61)

Although a certain degree of contention surrounds this term, a diaspora emerges for a number of reasons. Some are constituted through conquest and colonisation, while others are a result of forced slavery or labour. A number of diasporas are also the consequence of a forced expulsion, persecution, or political conflict, or even a due to a combination of factors.

Although Armenians are often associated with the classical definition of belonging to a diaspora, it is important to note that today's diaspora did not always have the ability to directly relate to Armenia, because most Armenians living in the diaspora today are descendants of 1915 Genocide survivors who were deported from the Anatolian and Western Armenian region — lands that are currently in Turkey's possession. Therefore access to these lands was limited and provoked the creation of imaginary bonds. Ms. Lory Boudjikanian, a 30-year-old who was born in Lebanon and immigrated to Montréal in 1991, describes her relationship with respect to the ancestral lands in the following way:

> I am from Kharpert[8] originally. The only link I have to the ancestral homeland, to the land we cannot visit is through the memoirs of the grand-father's great grand-father that I have read. And also, through the stories that my grandfather has told me. I feel that there is a strong link, but I feel that there is an imaginary link, whatever my imagination allows me to get, that is what I have.

Furthermore, while an important portion of the Armenian diaspora exists today as a direct result of the Genocide, there are nonetheless other factors that have brought forth this diaspora. For instance, preceding the Genocide, a smaller

Armenian diaspora emerged in the late 19th century due to a number of migrant laborers who made their way to the United States to improve their financial conditions.

If we were to brand the Armenian diaspora with a general definition, the one Brent Hayes Edwards (2001) offers is reasonably accurate. He writes:

> An origin in the scattering and uprooting of communities, a history of traumatic and forced departure, and also the sense of a real or imagined relationship to a "homeland", mediated through dynamics of collective memory and politics of return. (p.33)

Until recently, the majority of individuals constituting the Armenian diaspora, could not directly relate to the homeland of Armenia as it exists today. This is due to the fact that Armenia was under Soviet rule and was not easily accessible for all diasporan Armenians. Interestingly, the dynamics surrounding homeland and diaspora changed for Armenians when in 1991, Armenia held free elections and became an independent republic after 70 years of one-party Communist rule. Soon after, the Soviet Union tumbled into political dissolution, and on September 21, 1991, Armenians held a referendum and voted an overwhelming "yes" to become an independent state. This transition from communism to an independent homeland had enormous implications and repercussions throughout Armenia and the diaspora. A new understanding of "home" was implemented for Armenians living in the diaspora. While those diasporan Armenians who supported communism were faced with a new reality, those diasporan Armenians who condemned the communist domination in Armenia rejoiced about this historical step. Regardless of political views, Armenia's independence sparked new vigor in relations between Armenia and the

diaspora on numerous levels, by creating open communication and exchanges between the two entities. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and rebirth of the Armenian independent nation (its first independence lasted from 1918 to1922), the imagined homeland slowly became a reality, as more and more Armenians from the diaspora began to connect with the Republic of Armenia, through tourism, repatriation and various investments.

Historical background of the Armenian diaspora in Canada

When studying a particular diaspora, it can be helpful to take into consideration how the socio-economic and historical context affects the identity of the people within a diaspora, or as Stuart Hall (1996) states, through "specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices" (p.4). As much as the notion of collectivity is implied when we speak of diaspora, the experience of each individual is what constitutes the real narrative, of how and where they live today. Nevertheless, an important element related to analysing diaspora is the historical dimension. James Clifford postulates that diaspora is "always embedded in particular maps and histories" (Brah, 1996, p.179). Along similar lines, Avtar Brah argues that in order for the notion of diaspora to be useful, these journeys must be historicised. It is therefore important to uncover the particular conditions that mark the trajectories of these journeys, as well as the regimes of power shaping a particular diaspora. I will therefore briefly outline how the various waves of Armenian immigrants established themselves in Canada throughout the 19th and 20th centuries in order to explain how the Canadian-Armenian diaspora came into existence, namely in Montréal. My intent

is not to delve in historical details, rather it is to map out the socio-economic, political, and historical background necessary for the ensuing discussion, as these elements contribute to the formation of diasporic communities centres.

The Armenian diaspora initially emerged because of migrant labourers. In the 1890s, several Armenian merchant families from Constantinople (Istanbul, Turkey) and a group of factory recruits came to Canada from the Ottoman Empire, primarily from regions in eastern Turkey. By 1915, approximately 2,000 Armenians had settled in Canada, mostly in southern Ontario, while smaller groups of Armenians had also settled in Montréal. During World War I, however, authorities of the Turkish Ottoman Empire carried out the first orchestrated genocide in the 20th century, deporting and destroying huge portions of its minority Armenian population inhabiting Armenian ancestral lands. Between 1908 and 1915, the Young Turks were developing a nationalistic and racist discourse, called Pan-Turkism, which advocated the revival of a Turkish nation based on racial purity, "Turkey for the Turks." During the early stages of the war, in the midst of military setbacks, the Young Turks ordered the deportation of Armenians to so-called "relocation centres," which really meant one final destination: an agonizing forced march and annihilation in the deserts of Syria and Mesopotamia. On the night of April 23 to 24, 1915, as many as 250 Armenian leaders in Constantinople were arrested, deported to Anatolia, and killed. Authors, poets, intellectuals, clerics, and doctors, in other words; intellectual targets where all massacred. The Young Turks, having exterminated the Armenian leadership within the Empire, then turned to the defenseless Armenian citizens, particularly in rural areas. In total, up to 1.5 million Armenians fell prey to massacre, disease,

starvation, and exposure. Through death and destruction, the Turkish government eliminated the Armenians from most of the Ottoman Empire, including inhabitants of historic Armenian lands (Dadrian, 1995; Balakian, 1998; Hovanissian, 1992; Chalk & Jonassohn, 1990).

Classification of the Armenians as "Asiatics" by the Canadian government in 1909 slowed down the immigration process for the next five decades. From 1919 until World War II, Canada admitted only about 1,500 Armenians, all survivors of the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923. After major changes were brought to Canada's immigration programs during the 1960s, thousands of Armenians entered the country. Admitted under the manufacturing, mechanical, professional, or clerical immigration classifications, they came largely from Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Iran, and a smaller number from Europe. Most recently, Armenians have been immigrating to Canada from the former Soviet Union. Before 1914, Armenians were recruited to come to Canada as unskilled labourers in the expanding foundries and growing industrial base of southern Ontario. From the first decade of the twentieth century until the 1940s, Brantford, Galt, Guelph, Hamilton, and St. Catharines in Ontario were the largest and most active Armenian communities in Canada. A considerable concentration of Armenians into major cities has occurred over last forty years in Toronto and Montréal. Initially, Toronto was home to various groups, including successful rug merchant families who lived in the city's affluent north end, some factory hands in the West Toronto Junction, and a growing number of refugees and nascent entrepreneurs in downtown and eastern Toronto. After World War II, newly arrived Armenians settled throughout the metropolitan area, establishing new

communities in North York and Scarborough. They also spread out to the satellite cities of Markham, Mississauga, and Thornhill (Kaprielian, 1982).

Park Avenue was the early place of residence and commercial centre for the Armenians of Montréal. After 1960, members of the community moved northward and began to inhabit Ville Saint-Laurent and Nouveau Bordeaux. By the late 1980s, Armenians had settled in new districts in the greater Montréal area, including Cartierville and Laval, and along the Park Avenue Extension. Today, the city of Montréal is home to the highest concentration of Armenians living in Canada with a population of approximately 35 000.[9]

This brief historical summary of how Armenians arrived to Canada, describes the formation of the Canadian-Armenian diaspora. It is crucial to grasp the factors that lead to the establishment of the Armenians in Canada, because these factors shed light on the ways Armenian-Canadians are organized and how they perceive their relationship with regard to the local dwelling place, to other diasporic communities (namely in the Middle East, where a large number emigrated from) and with regard to Armenia. How do members of ethnic groups, particularly members of the Armenian community living in Montréal, attempt to make themselves "at home" through the creation of community centres? What are the ways in which these diasporic dwellings negotiate both global and local realities? How does a traumatic past marked by genocide influence the nature of these diaporic dwellings?

Chapter 3: Community

Living together is an art.

-William Pickens

Whether it involves converging in a physical place or partaking in a virtual community's life on the Internet, the notion of community not only possesses a comforting quality, but community also entails an imaginative component. Just as there are endless types of communities, there are just as many ways in which one can define this term. Benedict Anderson's (1983) anthropological approach to community in his book *Imagined Communities*, proposes that the term *nation* is in fact, an "imagined political community" (p.7). It is "imagined" because the "members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each, lives the image of their communion" (p.7). Evidently, the image of this communion that is examined throughout this thesis is the manifestation of Armenian ethnicity in Montréal through the spaces of community centres. Contrary to a nation, however, those who frequent the centres are familiar with most of the fellow-members.

To determine a community's authenticity is futile, when we take into account the contingency of nationality, ethnicity, mother tongue, and race at birth, as well as the hybridized and creolized nature that cultural identities are subjected to over time. Along this vein, Anderson writes, "communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined." What are the imaginative elements that sustain the Armenian diaspora? The "styles" in which community, or in this case, the Armenian

diaspora is imagined encompass political, cultural, spiritual, and national discourse. Elements nurturing the diaspora include the activities surrounding the politics of recognition pertaining namely to the Armenian Genocide and to the politics of return and contributions to the homeland.

Roupen Kouyoumdjian, an educator in his 60s, frequents the Montréal Armenian Community Centre. He immigrated to Canada in 1967, from Istanbul, Turkey. As a member of the Armenian National Committee of Canada (a grassroots political organization), he has spent the last 30 years of his life lobbying for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide from federal, provincial, and municipal governments. He has yet to visit Armenia, however, and he describes the country as "ma patrie fictive" (my fictional homeland). The homeland remains imagined for Mr. Kouyoumdjian, although he has dedicated a significant portion of his life to the Armenian cause because he is convinced that every country in the diaspora that recognizes the Armenian Genocide is ultimately an achievement for Armenia.

On the other hand, Dr. Artin Arzoumanian, a 70-year-old medical doctor who continues to be extremely involved with activities surrounding the AGBU Centre in Montréal, has been to Armenia on several occasions. He describes his connection with Armenia as "a very strong emotional and spiritual link," even though he is well aware of the current socio-economic problems in the country and sees the political situation as being "vulnerable." Based on these two responses, it is intriguing that a clearly imagined relationship between present dwelling and past ancestral homeland prevails, regardless of whether an individual living in the diaspora has been to Armenia or not. This "imagined"

relationship with Armenia, either lived or dreamed, plays a pivotal role in fuelling Dr. Arzoumanian's and Mr. Kouyoumdian's present involvement, which in turn allows them to express their hybridized identities in terms of national commitments in their current dwelling place. Furthermore, such understandings of an imagined homeland contribute in shaping projected identities, which fuel envisioned projects within Montréal Armenian community life.

Imagined communities are also reinforced through instances of concrete cultural exchanges between the diaspora and Armenia. Such exchanges tend to create enormous enthusiasm and are often free of political and other internal divisions that exist in Armenian communities worldwide, thus creating a sense of deep cultural, diasporic utopia. Often folkloric dance troups or other artists, for instance, visit and perform in various diasporic communities. These talented "compatriots" are welcomed with much pomp and emotionally stimulate diasporic subjects, who are in need of refined doses of Armenian culture, straight form the source: the homeland. This emotional refueling is crucial for Armenian-Montréalers who maintain a long-distance relationship with the country most have not even seen and for others whose nostalgia increases after having visited Armenia. The display of reactions at any one of these events, from teary-eyed to visibly inspired audience members, proves the efficiency of these exchanges. Similarly, artists from the diaspora visit Armenia, thus creating transnational cultural, social, and financial connections, while reinforcing imagined attachments between the diaspora and Armenia.

It is important to note that many of the Armenian cultural events taking place in Montréal are not always articulated in mainstream culture. These literary

events, concerts, and performances that are held within the Armenian community centres, are, in fact, open to the public at large. The promotion of such events however, remains limited to Armenian media, usually attracting a high percentage of Armenians-Canadians, either born in Montréal or elsewhere in the diaspora. There are instances, however, of precise initiatives with local cultural outlets, such as, for example, collaborations between invited musicians from Armenia and the Montréal Chamber Orchestra, I Musici de Montréal[10] or other orchestras. In such cases, promotional activities do extend to the broader cultural scene of Montréal, hence ensuring a more diverse audience and multi-faceted exposure. While these collaborative events do not always take place within the community centres themselves, cultural groups that function within the centres typically organize the events. With a largely Armenian-Canadian audience attending these events, the rest of Montréal's diverse community is excluded, perhaps not voluntarily, but rather for pragmatic reasons. Such a situation of generally isolated cultural manifestations, likely on the basis of "preserving Armenian culture," contributes to a culture's opacity, as opposed to the transparency of culture. On the contrary, I view the shared and interactive aspect of an ethnic culture with local society contributing in unanticipated dynamic exchanges, thus widening the participants' perspectives. The events taking place in the Armenian community centres are consistent with the multiculturalism model, whether the cultural events are organized only for Armenians, or for a more diverse audience. Whatever the case may be, due to the geopolitics of the country and a considerable diaspora, Armenian culture has been already marked by constant loss and lack of renewal over time. What is it that the community centres are striving to preserve? Can

Armenian culture subsist within the diaspora, when constant flows alter the identities and cultural formations? As Anderson insists, the answer lies in the "style" in which communities are imagined and not whether they are authentic or false. Therefore, how much longer can Armenian community centres justify their existence on the basis of preserving culture?

It would be useful to identify the underlying dynamics of a community in order to conceptualize how the spaces embodying these communities articulate collective memory (which I will discuss at length in the fifth chapter). Various social and political theorists have coined their own definitions for the elusive notion of community. The introduction of *Communities within Cities*, a sociologically grounded definition outlined by Davies and Herbert (1993), encapsulates the essence of community, as it has been perceived over the centuries.

> Community … must include something larger and grander—a collective framework; participation in a common enterprise; a sense of social solidarity in a common enterprise; a sense of social solidarity that transcends individuals and private networks, and most especially a sense of mutual obligation and responsibility for social survival. That was certainly the sense in which community was featured by the great political theorists—from Plato… to Rousseau. (p.1)

This comprehensive definition touches upon the basis of community, such as the scale of the community, the nature of a bond tying members to each other through solidarity, as well as the goal-oriented nature of community. Considering that the specific community studied for the purpose of this research is Armenians living in Montréal, the scale of this community is limited to the Armenians who frequent the community centres of Montréal. It is not unusual for several hundred

community members to gather at the centres for special events such as the annual New Year's Eve gala hosted separately by the two centres. At the Montréal Armenian Community Centres, the Sunday Church services also bring a large number of community members to the centre, although less than a special event, unless it is an important religious holiday. On other days, the typical number would be even lower. While there are no concise numbers of how many Armenian Montréalers frequent the centres, the 2001 Canadian Census indicated 18 445 Armenians living on the island of Montréal. More recent estimates indicate that there are approximately 35 000 Armenians living in Montréal, including Laval (Boudjikanian, 2004). Also, more than two Armenian community centres exist in Montréal, such as the Society of Armenians from Istanbul and Tékéyan Cultural Centre, however, I have chose to focus on the two largest ones in Montréal. The AGBU centre and the Montréal Armenian Community Centre remain the most dynamic in terms of activities, financial turnover, and range of organizations functioning within these centres.

Based on Davies' and Herbert's premise of community, the nature of the bond tying the members of Montréal-Armenian communities together ranges from a common ethnicity, to a common interest, or cause. The bond creates a sense of solidarity between the members of the community, who gravitate around the centres, as these centres mediate the organizational and cultural expressions of this ethnicity with respect to the broader local society. The goal-oriented aspect of the communities can be defined within more than one realm. The Armenian community centres have an organizational structure, as well as different administrative and hierarchical bodies, that are governed by defined mission

statements and by-laws that reflect Armenian heritage, identity, and beliefs. The organizations are often driven by an underlying cause, which consists usually of maintaining Armenian heritage, assuring the sustenance of the centres, fundraising for various projects, and the struggle for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, to name just a few. These constant challenges and quests inevitably create a sense of mutual obligation. It is, in fact, partly due to these organizational, cultural, and communicational formulations (which will be analysed in more detail throughout the fourth chapter) that the establishment and achievement for social survival is attained.

In a publication entitled *Nations, Identities and Cultures*, Jocelyn Letourneau cites Jurgen Habermas, whose notion of "community of communication" adds a communicational dimension to the term community:

> A group of people who participate by way of communicational activity, in an interaction which coordinates their projects in accordance with their shared perception of the world; a group of people who also share a life-world, that is, a type of horizon that defines their particular stock of cultural facts, interpretations, and explanatory models.(p.61)

As such, the organizational formulations, local infrastructures, and transnational networks that contribute to the coordination of activities and projects surrounding Armenian community centres throughout the diaspora can be understood in terms of communicational activities, as outlined by Habermas. As wide as the definition of ethnicity may be, there is no doubt that Armenians do share comparable general perceptions in terms of their cultural background—indeed, these perceptions fuel both contemporary and commemorative projects

revolving around the community centres. The common perceptions shared by Armenians embody the very "horizon" Habermas speaks of, which derive from, in this case, a series of Armenian cultural elements, interpretations of certain social realities, as well as stereotypes pertaining to Armenians, and include explanatory models within the historical and political realms.

Returning to the definition of community, it can range from the physical place where people live to an association between individuals. The well-known argument linked with community is that with Western society turning increasingly individualistic, there is less time and energy to invest in social and communal activities. On the other hand, the hectic and increasingly impersonal and generalized nature of the world has also led to the bloom of specific communities and its surrounding activities, acting as an antidote to the increased isolation brought forth by society. This phenomenon of converging towards a community is likely due to the fact that community is a space, real or abstract, where constructions of identity tend to be recognized, welcomed, and ongoing, therefore allowing for a sense of belonging to be established. Many individuals possibly live these elements on a personal basis, but are also compelled to express themselves and share their experiences through a collectivity, thereby potentially enriching their lives and amplifying their experiences. It would be naïve, however, to exclude potentially negative ramifications that some individuals may experience through an association with a community. These negative experiences can include an intrusion on their personal lives, spending long hours volunteering at the cost of family quality time, and difficulty balancing work/career and community involvement. Regardless of the repercussions, whether negative or

positive, each and every individual possesses their own reasons for being part of a community: whether it allows individuals to find freedom, security, empowerment, a support system, empathy, to express one's ethnicity, or simply to fulfill the human need to belong, to be recognized, and to help.

In a doctoral dissertation that examines the residential and economic insertion of Armenians living in Montréal, Aida Boudjikanian (2004, p.117) interviewed a sample of 100 Armenian-Montréalers in order to shed light on the socio-cultural and economical situation of Armenians living in Montréal. One of the aspects she studied is whether Armenian-Montréalers adhere to Armenian associations, which do not automatically translate to frequenting the centres, considering that some associations function within the centres. A number of Armenian associations are independent of the centres, yet the numbers are revealing. Out of the 100 respondents, 50 people said they were part of an Armenian organization in Montréal. Out of the 50 others who were not part of any Armenian organization, 36 said that they are not part of any organization or have never been a member, while 14 responded that they had abandoned their membership. The reasons given by the 36 individuals who are not part of an organization are mainly the lack of time, it not being a priority, (in one case because the spouse was not Armenian) and finally, because they deem professional success to be more important. The 14 that left the organizations and who were willing to say why, stated that they had "problems", or that they did not like the ethnic environment (although they then admitted to hiring Armenians at their work place). Hence, based on Boudjikanian's statistics, 50% of the sample adheres to an organization, while 71% of the respondents deem it important to

belong to an Armenian association. In terms of why the interviewees adhere to these associations and why they consider it important, out of a total of 123 answers (respondents were able to express more than one reason), the largest response, with 33 answers, consisted of individuals stating that to adhere to an association is a way to preserve Armenian identity. Networking with fellow-Montréal-Armenians followed with 28 responses and 13 individuals concisely responded that through their contribution, the Armenian community in Montréal would become more strong and efficient. Not everyone views the Armenian associations as being an attractive environment or simply do not seek to be involved in an ethnic environment, as stated by 12 individuals. Stagnant and stuffy hierarchical models of governance within the centres, *status quos*, internal divisions and tendency to form "cliques" are just some factors that can potentially drive Armenian-Montréalers away from the centres.

Having seen this sample, I am intrigued by the driving factors motivating Armenians living in Montréal to join the community centres are intriguing. What possesses these individuals to frequent and invest their time, emotions, and finances in these spaces? There exists a multitude of factors, such as culture, religion/spirituality, ethnicity, or social interests. When asked what factors dictate the extent of her involvement within the Armenian community centre here in Montréal, Dania Ohanian, a 36-year-old who works as an administrative assistant in the same complex as the Armenian Community Centre, answered that "being raised outside of Armenia, the community centre is my only attachment to my identity and belonging to a cause or culture." Ms. Ohanian was born in Aleppo, Syria, and then grew up in Los Angeles California, before emigrating to Montréal

in 2000 with her husband when he was invited to become the editor of *Horizon*, one of the Armenian weekly newspapers published in Montréal. Ms. Ohanian volunteers at the Montréal Armenian Community Centre, where she is a member of the Armenian Relief Society local chapter and the Sourp Hagop Armenian Apostolic Church.

Dr. Artin Arzoumanian, born in Cairo, Egypt immigrated to Canada in 1966. He continues to be a very active member at the AGBU centre and the Tékéyan Cultural Centre. Dr. Arzoumanian's extensive involvement in the Armenian community includes being a founder and a contributor to the weekly *Abaka* newspaper (the first weekly Armenian newspaper in Canada, established 30 years ago), a member of the executive of the Tékéyan Cultural Association, chairman for the Armenian Democratic Liberal Organization, and a member of the Parish council for the Saint-Gregory Church. According to him, there are two primary motivating factors in being involved at a community centre. First, he explains that an individual's personality plays an important role in his/her involvement, especially if one's nature is inclined towards "giving." Second, self-motivation is another factor. Dr. Arzoumanian explains that he experienced a moment of existentialist questioning at a certain point in his life. He always had an interest in his Armenianness, yet he came to the realization that he had not done anything for his people, considering all that the Armenians had been through. His father was a Gencocide survivor and he felt an obligation to do his part. He adds that one can also gain personal gratification through volunteering at a community centre.

Lory Boudjikanian is a 30-year-old who works in cosmetics and

pharmaceutical sales and immigrated to Canada in 1991 with her entire family, in order to flee the political instability in Lebanon. Ms. Boudjikanian describes her involvement within community centres as “pretty regular”, jokingly admitting that “I could pitch a tent there!” She attends both community centres: volunteering with the AGBU Scouts at the AGBU centre and attending events and visiting the Montréal Armenian Community Centre. She also states personal satisfaction as a motivating factor when describing her involvement. Ms. Boudjikanian describes the nature of her work within the centres and how it affects her personal life in the following statement:

> It gives you a lot of personal satisfaction, if that is what you want to do. It allows you to be there and help nurture Armenian identity in the younger generations. That is part of the personal satisfaction you get. On the other hand, it is very demanding, and with the limited number of people that we have involved in all the community centre, especially the youth, it ends up being too much of a burden on every person’s shoulder, so it pretty much impacts your day-to-day life, that’s the only negative end; but other than that, every other aspect is very positive.

Lory Boudjikanian also stated in terms of what motivates her involvement:

> It’s the energy that it gives back to me. It really motivates me to do my other daily tasks. The work that I do at the Armenian community centres, is because I want to do it. And most of the time, the results are positive; so it positively impacts every other aspect of my life.

Azad Chichmanian was born in Montréal and is a 30-year-old architect, who is an active member at the AGBU Centre. He does not limit himself,

however, to one community centre in Montréal, stating that he "wants to feel that I belong to all of them." He perceives "available time" as the factor dictating his involvement. He emphasizes the importance of his strong will to work, as well as the enjoyment that the work he does for the community provides him, because "I came to the realization that if you don't [get involved], then it just disappears, so everyone has a role to play." Mr. Chichmanian was on the executive committee of the AGBU until last November, having served for more than one year. He is also involved in events surrounding the Armenian Church, as well as being active in commemorative events surrounding the Armenian Genocide. He has also participated in CYMA (Canadian Youth Mission to Armenia), which is a group of Canadian youth who travel to Armenia every summer to help reconstruct schools and run summer camps.

Roupen Kouyoumdjian, the 70-year-old educator, also views "available time" as being one of the factors dictating his involvement. He is a soccer coach for the *Homentmen* Armenian Sporting Association and a member of the Armenian National Committee. He is also in charge of the Recognition of the Armenian Genocide dossier in Canada. Having been born and raised in Turkey, Mr. Kouyoumdjian explains how he was treated as a minority in Turkey and how discussing his own family's history who had survived the Genocide was considered taboo. He joined the Montréal Armenian Community Centre 30 years ago, after leaving Turkey in order to escape the harassment he suffered as an Armenian and to make sure that his children did not have to go through the same fate as he did. « J'ai été poussé à quitter le pays, à cause d'un climat insupportable vis-à-vis les minorités. [...] Le processus qui règne en Turquie, c'est un genre

d'endoctrinement. On va toujours essayer, de force ou de gré, pour vous faire oublier votre histoire. Ils ont leurs propres livres d'histoires, qui ne reflètent pas nécessairement la réalité. » The traumatic past of Armenians, along with the lack of freedom to ask questions and understand his past, led Mr. Kouyoumdjian to leave Turkey. Mr. Kouyoumdjian, who personally had 8 family members survive the Genocide, describes the situation in Turkey at the time, as being a tightly closed box that occasionally had revealing signs of trauma slip out, describing the situation as, « Une boîte fermée qui laisse échapper des signes révélateurs des fois. » Therefore, the main motivation for his involvement in the Armenian Community Centre of Montréal 30 years ago was his desire to establish his own identity and his own history. By doing so, he would be able to put the idea of trauma and indoctrination behind him and be able to have access to pertinent information.

Raffi Donabedian is in his 30s and is a project director at a telecommunications company. He was born in Beirut, Lebanon and immigrated to Canada in the mid-1980s. Mr. Donabedian is vice-chairman of the Board of Trustees at the Armenian Community Centre of Montréal, which oversees the community centre itself, the church, 4 schools, and the dining hall. He is also on sub-committees that organize fund-raising activities for the Sourp Hagop Armenian elementary and high school. When asked why he volunteers at the Montréal Armenian Community Centre, Mr. Donabedian said that being involved at the community centre allows him to maintain a balance between family and work. He said that his work at the community centre creates "a third-leg between family and work. Helps to balance my life, and also puts perspective. I find my

colleagues are jealous, I don't know why. I find they all want to be involved with something." Mr. Donabedian added other factors that included: "upbringing, questions of what kind of values I have been given. In my particular case, it so happens that my kids are attending the school linked to the community centre, so I have a keen interest in making sure that the school is performing at a level that it should." Mr. Donabedian claims these to be the selfish reasons. In terms of the bigger picture, however, he adds: "I find that a lot of the services we offer in the community centre are the services that are very unique and that there is a need for them in the community." Indeed, in the midst of the overwhelming new locale, for many immigrants, community centres are seen as a secure environment, as certain organizations or members offer social services, in terms of employment opportunities or guidance to immigrants during their transition period between previous and present dwelling places.

Besides allowing cultural expressions to be fostered and developed, activities to be organized, and for people to gather for weekly activities, allowing the organizations and the centres to sustain themselves; there tends to be a political and nationalistic aspect associated with the centres. In fact, a call for recognition or for justice pertaining to the Armenian Genocide, which continues to be deeply ingrained within Armenian identity, can serve as one of the mobilizing forces within communities, or any other social, political, or religious motivation asserting their ethnicity, for that matter. Armenian community centres often consist of the physical place where members of political organizations meet in order to outline lobbying activities and other commemorative events taking place in the foreground of the new dwelling place, with the "imagined" homeland

in the background.

As mentioned earlier, the majority of Armenians today, regardless of where they were born, are the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of Armenian Genocide survivors. This factor, along with the reality that most have lost a considerable number of family members, creates an immediate bond due to the traumatic past always being omnipresent in many people's family histories. The dynamics surrounding communities whose existence is or has been threatened differs from other communities who have not been threatened, in the sense that the past resurfaces in various ways in the present and projects itself into the future. Therefore, it is crucial to closely examine how the repercussions of the past are lived and expressed in the present, primarily through collective memory.

The extensive loss suffered by the Armenians following the Genocide is only amplified by the Turkish government's constant denial and refusal to take responsibility for the crimes committed by the Ottoman Empire authorities. It is therefore not surprising that Armenians often continue to define themselves in relation to the past and are protective of their origins, as some of the interview excerpts demonstrated. This echoes Hall's statement of cultural identity, in the sense that we are positioned by and position ourselves within the narratives of the past, as "we are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power."[11] To this day, most Armenians carry the burden of a human, cultural, intellectual, and territorial loss, as they continue to identify themselves in relation to the Genocide and pursue the struggle for recognition of the Genocide, both by the governments of their new dwelling places and by the Turkish government. In this sense, just how they express their resistance, as well as their cultural integration

once they live in a new dwelling place is intriguing, considering both a traumatic past and how they commemorate this past as a community. Could a past marked by trauma explain the need to protect Armenian identity? Along the lines of "threatened communities", Jeffrey Weeks (Bauman, 2001) points out:

> The strongest sense of community is in fact likely to come from those groups who find the premises of their collective existence threatened and who construct out of this a community of identity, which provides a strong sense of resistance and empowerment. Seeming unable to control the social relations in which they find themselves, people shrink the world to the size of their communities and act politically on that basis. The result, too often, is an obsessive particularism as a way of embracing or coping with contingency." (p.100)

I do concur with Weeks when he states that a strong sense of community emerges when collective existence is threatened. Yet, contrary to what Weeks stresses, the Armenian community in Montréal is in control of their social relations with their surrounding environment because Armenians no longer face a physical threat of annihilation. Seeing beyond the particularism of a certain ethnic group has become integral to the newer generations who, through educational institutions, local communities, and the workforce, are in no manner confined by their ethnicity within Canadian society. On the other hand, the fact that such an attempt of annihilating a race did occur 90 years ago has undoubtedly contributed to making Armenians more protective of their communities across the diaspora. Furthermore, the struggle to survive experienced by Armenians, following the Genocide has reinforced their need to be recognized. One of the ways this desire for recognition can tangibly be expressed is through actively belonging to a community throughout the diaspora. Following the trauma of the Armenian

Genocide, the survivors and orphans soon began to reestablish their lives. Robbed of human dignity, family members, land, and possessions, the rebuilding efforts undertaken by the survivors, namely in constructing community centres in host societies, are the concrete embodiment of resistance, recognition, and empowerment following utter loss, as well as the beginning of establishing relationships between the community and the new dwelling place. As Weeks points out, however, there is the danger of remaining within the confines of "an obsessive particularism," to which I would add, especially if there is an underlying traumatic past that has yet to be recognized by its perpetrators. Although a threatened past can create and reinforce more support among individuals in a given community, the threat of ethnocentric rhetoric may also linger. Fortunately, the majority of Armenians of different backgrounds and generations living in Montréal acknowledge and negotiate their hybridized identities in relation to Montréal, their current dwelling place. This awareness and attempt to live outside the insularity of community centres was apparent when interviewees were asked to describe the role of the Armenian community centres with respect to the broader urban context of Montréal.

Dr. Artin Arzoumanian stresses that the centres are not ghettos, but rather a space where Armenians can express and preserve their ethnicity, while being fully integrated in Canadian society. According to him, the centres will help the new generation; the Canadian-born generations have the opportunity to be part of Armenian community life, as they grow up in a non-Armenian environment.

Dr. Arzoumanian contends:

> This does not mean that the intention of the community centre is to keep the younger generation completely isolated and confined to the

> Armenian centres, because that would be "ghettoism" and of course we don't want this. That is one extremity and the other extremity is the complete dissociation from the Armenian life and that is what we are concerned about. We want there to be a happy medium, we want them to be adjusted to the Canadian environment, to feel comfortable in this new country that they call home and yet to maintain their identity, their heritage and be adjusted, to keep a healthy balance of being an Armenian and Canadian at the same time. And this is not an exclusive concept. You can be a good Armenian and good Canadian at the same time.

Dr. Arzoumanian also explains how, after the Genocide, when close to half a million survivors were granted asylum in Middle Eastern countries, it was the Armenian organizations, the political parties, and the benevolent organizations who opened schools, published papers, and built churches. He stressed that the churches and the Armenian organizations have had a significant role in organizing these communities, from which emerged a second, post-Genocide generation who were well educated, healthy psychologically, and physically, and strove for education. These individuals are the present leaders of the Armenian communities. He continues to say:

> A third generation has now emerged, who are even better educated, and better adjusted to their new environment than we were and this gives us hope. Although, there is always the concern that they may not be as involved in maintaining the continuation of the Armenian identity as we were. In my opinion, we should not expect the young generation to think the same way we did, to live the same way we did, or to work even with the same method we did. [...]We have carried the torch this far, we are confident that the new generation will be able to carry the torch one way or another.

Elements shaping cultural identity tend to take on various shades because they are transmitted from one generation to the next and are always exposed to present-day influences in new locales. How each individual shapes their cultural

identity is a result of the ongoing dialogue, tensions, and hybridizations between the new locale and previous locale or cultural knowledge. The community centres in Montréal comprise the medium that bridges and reconciles Montréal with the Armenian community, thus creating an ongoing and ever-changing dialogue between Montréal and Armenian culture.

Beginning in early childhood, most Armenians are exposed to a basic cultural make-up consisting of historical, traditional, social, and cultural knowledge, as well as legends, stories, songs, religion and language. Therefore, family upbringing, education, and different social class play a role in forming one's cultural identity over the years. Once Armenians have lived long enough in one locale, however, by default, they adopt certain aspects of local lifestyle and culture, thereby creating a new hybridized form: a personal rendition of identity that combines what Montréal has to offer culturally, socially and economically with the reality of belonging to a Diaspora and the idea of a distant homeland. As Mr. Roupen Kouyoumdjian explains, Armenians have a very high degree of adaptation because of the constant movement and diasporic condition that Armenians have found themselves over time. He sees the Armenian community centre playing a pivotal role in the integration to the new dwelling place. He explains his point as follows:

> Ce centre communautaire devra faciliter toute forme d'intégration dans le pays dans lequel on vit, malgré le fait que les Arméniens ont tendance d'avoir un coefficient d'adaptation très élevé. Pourquoi? Parce que lors du dernier siècle, nous avons été déraciné plusieurs fois, de force ou de gré, donc on a été dans l'obligation de nous adapter. Tout de même, il faut que le centre communautaire puisse mettre en place un système pertinent, afin de pouvoir faciliter l'adaptation des intervenants de notre groupe ethnique à ce type d'intégration.

Lory Boudjikanian, on the other hand, sees that the community centres fail in opening up to local society. While she does agree with the universal claim that community centres establish a sense of belonging, preserve the culture and allow you to interact with fellow Armenian-Canadians, she explains that the disadvantage of this, especially in a "multicultural and diverse city like Montréal" is that "none of the Armenian community centres so far have been successful to be able to open up. [...] If they open up, they think they might lose the sense of preserving the Armenian identity and the culture, which I also think is important. At the same time, there needs to be a fine balance."

This perpetual dialectic of the *old* and the *new*, the *here* and the *there*, undoubtedly results in tensions within the realms of different sets of ideologies, beliefs, cultures, and value systems within Armenian-Montréalers. This tension, however, is a necessity and a sign of renewal that both the local society and the ethnically diverse groups can benefit from. In fact, I would argue that belonging to a community centre in a locale such as Montréal entails not only an expression of Armenian identity, but also reinforces one's belonging to Montréal, because day-to-day life in the city requires interaction and integration, depending on each individual. When one negotiates their belonging to a certain locale in relation to far away "homes", the immediate dwelling place generally occupies an important place in determining their belonging. Almost by default, one adopts, at the very least, the basic lifestyle existing in Montréal, through various components, such as the educational system, the workforce, and the vibrant cultural life in the city, in parallel to their ethnicity. Therefore, a unilateral sense of belonging in a city like Montréal is not a valid approach, since being a member of the Armenian

community centres of Montréal is at once an expression of Armenian identity, but also equates to belonging to the city of Montréal.

What are some of the ways in which Armenians are particularly Montréalais? Granted each person expresses their individuality and identity differently, but certain common elements can surface in Armenians living in Montréal. Communicating both in French and English, the two official languages used in the city, facilitates their integration and interactions with other residents. Also, Armenian-Montréalers have adopted a particular jargon, using terms and geographic reference points, points of convergence unique to this city, such as the Métro (Montréal subway system), Marché Jean-Talon, Rue Ste-Catherines, St-Laurent Boulevard, Oratoire Saint-Joseph, and Mont Royal, where Armenian-Montréalers converge, outside of the centres. Moreover, 42% of Armenians living in Montréal are the owners of their own business, and therefore contribute to the city's economy (Boudjikanian, 2004, p.5). From the Armenian jewelers' quarter on Cathcart in downtown Montréal, the Armenian bakeries who sell "Armenian Pizza" (or "lahmajoun", ground meat, tomato sauce and vegetables finely diced on paper thin dough), to the Armenian car body shops in NDG (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce), Montréal-Armenians clearly have blended in the urban and suburban landscape of the city. These sights are interesting for Armenian Montrealers because these unique Armenian spaces cater to the needs of the Montreal community at large, thus creating interactions and socio-economic relationships with the diverse population of the city. In addition, some individuals who have been very active in Armenian community centres, eventually become involved in wider community work and with the overall uplift of Montréal's city life. Ms.

Noushig Eloyan is one of these individuals. She has been president of the *Hamazkayin* Armenian Cultural and Educational Society at the Montréal Armenian Community Centre, and then in 1994 was first elected as a city counselor and became the president of the City of Montréal's executive committee. It was the first time a woman with an ethnic background occupied this position. She is currently president of the Ahuntsic-Cartierville borough President and Montréal city counselor[12]. Health professionals, engineers, educators, artists with Armenian background, contribute also to the development of the Montréal community at large. This argument of belonging simultaneously to Armenian community centres and new locales can be extended to any diasporic region around the world. One cannot neglect the reciprocal aspect of an Armenian community centre's engagement, which equates to the individuals' engagement with local society, in this case, with Montréal, even though the spaces of ethnic community centres embody certain elements reminiscent of the previous dwelling place and strive to preserve Armenian identity.

Diasporic Dwellings

A strong sentiment of Armenian cultural identity resonates throughout the community centres. Due to a network of community centres across the diaspora, a collective consciousness permeates, often expressed through common vernaculars, performances, or beliefs stemming from various interpretations of Armenian identity that have been developed over the years. The creation of common performances and language contributes to the cultural formation of identity as defined by Hall's first definition which consists of cultural identity

which stipulates our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes, thus creating an initial, although somewhat superficial, connection between Armenians across borders. Nevertheless, these cultural traits and links do not exclude the fact that clear differences exist between various Armenian individuals and communities with diverse backgrounds in different locales throughout the diaspora, in countries such as Lebanon, Eygpt, and Greece, as well as with differences in approaches within organizations and ideologies. Hence, the majority of Armenian-Montréalers are triply affiliated. They are Armenian by origin, but born in a different diasporic locales before having immigrated to Canada. Based on the interviews by Boujikanian (2004), examining the residential and economic insertion of Armenians living in Montréal, her findings clearly reveal the triple affiliation Armenian-Montréalers have, by determining their country of birth. Out of 100 respondents, 31 were born in Lebanon, 24 Egypt, 18 from Syria, 7 Turkey, 7 Iran, 1 from Israel/ Palestine, 3 in the former URSS, 3 Montréal, 2 Armenia, 4 Others (France, Qatar, Ethiopia, Cyprus) (p.99). These different belongings to former diasporic communities tend to surface within the community centres in various ways, as Armenians coming from different backgrounds do not necessarily see eye-to-eye. An Armenian who grew up in Athens cannot have the same perception than an Armenian who grew up in Lebanon during the Civil War. As much as these differences of affiliations can cause a certain degree of tensions at times, it may also be viewed as adding diversity to the centres.

As Hall (in Anand, 2003, p.220) points out, "diaspora communities, constituted by displacement, are sustained by hybrid historical conjunctures." In

this sense, based on the interviews that I conducted, Montréal has become "home" for Armenians in a manner that depends on the degree of integration and adaptation of the individual. Individuals are free to choose whether they are to include elements that nurture their Armenian identity, and if so, what is the nature of these elements. This hybrid nature of diasporic subjects is in essence an empowering element, as Hall perceives them as being "distinct versions of modern, transnational, intercultural experience." Hall redefines diaspora by highlighting "the recognition of heterogeneity, diversity, and transformation as valid components of the diasporic experience" (Anand, 2003, p.220). Therefore, the experience of a diasporic subject according to Hall, is enriching as the following statement postulates:

> The diaspora experience is ... defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of "identity" which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. (Anand, 2003, p.220)

Diasporic communities, therefore, possess complex, hybridized, and evolving properties due to the history of the members, their different backgrounds, their places of birth, and their experiences. The role that Montréal plays is primordial: living in this city contributes to the hybridization that is experienced by Armenians. It would be irrelevant to ignore Montréal as a backdrop to the community activities taking place around the centres, as both the city of Montréal and Canadian society in general not only allow for such manifestations of identity, but also constitute the make-up of the cultural scene. As Sherry Simon (1996) writes:

> These interstitial identities inform the texture of much of the daily life in the post-Law 101 reality of cosmopolitan Montréal, (Montréal as a place of constant in- betweenness, one that is driven by a multitude of "beings-called:" a place of incessant attempts to linguistically name, a culture spun within the slippages of translation but they emerge most fully in the area of cultural creation. (p.126)

Hence, the cultural communities in Montréal make it a non-stagnant space-culturally speaking. With the Armenian schools in Montréal following the curriculum of the Québec Ministry of Education, all students graduate with fluency in writen and speak French, as well as being exposed to local Québécois and Canadian culture. Although Armenian-Montréaler children are not "québecois de souche," this language trajectory drawn out by the implementation of Bill 101, ensures that immigrant children communicate and interact in French, Québec's official language.

Facing unrest

Today, Armenians tend to define their existence over the course of history as being a difficult one, which was always marked by a struggle to relocate and then survive. Not only were they victims of genocide, but they have seemingly always been in the midst of geographical and political conflicts. In terms of displacement, an article entitled *Forced Displacement, Humanitarian Intervention, and Sovereignty*, Arthur Helton (2000) states how in 1921 the League of Nations established a program to resettle refugees. Among others, the League addressed Armenians who were exiled during the fall of the Ottoman Empire. In late 1922, after several years of violence and ensuing displacements,

100,000 Armenians were driven out of Smyrna and scattered to Bulgaria, Greece, Russian Armenia, Syria, and Turkey. Specific recognition for purposes of protection and assistance was then given under League auspices to "any person of Armenian origin formerly a subject of the Ottoman Empire." The promises of help, however, by the League of Nations, never materialized, and "Armenia's fate was sealed by defeat and Sovietization" (Dadrian, 1995, p.360). In spite of the lack of assistance provided by the League of Nations, certain governments and individuals did intervene to help the post-Genocide generation of survivors reestablish themselves in host societies. Moreover, natural calamities, such as earthquakes, are occurrences in the region of the homeland that have left devastating aftermaths, without mentioning the destructive burden of the Iron Curtain and communism for over 70 years. This precarious existence, as well as the ongoing reconstruction and successes along this treacherous historical road, may have played a role into making Armenians generally more protective in terms of maintaining their identity. Today, however, the Armenian existence is not threatened in their new dwelling places, especially in Canada. To what extent do the ethnocentric tendencies that resulted from a threatened past still linger within the multicultural context of Canada? Compared to the United States, Armenian immigrants arriving to Canada held on tighter to their heritage, whereas in the United States, Armenian immigrants and the following American-born generations strove to integrate themselves into American society as seamlessly and as fast as possible. They wanted to lead their lives without the traumatic burdens of the Genocide's aftermath interfering with their new beginnings. Ostensibly, the way immigrants react once they have settled in a new locale

largely depends on how they are received, how they are treated, and also what conditions brought them to the new country. It is interesting to note that the first post-Genocide generation experienced a different immigration and adaptation process than the generations who arrived later. In addition, the destinations for these immigrants greatly influenced their integration.

In his book entitled *Global Diasporas*, Robin Cohen (1997) highlights three striking features related to the Armenian diaspora living in the United States. First of all, "the relative public silence of the community till the 1970s, the more public role played since that time, and the growth of a powerful set of internal social and cultural organizations"(p.48-49). The powerful set of internal organizations is what kept the Diaspora alive over time. Cohen's argument about the Armenian community's formation in the United States, namely the expansion of a considerable set of social and cultural organizations, can be transposed to Canada, especially if we consider that some of the organizations functioning in Canada are extensions of the organizations that were founded in the United States. For instance, the Armenian Youth Federation[13] (associated with the Armenian Revolutionary Federation in the United States), was founded in Boston by Karekin Nejdeh in 1933. Today, this organization, originally established in the diaspora, has chapters stretching across Canada and the world, including Armenia.

Cohen's statements about the self-enforced silence of Armenians in the United States are echoed in author Peter Balakian's (1998) memoir entitled *Black Dog of Fate*. Balakian, an American of Armenian descent, who grew up in a New Jersey suburb during the 1950s and 1960s, uncovers late in his life his Armenian

past through his family, particularly through his grandmother and aunts. *Black Dog of Fate* vividly evokes his experience growing up in two different cultures simultaneously, until he uncovers the Genocide. Balakian's ambivalence towards his "Armenianness" is described in the following except from the book:

> When I was with my grandmother I had access to some other world, some evocative place of dark and light, some kind of energy that ran like an invisible force from this old country called Armenia to my world in New Jersey. It was something ancient, something connected to earth and words and blood and sky. (p.17)

During the time when Balakian was growing up, many Armenians did not go public about the emotional wounds left by the Genocide, mainly because the shock was unbearable and because they simply tried to reestablish their homes in their new setting. His aunt recalls Balakian's grandmother giving a speech on the 25th anniversary of the Genocide in 1940 in New Jersey. Balakian asked his aunt: "Was this the first time in your community people talked about the Genocide?" His aunt answered: "As I'm thinking about it now, I imagine that most of those people had been silent for all those years. They were proud citizens of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's America. They just wanted to be left alone to raise families, do business in peace. The events of the past were not only too painful, they were beyond words" (Balakian, 1998, p.177-178).

Mosaics or Cultural Masks?

Stuart Hall (2003) describes cultural identity, not as an essence, but a *positioning*, to which I would add a creolized positioning (p.237). How does one balance their belonging to a previous dwelling- real or imagined- with a present

dwelling, which is foreign and perhaps hostile, or at times seemingly welcoming? What are the ways this double existence or consciousness is expressed and lived on a daily basis? Does one automatically assume and confront their "otherness", once they are in a new dwelling place? Is their presence stable or constantly changing? As Hall points out, utilizing Jacques Derrida's terminology, this notion of difference is not pure "otherness". Derrida uses an "a" when writing the word "difference" - *différance*, thus blurring the boundaries between the French verb "to differ" and "to defer" with the idea of meaning always being deferred. Put differently, the word is in motion without ever "erasing the *trace* of its other meanings" (Hall, 2003, p.239). Otherness can represent a wide array of significations, taking on a notion of difference. Along this vein, how is one to qualify the ethnic Armenian presence in the city of Montréal, the province of Québec and subsequently to the nation of Canada?

The "new indifference to difference," as referred to by Zygmunt Bauman (2001), is theorized as recognition of "cultural pluralism." The policy informed and supported by that theory is "multiculturalism." According to Bauman, "multiculturalism is guided by the postulate of liberal tolerance and by care for the communities' right to self-assertion and public recognition of their chosen (or inherited) identities." He claims that multiculturalism works essentially as a conservative force: "its effect is a recasting of inequalities" (Bauman, 2001, p.107).

Cohen (1997) describes how in addition to the survivors' acute psychological state following the Armenian Genocide, "it is noticeable that the first and much of the second generation of Armenian-Americans adopted a

privatized, inward-looking world of apparent conformity to the assimilationist ethic, *together with* a strong sense of difference, which was rarely displayed in the public domain" (p. 49). In Canada, however, the multiculturalism policy differs from that of the United States of America. Canada claims to welcome expressions of cultural identity expressed by racially and culturally diverse communities. Based on the information on the Canadian Government website, the concept of Canada as a "multicultural society" can be interpreted in different ways: descriptively (as a sociological fact), prescriptively (as ideology), from a political perspective (as policy), or as a set of intergroup dynamics (as process)[14]. Historically speaking, the official entry of multiculturalism onto the Canadian political stage, took place throughout the 1960s and '70s, when an "open door" immigration policy prevailed. Attributed to the Liberal party and its leader, Pierre Elliot Trudeau, this policy brought many people of colour, other "races," into the country. The explanation for this was "the expectation of capitalist industrial growth in Canada and the aspiration for the creation of a liberal democratic nationhood" (Bannerji, 2000, p.30).

According to the government, "multiculturalism" in Canada refers to "the presence and persistence of diverse racial and ethnic minorities who define themselves as different and who wish to remain so." This "presence and persistence" mentioned by the Canadian government seems to suggest a restricted presence, almost condemning people to remain the way they were when they arrived to Canada, while putting a mask on that makes them a part of Canadian society. As Neil Bissoondath (1994) points out, "in its rush, the act appears to indulge in several unexamined assumptions: that people, coming here from

elsewhere, wish to remain what they have been; that personalities and ways of doing things, ways of looking at the world, can be frozen in time; that Canadian cultural influences pale before the exoticism of the foreign" (p.39).

In terms of ideology, the government states that multiculturalism entails a relatively coherent set of ideas and ideals pertaining to the celebration of Canada's cultural mosaic. At the policy level, multiculturalism is "structured around the management of diversity through formal initiatives in the federal, provincial and municipal domains." Finally, multiculturalism is "the process by which racial and ethnic minorities compete with central authorities for achievement of certain goals and aspirations."[15] The Act does not address the limits of encouraging and promoting cultural difference beyond the concept of "unity or oneness of vision" (Bissoondath, 1994, p.40). Furthermore, the Multiculturalism Act carries contradictions. In his book *The Trouble with Canada*, William Gairdner "poses a number of pertinent questions—how, for example, can cultural diversity be preserved and enhanced when the ultimate goal is, and must be, immigrant integration?"(Bissoondath, 1994, p.65) Does complete immigrant integration take place and should it even occur? Surely, the Armenian community centres do allow Canadian-Armenians to maintain their cultural diversity; regardless of what extent they are integrated.

I do not attempt to provide a full analysis of the Act in this thesis. Nonetheless, the Act has been accused of being shortsighted, or deemed as being "sweet talk" by Bissoondath. At first glance, Canada is in fact a welcoming country that invites immigrants from various parts of the world, in certain cases as refugees. At the same time, it allocates the right and the space for immigrants and

citizens of diverse cultural backgrounds to continue to support their homeland and maintain their connections. Perhaps such an attitude only reinforces difference, enlarging the cultural gaps, rather than bringing diverse groups together. One cannot deny the extent to which the Canadian government has financed and supported the different ethnic groups to realize cultural performances reminiscent of home, for both ethnic and non-ethnic audiences alike. Yet, these performances are, for the most part, opaque for the Montréal society at large.

Chapter 4: Extended Homes

> We are in the epoch of simultaneity, the epoch of near and far, of the side by side, of the dispersed.
>
> -Michel Foucault

In the introduction, I questioned what it means, "to feel at home" in a world where the location and the meaning of dwelling fluctuates amid transnational flows. The access to mobility and subsequent attachments has substantially altered how we chose to belong to dwellings. Moreover, when one is physically removed or born outside of a homeland, diasporic community dwellings take on new dimensions, because these spaces not only foster communication between members of the same community, but also interactions occur between other diasporic communities, local society, and its numerous socio-economical and cultural facets, further complicating notions of belonging. In this chapter, I will describe the organizational formulations and the infrastructures of the Armenian Community Centre of Montréal and the AGBU Centre, and demonstrate how these centres fall within the theoretical framework of dwelling and of space, in the social sense.

In *Communities within Cities: an urban social geography*, by Davies and Herbert, the term community is described as being the shared characteristics that bind people together, and that these associations arise in a *defined area*. Hence, "community can have a spatial or territorial context, a common territory or place that often reinforces the interactions, provides a psychological association and enhances its character" (Davies & Herbert, 1993, p.1). The two Armenian

community centres examined clearly occupy a defined area in the suburban layout of Montréal, thus maintaining a spatial context that reinforces interactions between members, and creates dialogue between local residents of different backgrounds, city and government officials, and other ethnic and diasporic communities. These centres also cater to local needs, as well as to the needs in Armenia, through charity, social, religious, and political involvement, thereby reinforcing transnational ties. The psychological associations that these spaces construct come to light namely through members' involvement within the community centres; they perceive the centres as being extensions of "homes". Do these spaces continue to represent the "imagined homeland" of Armenia in the strict sense, as they were intended to do when the centres were established following the Genocide? How have the temporal and geographic distances from the locus of Armenia created a more dynamic transnationalism for diasporan Armenians in Montréal, thus shifting and destabilizing the point of departure? I argue that these community centres, although still viewed by many as being diasporic dwellings (as the interviews will reveal), are no longer confined to a static embryonic cord connected to a real or imagined homeland.

Before describing the centres, I must, however, point out that the majority of the diasporic performances remain within the realm of conservative multicultural models. For the pragmatic purpose of this thesis, my research remains within the realm of examining organizations that are affiliated in some way with the spaces of Armenian community centres in Montréal. I do, however, acknowledge individuals in society who choose not to attend community centres and have created their own alternative satellite communities. One example of the

counter-diasporic performances within communities is the Gay and Lesbian Armenian Society of Los Angeles (GALAS) that has sister organizations in New York, Boston, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, Sydney, and Toronto. The mission of GALAS, according to their website, is "to foster acceptance and promote equality of its gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgender membership by empowering its members and enriching their lives."[16] By providing outreach programs and participating in local activities geared towards the broader homosexual community, they provide a support system in order to help each other in their emotional, cultural, spiritual, and professional growth. The interaction between the members of this organization with the current dwelling place radically differs from the interaction of members of organizations that function within the parameters of established Armenian community centres throughout the diaspora. While there are no organizations for gay and lesbians in Montréal to date, I speculate that the way in which these organizations would exist in parallel with the functioning organizations would reveal many questions worth pursing surrounding the marginalization of Armenian diasporic bodies, as well as expressions of new forms of cultural identity and how they relate to gender and sexual orientation.

Community Centres

In contrast to the counter-diasporic performances, I will nonetheless outline the dynamic and non-linear aspect of transnational communication housed by these community centres, versus the usual perception of a dialogical model between current dwelling and the homeland. The existing Armenian community

centres in Montréal and the community centres' buildings functional value can be viewed as the space where the different Armenian organizations have their offices and conduct their work and meetings. Thus, the community centres are a meeting place in every sense, catering to every generation, that also extends within the social realm, whether it entails the elderly converging to the centres once a week for brunch, families supporting soccer tournaments, dinner-dances held to commemorate Armenia's independence, worshippers coming to Church, or by others playing bridge. In this section, I will discuss the nature and the scope of each community centre. By doing so, my aim is not to draw comparisons of the two centres. Instead, by delineating the organizations housed in these centres and the types of activities that occur within or, at times, on the peripheries, I will discuss the meaning of dwelling and space through the consideration and conceptualization of contemporary forms of belonging, such as community centre spaces.

Organizations and Activities

In her book, *The Dark Side of the Nation*, Himani Bannerji (2000) writes:

> Diversity has become a commonplace word in our political and cultural world. [...] So much so that even businesses have adapted their talk about profit and productivity to the language of diversity, while governments and public institutions set up bureaucracies in its name. On the side of the people, from below, organizations have been created merging notions of community with diversity- speaking to ethno-cultural pluralities and collective cultural identities. (p. 35)

Indeed, there has been a proliferation of organizations in the various ethnic communities that have come to life in the name of diversity and multiculturalism rhetoric. In this section, I look at the organizations established "by the people

below", often in other diasporic locales, with chapters expanding internationally, including in Montréal. These organizations often have their offices and administrative structures in the centres where most of the formal functions are held. According to an informational and fund-raising brochure produced by the Montréal Armenian Community Centre in the early 1990s: "the last four decades have seen an increasing number of institutions and organizations emerge to accommodate the spiritual, cultural, educational, and social needs of Montréal's growing Armenian community." I will therefore provide the basis for the primary formal organizations functioning within the centres and accommodating these "needs." According to Davies and Herbert (1993), "an organization occurs only when there is some formal mechanism for the creation of the association, such as membership fee, constitution or a hierarchy of officials" (p.65). In this sense, the organizations I refer to below generally follow these organizational formulations mentioned by Davies and Herbert.

The Montréal Armenian Community Centre

The Montréal Armenian Community Centre is nestled in a residential zone in the borough of Ahunstic-Cartierville. This structural complex encompasses offices for the organizations functioning within the centre, as well as a performance hall, gymnasium, dining room, library, bookstore, and a nursery school. Both the Sourp Hagop Armenian Apostolic Church and the Armenian Prelacy of Canada are also annexed to the centre. Directly opposite the centre, one can find the Parc de l'Arménie. The Sourp Hagop Armenian elementary and high school is also adjacent to the centre. Clearly, the structure of the centre itself

offers a wide spectrum of daily activities that cater to the various organizations and age groups that function within the community centre and surrounding spaces. Furthermore, the Armenian Community Centre defined in this spatial context is recognizable through either architectural or iconographic imagery and artwork that recall Armenian history. Besides the Armenian flag that stands along side the Québec and Canadian flag, a distinct architectural element clearly reveals this space as being Armenian. This element is the exterior shape of the church's roof. It is, in fact, a modern replica of the centuries-old stone churches that still stand, intact or in ruins, in Armenia or historical Armenia today. The interior of the centre is adorned with framed photographs of ancient stone crosses hidden in the mystical landscape of Armenia, with maps of Armenia, and with portraits of significant literary, spiritual, political, and cultural leaders. The presence of these images goes beyond their aesthetic value and embodies various degrees of symbolism, depicting and evoking other temporal and spatial dimensions that contribute to the character of the space, while creating a tension of "here" and "there." Although these images create a tension between "here" and "there", and a "past" and "present," these images and symbols do however surface in the present and in a community centre located in Ahunstic-Cartierville, Québec.

Because the centre is located in the Ahunstic-Cartierville borough, it would be useful to consider this borough's demographic and ethno-cultural variables compiled by City of Montréal.[17] The borough of Auhunstic-Cartierville represents 7% of the population within the conglomerated City of Montréal and ranks 5th out of the 27 boroughs of Greater Montréal, in terms of total population. Based on the 2001 census, the borough of Ahunstic-Cartierville counted 125,145

individuals out of which 90% of the residents were Canadian and 10% declared another citizenship. The percentage of immigrants in Ahunstic-Cartierville stands at 33%, which is higher than the number of immigrants found on the entire island of Montréal, or 28%. The main countries the residents have emigrated from are Italy, Lebanon, and Haiti. More recently, the borough counted 9100 new immigrants who arrived between 1996 and 2001, mainly from Algeria and Haiti. Similar to many of the boroughs that are part of Greater Montréal, Ahunstic-Cartierville is characterized by the predominance of the immigration periods of 1981-1990 and 1991-1996, representing 55% of the total immigration of the borough, versus 49% on the Montréal level. A considerable number of residents, 31%, indicated that they hold other "unique" origins, while 12% considered themselves as having French origins. In third place, with 11%, were the Italians. In terms of language, French as a mother tongue was predominant throughout the borough with 57%. Those who have English as their mother tongue represents 5%, while Arabic was the highest non-official mother language with 8%, followed by Italian with 7%, Greek, 4% and Spanish and Armenian, both at 3.2%. The residents in the borough, representing a visible minority, represent 24% of the population. Overall, there is no doubt that the Armenian Community Centre of Montréal is located in a highly "interethnic" neighborhood cohabited by numerous English, French, Armenian, Haitians, Lebanese, Egyptian, Italian, and Greek residents.

In *Communities within cities*, Davies and Hebert (1993) write that "ethnic residential segregation is often the most pronounced form of residential separation within cities, and historically ethnic areas, frequently linked with recent

immigration, have been regarded as close-knit communities" (p.75). Although Armenians do not have a precise residential location in the city of Montréal, there is a higher concentration of residents, merchants, and community centres in the north-western part of the island (in Ahunstic-Cartierville and St-Laurent), as well as in the neighboring city of Laval, thereby creating small enclaves of Armenians of close-knit communities throughout the city.

Administration

The Board of Trustees of the Sourp Hagop Armenian Apostolic Church heads the Montréal Armenian Community Centre. This board oversees the management of the Sourp Hagop Church, the Sourp Hagop Armenian School, as well as the Montréal Armenian Community Centre itself.

Spiritual Sphere

The main spiritual sphere associated with the Montréal Armenian Community Centre is the presence and the primary role of the Sourp Hagop Armenian Apostolic Church. This church, which is annexed to the Montréal Armenian Community Centre, offers auxiliary organizations, including a Sunday school, a Ladies' guild, and a youth bible study program that organizes monthly lectures open to the public on topics pertaining to current affairs and spirituality. Mass takes place on every Sunday morning, and the Church celebrates religious holidays, such as Easter and Epiphany (Orthodox Christmas), thus creating a steady flow of movement around the community centre adjacent to the church. The Armenian Church has a long-standing role in Armenian history and is often seen as one of the pillars of Armenian identity, because it has withstood numerous threats to its existence and is considered as the cornerstone, a point of

convergence, for Armenian communities throughout the diaspora. The Sourp Hagop Armenian Apostolic Church in Montréal, which was established 1958, has always played a leading role in the development of the Montréal Armenian Community Centre, in terms of gathering Armenians around the community. Until its relocation to Olivar Asselin Street in 1973 next to the community centre, the small church was located on St-Zotique Street. In 1994, as the Armenian community in Montréal continued to grow, the Sourp Hagop Church was designated as Cathedral for the entire Armenian Canadian Community. Later, in 2005, the Armenian Prelacy of Canada, was constructed in annex to the centre and was inaugurated.

Cultural Sphere

Within the cultural realm, the primary organization operating within this centre is the *Hamazkayin* Cultural and Educational Society, an international association that has existed for over 75 years with chapters throughout the diaspora and in Armenia. The objective of Hamazkayin is "to provide a sound education to the new generation, and to strive towards the preservation of the ethnic identity and cultural heritage of the Armenian people living outside their homeland."[18] The Montréal chapter includes a theater group, a folkloric dance troupe, a bookstore, and a library all within the community centre complex. The *Hamazkayin* cultural society is managed by a central executive (on a Canadian national level) and by a local executive (on a local chapter level), organizes photograph and art expositions, music concerts, literary events and book launches. Such events often showcase Canadian-Armenian artists and writers, as well as guest artists from other communities throughout the diaspora and from Armenia.

Charity Sphere

The Armenian Relief Society (ARS) is an international charitable organization with local chapters throughout Canada and a central executive, whose headquarters are located in the Montréal Armenian Community Centre. This non-governmental and non-sectarian organization is an NGO on the Roster in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations[19]. The organization finances and manages several humanitarian projects in Armenia, which include orphanages, medical centres, kindergartens, and maternity centres established by the organization. The ARS comes to the aid of local Armenians in need, but also contributes to non-Armenian charities throughout Montréal. In times of natural calamities or war, the organization provides considerable material and financial relief to disaster zones throughout the world. The organization is run by women and has a primarily female membership.

Educational Sphere

The educational wing of the Montréal Armenian Community Centre is the Sourp Hagop Armenian School. This private elementary and high school starts from kindergarten and ends with a graduating class at the Québec Secondary 5 level. The school follows the provincial curriculum in French as established by the Québec Ministry of Education. At this school, the students not only are taught in Canada's two official languages, but are also exposed to the local culture and history of Québec and Canada at an early age. Beyond the provincial program, additional daily periods are allocated to the teaching of Armenian language,

culture, history and religion.

Media

Diasporic communities tend to have media outlets that facilitate the flows of information between other diasporic communities and the homeland. *Horizon* is a weekly newspaper, whose offices are located in the Montréal Armenian Community Centre. It is published mainly in Armenian with French and English language inserts. The paper covers current events taking place in Canada, Armenia, and in other communities across the diaspora. *Horizon* also produces a weekly half-hour television show in Armenian, English, and French that is broadcasted three times a week. The program airs on Global CH, Montréal's ethnic television channel. The Montréal Armenian Community Centre also produces a radio show entitled "Panorama Arménien" which airs in one-hour slots three times a week on CKDG 105.1 FM, an ethnic and community radio station in Montréal. The live show includes news segments, features new music from the diaspora and Armenia, and also showcases interviews with guests. Past interviews have included the chief of police for the Montréal Urban Community's Police on the issues of neighborhood security. Other guests have included artists, musicians, and politicians.

In an article entitled *Fieldwork at the Movies: Anthrolopogy and Media*, Faye Ginsburg (2002) writes that the "activist engagement with media encompasses not only indigenous work but media being produced by diasporic communities, who use media to create community across dislocation, and by variety of other minoritized people who have become involved in creating their own representations as a counter to dominant systems" (p.366). Because

mainstream media scarcely cover what occurs in Armenia on a daily basis (excluding major catastrophes or wars) or what occurs within the diasporic realms of the Armenian community in Montréal, for that matter, media produced and diffused by diasporic communities have developed their own formulations that complement dominant media discourses.

Political Sphere

The political party functioning within the Montréal Armenian Community Centre is the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF)[20]. This political party's chapters stretch worldwide, including Armenia, where it is one of the three ruling parties in the Armenian Parliament. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation is essentially a nationalist, socialist, democratic, and revolutionary party.

> The Armenian Revolutionary Federation with all the power at its disposal strives to defend the aggregate political, economic, and socio-cultural interests of the Armenian nation. [...] It advocates individual freedom, national self-determination, independent statehood, social harmony, and economic well being to secure unobstructed, multifaceted, and sustainable development of both the individual Armenian and Armenian nation. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation strives for the resolution of the Armenian Cause. - A united homeland for the entire Armenian people. [21]

Therefore, the regional and national committees of the ARF ensure that the national and international interests of Armenians are protected. One of the main goals of the ARF is the "international condemnation of the as yet unpunished Genocide committed by Turkey against the Armenians, return of the occupied lands, and just reparations to the Armenian nation."[22]

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation Youth of Canada (ARFYOC) is the youth wing of the ARF, for youth between the ages of 18 to 26. This political

organization is involved in Canadian politics either on the municipal, provincial, or federal level. They also have a social aspect to the organization, which includes trips to Armenia, seminars, and other educational activities involving the acquirement of leadership skills. Another political organization functioning within the Montréal Armenian community centre is the Armenian National Committee (ANCC), which is considered to be the largest and most influential Canadian-Armenian grassroots political organization. This lobby group works in coordination with their offices in Toronto and counterparts in Ottawa, as well as with a network of supporters throughout Canada. It is affiliated with the ANC of America Washington, D.C.[23], as well as other organizations around North America and the entire world. The ANCC actively strives to advance the concerns of the Armenian-Canadian community on numerous levels, mostly political. For example, the ANCC played a pivotal role when the Canadian Senate recognized the Armenian Genocide in 2002 and the when House of Commons did the same in 2004.

The main goals of the ANCC are:

- to foster public awareness in support of a free, united and independent Armenia;
- to influence and guide Canadian policy on matters of interest to the Armenian Canadian community;
- to represent the collective Armenian-Canadian viewpoint on matters of public policy, while serving as liaison between the community and their elected officials.

Sporting and Scouting Spheres

The Montréal Armenian Community Centre is also home to Homentmen, an organization that encompasses sporting and scouting divisions. Members of the Homentmen play on soccer, volleyball, basketball, and floor hockey teams. They compete in local league tournaments throughout Montréal and Québec, and they participate in competitions against other Homenetmen chapters throughout the diaspora and Armenia. The Homentmen Armenian Scouts of Canada, which are affiliated with Scouts Canada. They are also active internationally, by collaborating on projects with other chapters around the world, which includes organizing camping trips in Armenia. According to their mission statement, the mission of Homenetmen is to prepare physically strong Armenians and exemplary citizens with the highest intellectual and spiritual virtues. These objectives are realized by scouting, general physical education and sports, lectures, seminars, publications, clubs, gymnasiums, and sports facilities.

Social Sphere

The Golden Age organization organizes field trips, lunches, and social activities for the senior population of Armenians. The Montréal Armenian Community Centre Bridge group meets on a weekly basis to play, and it also organizes tournaments. Other facilities available at the Montréal Armenian Community Centre include a full-size gymnasium, where not only sporting events are held, but also this space also serves as a reception hall for dinner-dances and weddings. Also the Aharonian Hall (named after a famous author) includes a performance stage and is often used for public lectures, exhibitions. Finally, the

dining hall within the centre, which is open to the public in the evenings, serves Middle Eastern and Armenian cuisine, allowing friends and family to gather for occasions. In fact, engagements, weddings, funerals and baptisms take place in the Sourp Hagop church and are often followed by a reception in the dining hall.

The Armenian General Benevolent (AGBU) Centre of Montréal

This centre in Montréal represents one of the numerous chapters across the world of the non-partisan international organization known as the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU)[24]. Established in 1906, the AGBU's purpose is "to preserve and promote the Armenian identity and heritage through educational, cultural, and humanitarian programs." Besides the global chapters, the AGBU also maintains cultural and educational institutions, such as schools and community centres throughout the diaspora and Armenia. The organization hosts a range of different activities such as cultural events, lectures, AGBU publications, career-oriented internships in New York and Paris, summer camps, athletic games, to mention only a few. Within the education realm, the organization also provides international scholarship and loans for Armenian college students, and it runs 24 primary, secondary, preparatory, and Saturday schools, as well as funding the American University of Armenia. Some of the other projects the AGBU sponsors in Armenia include the funding of the Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery Centre; the Armenia Philharmonic Orchestra; *Nork, Arapkir* and *Malatya* Children's Centres; *Sevan* Theological Seminary; *Gyumri* Cold Food Storage facility; *Yerevan, Sevan, Hrazdan and Etchmiadzin* Soup

Kitchens; *Gyumri* Academy of Music and Art.

With AGBU chapters and offices stretching from Melbourne, Montevideo, Miami, and Montréal to Manchester, among many others, the organization extends throughout the diaspora and each chapter functions according to the ideals and vision of the AGBU. The Montréal chapter serves Canada's largest Armenian community, according to the AGBU website. The core of the activities within the newly renovated community centre mostly supports the Armen-Québec Alex Manoogian School, an active scouting troop, and an ABGU Young Professionals committee. In their commemorative booklet published in 2004 that highlights the renovations of the centre in Montréal, the organization describes its vision as follows:

> AGBU Montréal believes that the two pillars of Armenian identity are a strong Armenia and a strong diaspora. Strong and prosperous Armenian communities in the diaspora are able to assist Armenia in this difficult period of history. A strong Armenia is the *raison-d'etre* of all Armenians around the world. Therefore, a significant component of all the activities and events organized by AGBU Montréal focuses around initiatives related to Armenia, such as exhibitions of works by artists from Armenia, sponsoring of concerts by musicians from Armenia and the Educ-Aid program for Armenian schools.[25]

This vision explicitly mentions the transnational ties between Montréal and Armenia, and how Armenia and the diaspora go hand-in-hand. Furthermore, the Montréal chapter, similar to all other AGBU chapters, is committed to encouraging Armenian youth to develop their leadership skills and preserve their Armenian roots, through community involvement and volunteer work. Notwithstanding the AGBU's wide spectrum of different activities and events, it allows for all age groups to participate in community life.

The AGBU Centre is situated in a residential area within the borough of St-Laurent, on the northwestern side of Montréal. St-Laurent has the highest concentration of immigrants among all of Montréal's boroughs. Based on the 2001 census, St-Laurent had a total population of 77,391. Out of this total, 88% of the residents were Canadian, while 12% declared another citizenship. St-Laurent is considered to have one of the lowest concentrations of Canadian residents compared to the rest of Montréal. The percentage of immigrants in this borough is 49%, which is higher than the average observed in Montréal, of 28%. The countries of origin of these immigrants are mainly Lebanon, Egypt, and Morocco. More recently, between 1996 and 2001, 7250 immigrants came to St-Laurent, primarily from Lebanon and Algeria. In terms of language, only 33% of the residents have French as their mother tongue, 18% have indicated English as being their mother tongue, followed by Arabic, with 13%. In terms of origins, 15% of the residents indicated that they belonged to a "unique" origin, while specifying their belonging to Canada. Lebanese ranked second with 11% and 8% represents Jewish residents. Those residents who identified themselves as visible minorities represent 38% of the borough's population, with the Arabs ranking second with 27%, followed by the Chinese with 17%. The AGBU centre is therefore located in a highly multi-ethnic borough, with a considerable number of immigrants from different backgrounds and origins.[26]

The AGBU Centre in Montréal, spearheaded by an executive committee, accommodates a variety of different activities in its spacious and well-lit spaces that include a main hall that hosts lectures, exhibitions, and concerts, a dining room, a kitchen, and a boardroom. As opposed to the Montréal Armenian

Community Centre, where the majority of its organizations function within the confines of the centre itself, some of the organizations or infrastructures that work closely with the AGBU are not located directly within the centre.

Spiritual Sphere

The church associated with the AGBU Centre is the Church of St-Gregory the Illuminator that is located in Outremont. The Diocese of the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church of Canada, also located in Outremont, who celebrated its 20th anniversary of existence in 2005, oversees all the Armenian churches across Canada belonging to the universal mother church of Holy Etchmiadzin in Armenia, where the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians resides. The Diocese organizes numerous religious and cultural events, as well as pilgrimages to Armenia, Jerusalem, and other religious shrines across Canada and the diaspora. The auxiliary church organizations include the Canadian Youth Mission to Armenia (CYMA), the Ladies' Guild, Armenian Church Youth Organization of Canada (ACYOC), the Church Choir, Saturday and Sunday schools, the Canadian Armenian Association for the Performing Arts (CAAPA), and the Children's fund for Armenia (CFFA).

Although the Armenian Church has been described as "the most ingrained national institution", and has always been an integral part of community politics," (Panossian, 1998, p.186) ironically, the Church is the main reason of polarization within the Armenian diasporic communities. The Church of Saint-Gregory along with the Canadian Diocese is affiliated with the Holy See of Etchmiadzin in Armenia, which was under the Soviet rule till its independence in 1991. The Sourp Hagop Church on the other hand, along with the Canadian Prelacy, is

affiliated with the See of Cilicia, based in Beirut, which was displaced from historical Western Armenian and exiled along with the Armenian people following the Armenian Genocide. In his discussion regarding Armenia-diaspora relations, in reference to the Armenian Church, Razmik Panossian outlines this historical division. This schism officially took place in 1956, when the ARF elected their candidate, Zareh I, as Catholicos of the See of Cilicia, while Vazken I from the Etchmiadzin See (Catholicos of All Armenians), who was present at the elections, was "under pressure from the Soviet authorities and some anti-ARF diaspora organizations that did not recognize the legitimacy of the elections." After Zareh I became the Catholicos, "a battle of jurisdiction ensued as the Cilician Church sought to extend its influence beyond the Middle East and Europe and to North America and to where ever there was a large enough ARF community to sustain its own Church. Hence, Armenians based on their political persuasions split of their loyalty between one of the two Catholicoi"(Panossian, p.187). This antagonism continues to divide the Armenian community in Canada, which reinforced the differences between the community centres. Fortunately these differences are fading with the newer generations of Canadian-Armenians, as the emphasis is now on helping to rebuild the independent nation of Armenia that emerged from more than 70 years of Communism.

Cultural Sphere

A cultural committee at the AGBU organizes events such as publications, lectures, theater, films, and concerts featuring local musicians, scholars, writers or performers from various regions of the diaspora or Armenia. Poetry recitation contests as well as art exhibitions featuring Armenian artists from all over the

world also take place within the AGBU centre.

Charity Sphere

The AGBU is a charity organization, managing and funding charitable missions, thereby reaching out to different groups within Armenian communities. The charitable activities revolve around the renovating and maintenance of the centre, the Armen-Québec-Alex Manoogian School, a scouting troop and an AGBU Young Professionals committee here in Montréal. The chapter here also contributes to the numerous humanitarian and cultural projects established in Armenia, outlined earlier in this section.

Educational Sphere

The AGBU of Montréal supports the Armen-Québec School which starts from kindergarten and extends to grade 8. Armen-Québec conforms to the program requirements of the Québec Ministry of Education. Students are taught primarily in French and English, with additional instruction in Armenian language, history, culture and religion are also taught.

Media

The AGBU is responsible for many publications. The community newspaper is *Abaka*, published in Armenian with English and French inserts. Founded in 1975, this newspaper was the first Armenian weekly newspaper published in Canada.

Political Sphere

Members and leaders of the AGBU are often associated with different political parties or organizations, such as the Armenian Democratic Liberal party

(ADL). The ADL is one of the three important political parties for Armenians. It is the only one that was founded on Armenian soil itself in the city of Van (used to be Western Armenia, presently in Turkey). ADL has not adopted socialist or Marxist political models. ADL's goals are to preserve and promote the historical, cultural, and religious aspects of Armenian heritage. By maintaining the Armenian national entity and encouraging economic progress throughout the diaspora, the ADL applies the principles of liberal democracy when carrying out work in the public sphere. The ADL also actively works to promote the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. The Congress of Canadian Armenians (CCA) also works closely with the AGBU. The Congress of Canadian Armenians aims to create "a united front in presenting Armenian issues and the Armenian community to the Canadian public, to carry out significant projects of general interest to the community, and to provide a forum where member organizations can coordinate their activities."

Scouting Sphere

The AGBU Scouts are a member of *Scouts de Montréal Metropolitain.* They are involved in local life from supporting local charities, protecting the environment, to taking initiatives in accomplishing humanitarian projects abroad, namely in Armenia.

Social Sphere

The AGBU Young Professionals (YP) is an organization with chapters extending throughout the diaspora in cities like Montréal, Toronto, London, Paris, New York, and Los Angeles. AGBU YP consists of a network of Armenian young professionals who organize lectures by prominent and successful

Armenians, and also host social gatherings. The Golden Age group offers a social environment for the elderly, organizing trips and special activities. Another social activity taking place at the AGBU Centre is the Bridge Club, who meets at the centre on a weekly basis for competitive tournaments.

As the description of these two centres shows, the Armenian community living in Montréal is equipped with the infrastructures and structures in order to meet the needs of a diasporic collectivity who wishes to partake in Armenian community life. Compared to other cities in Canada and even in the United States, the community life in Montréal is one of the liveliest today. A few elements contribute to the uniqueness of the Armenian community life in Montréal. Besides the fact that in terms of population, Montréal has the highest concentration of Armenians in Canada, the city is also home to three daily Armenian schools, which equates to approximately 1200 children attending Armenian school every day. Parents and families are thus involved with the community to a certain degree, as the schools belong to the Armenian communities. Also, the Armenian-Montréaler community has access to many facilities offered by the community: from the Church services (baptisms, weddings, funerals, counseling), to various organizations catering to different age groups and interests, and to social events for the entire family. These factors, along with their Armenian-speaking feature contribute to a general sense of an intimate community, although this does not necessarily equate to being an insular community. Moreover, the compact and manageable geographic size of Montréal facilitates attending the centres, as the concentration of Armenians mainly lives in the boroughs of Ahunstic-Cartierville and St-Laurent, where the centres are located and are easily accessible by public

transportation. In cities like Toronto and Los Angeles, where everything is much more dispersed, the same vigour of activity and close-knit aspect does not exist on the level it does in Montréal.

What are some of the ways in which these spaces equate to representing a home? First, the centres are secure environments and parents feel safe leaving their children at the center. A sense of family reigns within the centres, where different age groups attend for specifically tailored activities depending on their age and interests. There is, however, a wide range of activities that every age group partakes in together, just like in a family setting. For instance, celebrating Armenia's independence or religious holidays such as Armenian Christmas or Easter, assembles various age groups. This congenial atmosphere allows for more tolerance among each other, as well as creating a sense of support and solidarity that individuals sharing a similar ethnic background seek. Also the centres foster a homey feel, because almost everyone, regardless of age, speaks Armenian within the centres, just as they do within their households; and this includes the younger generation, whether or not they have attended an Armenian high school. The fact that the majority of Armenians living in Montréal speak Armenian fluently is a unique phenomenon throughout North America, yet not unique to Armenians as an ethnic group to Montréal. All one has to do is take a Montréal city bus to discover the rich panoply of languages spoken on just one bus-ride. The Armenian community in Montréal speaks Armenian, as opposed to English in social gatherings at the community centres or at home, due to the recent influx of immigrants who established themselves in Montréal from diasporic communities, such as Beirut and Aleppo (which happen to be strong Armenian-speaking

communities). Whereas in the United States for instance, the communities have been established for a longer time, and the Armenian-Americans today are mostly second and third generation Armenians. Youth in other cities like Toronto, Ottawa, Boston, New York, Detroit, Chicago, and Los Angeles speak mainly English, also perhaps due to the different urban and cultural dynamics existing in these cities. [27]

While both centres' primary mission is to preserve Armenian identity and heritage in the diaspora, there exist differences in approach, ideology and in the nature of the centres. This division is unfortunately amplified by tensions that come to light especially within the realms of politics and the Church (which are connected to a certain degree for Armenians). I already discussed the different affiliations to the Holy See of Cilicia and Echmiatzin and how they are source of contention among the communities, earlier in this chapter. As I mentioned previously, my intention is not to compare and evaluate the centres. On the contrary, the differences can be healthy, constructive, and enriching for all Armenians, granted there is respect towards each other. Although both centres firmly believe in a strong diaspora and a strong Armenia, both centres have different approaches due to different political views and class affiliations. To begin, the Montréal Armenian Community Centre overall has more of a political inclination and a clear commitment to the Armenian cause. The political party (ARF) directly operates within the community centre and in time of political action, mobilizes the entire community. Its primary mandate continues to be to push the recognition of the Armenian Genocide throughout the diaspora. While the name of the party was coined during a historical period marked by uprisings in

Western Armenia against Ottoman oppression, which was only a precursor to the Armenian Genocide, the party continues to carry this name, now but focuses on various levels of political lobbying.[28] The AGBU Centre in Montréal, on the other hand, represents a chapter of an international benevolent organization. The AGBU is a non-partisan organization and seeks to implement various projects throughout the diaspora and Armenia. This charitable organization contributes, mainly financially to Armenia's development on several levels, from the educational and cultural realms to developing medical facilities and construction. As I mentioned previously, political organizations such as the ADL and the CCA are not directly affiliated with the AGBU centre. Instead, individuals who are members of these organizations are at times also members of the AGBU and also seek to promote the recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

Although the AGBU's mission is a crucial one, as it supports countless initiatives that contribute to the development of the Republic of Armenia and to the diaspora, it also offers an attractive social aspect. For instance, the AGBU Young Professionals is mainly a social initiative for Armenian professional youth, who meet occasionally in order to network and contribute to the success of the community's projects. Moreover, the AGBU YP organizes a weekend long event every two years called AGBU YP Focus. In 2003, the Focus event was in Montréal, which included lectures that took place in the Museum of Contemporary Art of Montréal, an evening at the Newtown nightclub on Crescent and a gala at the Marché Bonsecours ballroom in Old Montréal, complete with an award show to honour those who are active within the AGBU organization. This event attracted diasporic Armenian youth from all over, including the United

States, France, and Australia. In the summer of 2005, the AGBU YP Focus events will be held in South Beach, Miami. While attending these events surely entails a certain financial capacity, the events succeed in drawing a crowd of diasporic Armenians, seeking to socialize, network within an Armenian milieu, gathered under the umbrella of a charitable organization linked to the Armenia and the diaspora.

The ARFYOC on the other hand, which is based out of the Montréal Community Centre, is a political organization affiliated with the ARF and is also implicated with the efforts to push the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. While there is a social aspect to this organization, the mission follows the ARF's beliefs and prepares a future generation of leaders. Both organizations are targeted to all of the youth in Montréal, because going to South Beach does not exclude being politically active.

As the description and analysis shows, there is no doubt, however, that the centres contribute to strengthening the Armenian diaspora as well as the Republic of Armenia, but in their respective ways.

"Superimposed Transnationality"

Having explained the nature of the activities and organizations around the community centres, using Michel Laguerre's notion of diasporic citizenship as my point of departure, I will now outline a diasporic model I identify as "superimposed transnationality." Through their broad spectrums of activities, the Armenian community centres tangibly embody Michel Laguerre's (1998) understanding of diasporic citizenship, which includes a national and

transnational outlook, attachment, and commitment. He contends that diasporic citizenship "presupposes some level of integration in the country of residence and some kind of attachment with the homeland" (p.8). I would incorporate an additional dimension to Laguerre's notion of diasporic transnationality, which is the established connections and communication with other diasporic locales. Hence, Armenians residing in Montréal reincarnate this notion of diasporic transnationality through what I view as a cinematic image comprised of a superimposition of three transparent frames. The three transparent frames superimposed onto diasporic community centres are:

> Frame 1: Working to preserve the Armenian heritage and contribute to Armenia's development;
>
> Frame 2: Belonging to a network of other diasporic communities across borders;
>
> Frame 3: Interaction with the local dwelling place, meaning Montréal, in this particular case.

The perception of a real or imagined homeland perpetually "in need", along with a stagnant multicultural rhetoric of preserving one's cultural heritage lingers throughout these centres. Nonetheless, the activities occurring within and around the Armenian community centres have local (which includes provincial and national components), diasporic and finally, homeland components, thereby instilling the basis of a superimposed three-way communication system within a single image. I refer to this communicational process as a three-way superimposition, because the point of departure is no longer overtly transparent. From Montréal, to Los Angeles, to Yerevan, my view of "diasporic

transnationality" is in fact a circular pattern, influenced by different locales, bouncing across boundaries, between the past, present and future. In this sense, I do not perceive the diasporic model as being linear, which generally assumes the imagined homeland of Armenia as the origin for the activities taking place in the diaspora. On the contrary, the multiple points of departure vary, depending on the type of activity and the resources being used, whether in diasporic locales nationally, internationally, or in Armenia. Although I argue that the three components (current dwelling place, diasporic locales and homeland) are central to my suggested model of superimposed transnationality, numerous peripheral components resulting from the links between these initial components also influence any given activity organized within the centres. For instance, a cultural association organizes an art exhibit in Montréal, in conjunction with chapters in Ottawa, Toronto, and Vancouver featuring artists from Armenia are executed in order to contribute to Canadian cultural life, but also to preserve Armenian culture. However, the exhibit's reach and caliber transcend the desire of "preserving Armenian culture." This type of event breaks away from the insularity of the typical cultural events. Not only does it communicate to a nation-wide audience, but in addition, the organization was influenced by Montréal, a city the members of the community centres are in full interaction with and who's influence therefore cannot be ignored. And perhaps should no longer be viewed as gesture that attempt to preserve Armenian culture in Canadian society, because the environment can not only influence the nature of what is being present but also alter the aim.

What are some of the ways in which members of the community centres

perceive the role of these spaces to be within the public sphere or more specifically, within the broader urban context of Montréal? Furthermore, the tri-communicational superimposed model that I suggest tends to resurface in different ways, making the role of the community centres difficult to dissociate from Montréal's reality (as the interviews will suggest.) Although the sample studied is relatively small, the participants who are very much engaged with the Armenian community nonetheless lead fulfilling lives in Montréal, acknowledging the cultural freedom that this unique city provides.

Dania Ohanian explains the role of the Armenian community centres in Montréal as follows:

> Since we are a part of a generation growing up in the diaspora, Armenian community centres play a very important and pivotal role in our lives. They are the only place where we can relate to our identity and survival as a nation.

Therefore, the centres embody a *national* space in the current dwelling place of Montréal that Armenians who find themselves within the diasporic condition need, in order to be able to symbolically and concretely relate to their identity and nation. Interestingly, Ms. Ohanian does not feel a very strong attachment towards Armenia, having been born and raised in the diaspora. She explains:

> I traveled to Armenia for the first time in February 1997 and again in the summer of 2003. On both of my trips I did not feel that I belonged there. There is the land, the culture, the language, but then again, it's not where I grew up. I felt more at home when I moved to Montréal, then when I was in Armenia. I know that I have a sense of responsibility towards the country, but it's not part of my daily life.

Despite her stance towards Armenia, Ms. Ohanian is nonetheless an active

member within the Montréal Armenian Community Centre, which reinforces the idea that the homeland is no longer necessarily the sole and original point of departure that justifies her involvement or the role of the community centre in the diaspora. Yet, she does describe her attachment towards her current dwelling place as being strong, as she expresses the following:

> I feel very much at home in the province of Québec and specifically in Montréal. I have lived in the States most of my life, but felt a special connection in Montréal. I guess I feel a touch of Europe and the States in Montréal and this makes it a perfect place to live.

Mr. Chichmanian, on the other hand, feels a strong attachment both towards Armenia, as well as Montréal. He explains:

> My belonging to the Armenian motherland ... it's hard to put into words, but there is a very very strong sense of belonging even though I have spent a grand total of 3 months over 4 trips there, since 1991. It's not much, but each of those days are so intense and so packed, it feels like much longer. It's a huge part of you, no matter where you are. Even though I am here, I am in a way there; you can't help but feel that way.

Simultaneously, he contends that it is "crystal clear" for him that home is Montréal, having lived and experienced various Armenian communities in the United States during the five years he worked there. Mr. Chichmanian describes the active nature of the centres: "in terms of the community centres in Montréal, it is good to see they are all thriving, they all have their identity, they are all busy, they are not just a place where old people hang out, and there is a good mix of age groups." He expresses the following about the role of the Armenian community centres in Montréal:

> The community centre itself is the physical manifestation of ethnic life in Montréal. I have seen different Armenian

> communities in a good range of different places. But Montréal is very particular as a city, not only in North America, but in the world as well. I think here you are encouraged to keep your culture, it's the norm. It is more than tolerated, it is expected.[...] It's a very different community here, it has to do with the fact that Québec is a minority within North America, so they understand it and it is not as imposing of a host culture.

Hence, the culturally diverse make-up of a city like Montréal makes allowance for expressions of ethnicity, and as Mr. Chichmanian points out, it is almost expected for one to do so. The dynamics surrounding the community centres differ from those on the American East Coast, for example, where the communities have been living in the United States even before the Genocide. In Canada, on the other hand, the communities have mostly become a refuge for large influxes of immigrants from Middle Eastern countries that have fled political and economic instability. What makes a certain region in the diaspora and specifically a community more prone to assimilation versus another community? How relevant is this fear of assimilation with globalization and the multiplication of dwelling places setting the precedent of what is now being called "world citizenship?" How are centres to balance their activities between extreme cultural retention and total assimilation? Are communities throughout the diaspora who do not possess an actual space of a community centre inevitably faced with assimilation?

One of the roles that Dr. Arzoumanian attributes to the community centres is that of a home. He explains that Armenians have been, and continue to be, a very mobile society, especially during the last 90 years since the Genocide.

> They have been moving from one place to the other, they settle in once place, buy a house. Then a different job comes by or catastrophe

> hits and they move again. So the community organizations become like a second home for them. It is where they identity themselves.

He also perceives the Armenian Church playing a similar role, saying that many people go to church not necessarily because they are devout Christians, but because that's where they identify themselves with their "brother and sisters." Regarding the role of the community centres, Dr. Arzoumanian states the following:

> Cultural heritage is carried in the Armenian community centres and of course there is the social aspect associated with the centres. People like to get together who have the same language, the same habits, traditions, and background. It's a need, like any community has. Therefore, the centres are a natural response to the needs of the community.

Not only do these spaces embody Armenian identity, culture, and the nation, but also these centres seemingly carry actual notions of "home" for individuals frequenting the centres, hence, fulfulling a need to associate themselves with others with a similar ethnic background. Mr. Kouyoumdjian states that the Armenian community centre's first and foremost responsibility, is to preserve Armenian identity and culture. He also insists that these centres must also accommodate Armenians' integration in local society by implementing social services and programs that ensure a smooth transition and integration process with local society. Mr. Kouyoumdjian also considers the community centre to be a home. Over the years, he claims that it does feel like a "home" where, just like in any family, he explains, one can experience and potentially overcome arguments, successes, and internal and external integration issues. All of this is executed on a larger scale within the community centres, according to Mr.

Kouyoumdjian, because the centres have established a reputation on cultural and political levels. Therefore, he deems it more productive to participate, discuss, debate, and to take decisions within the community centres. Such an approach, he postulates, can lead to accomplish projects for the benefit of the community and for society at large. He states:

> Je considère le centre communautaire comme ma maison. [...] On pourrait discuter de ces affaires à la maison, mais ça ne servirait pas à grande chose. À la maison tu n'aboutis à rien. Ce qui reste théorique chez toi, peut devenir pratique et concret au centre. Par exemple, l'achat de l'immeuble de l'école Sourp Hagop en 2002, ou encore le travail mené par le Comité National Arménien à Ottawa pour la reconnaissance du Génocide Arménien, et ainsi de suite. [...] D'un autre côté, vu qu'il y a des intervenants de toutes les sortes, on est capable d'avoir un cercle d'amitié qui est très bénéfiques, car c'est un enrichissement pour moi de fréquenter ce centre.

Simultaneously, Mr. Kouymoudjian also feels a strong attachment to the culturally rich city of Montréal:

> Je vis à Montréal, donc je suis un montréalais avant tout, et je ferais tout ce qui est possible pour moi, de participer au civisme. Il est important pour moi, d'être d'abord un citoyen de Montréal, respecter la ville de Montréal, respecter ces citoyens, respecter la richesse ethnique de cette ville. [...] Finalement, c'est cette ville qui nous a donné toutes sortes d'opportunités, de même que le monument du génocide.

Raffi Donabedian has visited Armenia on countless occasions, including when the country was newly emerging from communism towards independence in 1991. He describes the community centres in Montréal as being, in the symbolic sense, "home away from home." He goes on to describe the attachment with Armenia as being mostly a romantic sense of belonging, although he would like to visit the homeland more often. Mr. Donabedian says:

> I see Armenia as a home- I have a keen interest in what is

> happening there, but at this stage of my life, I have no plans to leave Montréal, Québec, or Canada and establish myself in Armenia. I do not consider moving there for various reasons, and many of them are quality of life issues, such as all the choices you have professionally or culturally. It's more of a cosmopolitan society here, as opposed to Armenia. 99% of the population is of Armenian origin, so it's a very different experience. I mean you have more variety here than you have there for sure and because of my background, of where I was brought up in Lebanon, I actually would kind of find it boring.

Lory Boudjikanian, regards Montréal, Québec, and Canada to be her home, while maintaining a strict sense of her Armenian identity in relation to the city of Montréal. She explains:

> Home, yeah, all of them. I feel Canadian, but regardless of how Canadian I feel, if anybody on the street asks me who are you as a person? 100% of the time, I say I am Armenian first, and then I say I am Canadian second. But as a home yes, I think Montréal, out of every other province I have visited is the most multicultural one, and regardless of any political situation, Québec is the most open to all types of cultures and I think Armenians need to use that a little bit more to their advantage, in order to gain more exposure.

When asked to describe her belonging to Armenia, particularly, after the independence of Armenia, Ms. Boudjikanian expresses the following:

> The connection I have with existing Armenia today, especially since my visit in 2003, is phenomenal. I see the change in me, the personal growth that I have had and I see the change within the youth that went and came back and the strong sense of how they feel as Armenians. I can't really describe the link, it's indescribable, it's strong, and it's something that drives me to want to go back, as many times as I possibly can and even to retire in Armenia if I can.

Dwellings

As the description of the centres and the interview excerpts demonstrate, they are many elements and factors that contribute to the embodiment of

Armenian community centres as notions of homes or dwellings. Whether one wishes to preserve his/her culture, accomplish projects, volunteer, participate in social activities, or attend a place where they can relate to others in terms of their cultural identities, these public spaces create attachments that recall a form of diasporic dwelling. What does a dwelling really entail? Martin Heidegger has discussed the terms "building" and "dwelling," arguing both to be more of less the same. In the past, "to build" involved a certain amount of care, consisting of "cherishing and protecting, tilling soil and cultivating vines" (Urry, 2000, p.131). As John Urry explains, however, this sense of building, of dwelling, has fallen into oblivion due to modern technology. Urry cites Zimmerman who claims that "uprooted modern humanity no longer dwells authentically upon the earth" (p.131). Heidegger however, seeks to combine the notions of building and dwelling in such a manner to suggest that "the essence of building is not abstract technology but the way that any such building permits and facilitates dwelling" (p.131). For Hiedegger, dwelling equates to a place to live, or stay, to dwell at peace, to be at ease or at home in a place. He speaks of dwelling places— in contrast to other buildings like airports, railway stations and bridges— where one's stay is more ephemeral. "Dwelling always involves a staying with things." Therefore, Heidegger argues against "the separation of man [sic] and space, as though they stand on opposite sides" (p.131). Instead, he contends that "people only go through spaces in ways which sustain them through the relationships which are established 'with near and remote locales and things.'" Urry (2000) provides the following concrete example of this theory. If someone goes to open a room's door, the person is already part of that room. Thus, a person is not a

separate 'encapsulated body' because such a person already pervades the space of the room they are about to enter. Only because of the form of dwelling is it possible to go through that particular door. In this sense, the staying power of Armenian cultural identity that is embedded in the constructed spaces of community centres throughout the diaspora embodies Heidegger's understanding of dwelling. These spaces sustain relationships on various levels, with local reality and influences to far away diasporic places, to a distant homeland.

Considering that the Armenian community centres can be perceived as dwelling spaces, just like a home carries a family's history filled with narratives of the past, souvenirs and mementos, I wish to expand on the physical and symbolic meaning of these spaces, where sediments of collective memory exist.

As sociology tends to associate and conceptualize the notion of dwelling with 'community,' Bell and Newby (Urry, 2000, p.133) have developed three distinct ways of looking at community. Firstly, community is viewed in the topographical, geographical, and physical sense. Secondly, community is seen as a local social system that functions as localized and bound up in interrelations with social groups and local institutions. Finally, it is viewed as a communion, contrary to Benedict Anderson's claim on communion regarding the nation, where members do not know of each other's actual existence. Bell and Newby instead describe this communion as a human association characterized by close ties, belongingness, and warmth between the members.

Much of the focus surrounding community revolves around the people and the interactions, thus ignoring the role of object (what Hetherington refers to as the "materiality of place"), hence my emphasis on the physicality of the space

(Urry, 2000). What is the role of this space in relation to the 'imagined' Armenian community, over enormous distances, and in terms of belonging and a sense of connections? How do society and space relate to each other? In this case, how does an ethnic space, such as community centres, interact with its immediate surrounding and how does it figuratively represent a home, recalling another homes miles away?

Space: mobile frontiers

James Clifford (1994) argues that diasporic cultures work to create community, because community requires space, the material space may become a political apparatus for some diasporic communities when it comes to defining themselves. He writes, "Thus the term diaspora is a signifier, not simply of transnationality and movement, but of political struggles to define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement." Lived space is therefore "the representational space mapped onto physical space," creating a local that is "both imagined and material" (Rinaldo, 2002, p.164-165). In this regard, Armenian community centres in the diaspora are distinctly defined by space amid a complex history of displacement. How do these socially constructed spaces affect the people frequenting them?

Henri Lefebvre's work pertaining to the notion of public space also provides useful insight in developing a theoretical framework surrounding space and community. Lefebvre (2000) sees space as being more than just a map to read. It is also to be produced and consumed by collective social practice, and therefore, a part of daily life. Lefebvre contends that space assumes social

relationships, mostly in an arena of social struggle. "Recognizing the quotidian dimensions of space allows us to understand that not only does power produce space, but also everyday acts of resistance contest the dominant mapping of space" (Rinaldo, 2002, p.136) The space that community centres occupy in new dwelling places goes beyond simply being gathering spots that inscribe a notion of a home. Rather, I contend that these spaces enact subtle resistance to mainstream dominant culture on a daily basis through their organizational structures and through attempting to reinforce cultural identity and maintain collective memory. This adds new layers of complexity to questions of integration, although this cultural identity and collective memory are not necessarily in competition with local society. The hybridized identities of Armenians-Montréals do not exclude one another; instead, they develop and influence each other mutually, because they subsist and are nurtured in each other's presence.

In his study *Place and Placelessness* (1976), Ted Relph expresses the humanistic perspective of place, which can be equated to space, depicting it as profound centres of human existence and experience. Relph states:

> Places are fusions of human and natural order and are significant centres of our immediate experiences of the world. They are defined less by unique locations, landscapes, and communities than by focusing of experiences and intentions onto particular settings. Places are not abstractions of concepts, but are directly experienced phenomena of the lived world and hence are full of meanings, with real objects, and with ongoing activities. They are important sources of individual and communal identity, and are often profound centres of human existence to which people have deep emotional and psychological ties. (Davies & Herbert, 1993, p.101)

While every person has their own reasons as to why they frequent the centres as I discussed previously in chapter 3, it is clear that the Armenian centres offer a secure space of collective and individual identity. Language and spirituality play an important role when it comes to Armenians converging around the centres in Montréal. Spaces are not simply a natural backdrop to human affairs. Rather, Relph's notion of place encapsulates how the space of community centres can contribute to the formation of individual and collective cultural identity, through the interaction of the space with individuals. Because as spaces are often charged with meanings articulated either symbolically or physically, this allows the shaping of individuals' experiences, including their identities. Although Relph argues that places are not bound to communities, locations, and landscapes, and rather linked to experience, the fact that communities combined with the notion of space do indeed help shape the experiences cannot be ignored. If experience can shape our perceptions of space, this begs the question of what is it about the space that makes us feel this way? A profoundly Kantian dualism suggests that there is a separation between the social and the spatial. With the advent of a particular perspective of cultural studies that analyses public and private spaces such as theaters, shopping malls, airports, museums, and city streets, this dualism is futile and archaic, considering that social processes are marked by spatial processes and vice versa.

Lofland (1989) defined the public realm as spaces in the city occupied by people who are strangers to one another or who know one another only in terms of roles. In the 'ideal community' there may be no public realm; private and public merge into one, although the scale of urban life make the public realm

inevitable and creates a world of strangers. (Davies & Herbert, 1993, p.74) Close-knit ethnic communities, such as the Armenian community surrounding the centres, counter this argument because the private and the public are blurry at times.

When asked what the physical space of the Armenian community centre represents for her, Dania Ohanian answered: "They [the centres] are an environment where kids, the youth, middle-aged families and the aged feel at home and safe. They are also a representation of our culture, architecture, as well as a corner from our homeland."

An architect by profession, Azad Chichmanian explains his pragmatic view of space: "the physical space is the building that hosts all our different community events. The formal gatherings and the formal events happen in this building and the preparations for these events and the work that goes into being a community happens within these walls. Therefore, the building is an extremely important element. [...] you need a formal gathering place where people can meet and feel some kind of belonging to, responsibility for..."

Lory Boudjikanian believes that the physical space of the centres is "important, because you feel like you are at home." She goes on to say that at the same time, you do not have to necessarily be at an Armenian community centre to feel at home.

> I think you can create this type of home no matter where you are, as long as you can create that ambiance, but it is always important to have a space. You cannot create a basketball team without a basketball court. So there is the importance, to have a home, where you can speak the language, interact with everybody. And on the other hand, if you don't have that, it doesn't mean you cannot create that however many people are around you.

On a more symbolic level, Mr. Kouyoumdjian, who has never visited Armenia, views the physical space as the link between him and Armenian history. In his own words, he claims:

> Peu importe quel centre, je peux dire très clairement que sur le plan symbolique le centre communautaire arménien dépasse de très loin l'espace physique qu'il occupe. Pour moi, le centre est un lien concret qui me lie à mon histoire, sous toutes ces formes. [...] Autrement dit, n'importe quelle espace qu'il occupe ce centre communautaire, c'est la pierre angulaire entre moi et mon histoire.

The symbolic and physical relationships of the Armenian community centres in Montréal represent the numerous facets of cultural identity, expressed through the existence of various organizations functioning within the centres. I believe that the notion of dwelling and social space contributing to shaping our immediate experience is intertwined within the context of the Armenian community centres in Montréal. But as Mr. Kouyoudian points out, the past plays a pivotal role in the space of the community centres as I will discuss in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Collective Memory

> The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.
>
> -Milan Kundera

> La commémoration s'oppose à la mémoire: elle se fait en temps réel et, du coup, l'évènement devient de moins en moins réel et historique, de plus en plus irréel et mythique...
>
> -Jean Baudrillard

Within the junctures of community dwellings and space that are discussed in the previous chapter, I now incorporate the additional dimension of memory in this chapter in order to conceptualize the underlying dynamics of collective memory that exist within the Armenian community centres in Montréal. I therefore seek to discuss how the spaces of Armenian community centres embody collective memory in relation to distant pasts, and the various ways in which this past articulates itself in the present.

In *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsets and the Politics of Memory*, Andreas Huyssen's (2003) central concern throughout his book is the issue of the monumental in relation to memory. He addresses the specific contemporary context in Germany after unification, analysing generational memory, memory in public culture, national memory, and how memory becomes stone in architecture by studying various sites, such as monuments dedicated to the Holocaust throughout Berlin. He points to the undeniable link between memory, temporality, and space.

Huyssen writes that whenever one looks at the contemporary public obsession with memory clashing with an intense public panic oblivion, this occurrence begs an important question: which came first? Does our fear of forgetting fuel our desire to remember, or it is perhaps our anxiety to remember that contrives our fear of forgetting? Moreover, could the excess of memory in the media-saturated culture contribute to creating an overload that is bound to implode, thereby triggering our apprehension towards oblivion? Regardless of the potential answers to these questions, Huyssen (2003) argues that older sociological approaches to collective memory "posit relatively stable formations of social and group memories," but are they "adequate to grasp the current dynamics of media and temporality, memory, lived time, and forgetting" (p.17). He questions whether specific social and ethnic groups are still capable of forming a collective consensual memory, considering that the "clashing and ever more fragmented memory politics." If not, is it possible to assure social and cultural cohesion within these social and ethnic groups, and if yes, how?

I contend that the existence of Armenian community centres in Montréal contributes to securing a certain degree of cohesion despite this fragmentation, clashing of memory politics, and the additional burden of geographical distance brought forth by a diaspora. It is through the specific structural and infrastructural aspects discussed in the previous chapter that these centres contribute to maintaining collective memory alive. The centres create a sense of homogeneous collective solidarity for those who partake in activities surrounding these spaces on an active basis. Although belonging to a community does not necessarily erase or diminish one's individuality, the shared language, cultural traits, exposure to

the same imagery create a merged vision of collectivity, while potentially fueling political struggles. The degree to which a consensual collective memory pervades within these community centres is debatable and depends on many variables, such as internal divisions, diverging approaches and politics. Yet, certain deterministic elements, such as the Genocide, and a general sense of cultural identity remain focal points in the shaping of Armenian collective memory.

Initiating a discussion on collective memory is a challenge and proceeding to interpret this notion is equally complex. James V. Wertsch (2002), who has been influenced by figures such as Lev Vygotsky and Mikhail Bakhtin in developing his theory, claims that memory both individual and collective, is usually mediated. Wertsch's book *Voices of Collective Remembering* outlines "the sociocultural analysis of mediated action that underlies the account of collective memory" (p.66). By analysing collective memory from this perspective, he examines the role of narrative texts as cultural tools. Wertsch writes, "the functional dualism of these tools means that memory can be used to provide accurate accounts of the past as well as accounts that are 'usable' in the present for various political and cultural purposes" (p.66). For the purpose of this thesis, the cultural tools that I analyse are the community centres, which I perceive to be largely mediated spaces due to the transnational organizations, symbols, and communication they encompass. The "usable" articulation of the present based on the past does serve the aims of various political and cultural purposes, as their mission statements have revealed in the previous chapter, thus adequately describing the *raison-d'etre* of the Armenian community centres in Montréal. The past is often used to justify the nature of the activities that occur within the

Montréal context of the Armenian community. The diasporic element adds a more global dimension. For example, the inauguration of a Genocide Monument in the Montréal's Marcelin-Wilson Park in 1998 not only commemorates the Armenian Genocide, but all the genocides that took place in the world as well. Montréal thus becomes an active participant to all such recollections expressed and lived in the present by its citizens.

Within diasporic spaces throughout Montréal, the past clearly unfolds in the present on a daily basis. Huyssen (2003) writes, "the act of remembering is always in and of the present, while its referent is of the past and thus absent" (p.3). One of the absent pasts that the Montréal Armenian Community Centre refers to is the Armenian Genocide, often triggering one's involvement and commitment. This phenomenon echoes Stuart Hall's notion of "becoming" in defining cultural identities that stipulates cultural identity "belonging to the future as much as to the past." In fact, both centres share an array of similar absences, such as the Genocide and the homeland, yet the compensations for these absences are expressed differently, due to diverging opinions and political approaches, which create schisms as well as an open forum for people to express themselves. Regardless of what the so-called absences may be, they are at times overcompensated through the daily functioning, activities, and expressions of collective remembrance on political, social, religious, or cultural levels.

Huyssen (2003) claims that today, we suffer from a hypertrophy of memory and that historical memory now takes a different shape. Earlier, it marked the relation of a community or a nation to its past, with the boundary between past and present being stronger and more stable. According to Huyssen,

due to the surge of media and the study of history, the past is now becoming part of the present like never before, thereby leading to a reduction of temporal and spatial boundaries. Based on Manuel Castells' (1997) hypothesis that space organizes time in the network of society, the community centres mediate between the past, present and future through "flows of capital, flows of information, flows of technology, flows of organizational interaction, flows of images, sounds, and symbols" (p.412). The collection of flows results in the formation and propagation of collective memory within the centres. Although collective memory can be an abstract notion, certain elements constituting it can be represented in a tangible manner, allowing for different articulation of collective memory. According to Huyssen (2003), today we think of "memory as a mode of re-presentation and as belonging ever more to the present" (p.3). What are some of the ways in which these diasporic centres communicate this omnipresent past? First, the exterior and the interior of the centres reveal the spaces as being Armenian. Then, there is the organizational structure that feeds off the past to accomplish its aims in the present and the future. Thus, the interaction that occurs within the spaces of Armenian community centres in Montréal and the physical elements represent the transnational reality of the centres. Finally, the performative aspect of religious ceremonies and the high frequency of commemorative events linked to the homeland also promote the creation of collective memory.

Spatial Recall

To what extent is the physical space of the centres vital in the creation and maintenance of collective memory, considering that the social aspects are linked to space, as discussed in the previous chapter? Maurice Halbwachs, author of *On Collective Memory*, states how memory depends on the social environment and it does not stem from isolation: "individuals normally recall, recognize, and localize their memories in society." Groups provide individuals with frameworks within which their memories are localised by a kind of mapping. These mappings that are provided by the group are perceived as mental spaces where recollection occurs. These mental spaces, insists Halbwachs, "always receive support from and refer back to the material spaces that particular social groups occupy" (Connerton, 1989). Thus, Armenian community centres are the material spaces, where collective memory is simultaneously created, sustained, and diffused among community members living in a diaspora or in exile. Commemorative events and political, cultural, and social gatherings all take place within and around the spaces of community centres, this physically localizing the past in the present. Organizations, especially those functioning in the realm of politics, culture, and religion, also have a particular emphasis on the past being re-introduced and re-shaped in the present, which undeniably has an impact on local society. On example of this is the Armenian Independence parade through the streets of Montréal. Every year, the scouts and the youth march through the streets with Armenian flags to commemorate the first independence of Armenia after the Genocide in 1918, which not only exposes Armenian patriotism to the Montréal community at large, but allows the Armenian community to recall and express a

turning point of Armenian history. Hence the past is expressed in the present through a performative display of a marching band, a flag raising ceremony at the Montréal Armenian Community Centre at the end of the parade, along with the Canadian national anthem, followed by Armenia's anthem.

James Clifford argues that diasporic cultures work to create community. He claims that "the term diaspora is a signifier, not simply of transnationality and movement, but of political struggles to define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement." (Rinaldo, 2002, p.165) Community requires space, hence the material space can even become a political apparatus for some diasporic communities when it comes to defining themselves and protecting their territory, such as the case of the Puerto Rican Cultural Centre in Chicago as related by Rachel Rinaldo in her article entitled "Space of Resistance." This particular Puerto Rican centre resisted the gentrification of the surrounding neighborhood. Lived space is therefore "the representational space mapped onto physical space," creating a local that is "both imagined and material" (Rinaldo, 2002, p.161). The material space is occupied by various organizations and individuals, who maintain an imagined relationship with the homeland, and a more concrete link with the local society. In this regard, Armenian community sites are the localized instances of collective memory *par excellence.*

Huyssen (2003) raises an important point regarding memory and trauma, which is relevant to the Armenian case. Although he sees the relevance of historical trauma in explorations of memory, he also cautions that trauma cannot be the central theme in addressing a larger memory discourse because collapsing memory into trauma is too confining for the understanding of memory, as it links

memory only with pain and suffering, and loss, while denying human agency. He does however postulate, "the focus on trauma is legitimate where nations or groups of people are trying to come to terms with a history of violence suffered or violence perpetrated" (Huyssen, 2003, p. 9). Considering that Armenians attempt to achieve closure with the Armenian Genocide, the focus on trauma is omnipresent. Several elements contribute to the inability to achieve closure: namely the Turkish government's denial, the extent of the loss suffered by Armenians and also the absence of proper burial grounds, which is vital in nurturing human memory, as Huyssen points out. In order to allow people to break out of traumatic repetitions, he suggests human rights activism, truth commissions, and juridical proceedings as better ways for dealing with historical trauma.

Another way of interpreting Armenian community centres in Montréal as being a pivotal space in the formation of collective memory is my transposition of Pierre Nora's (1998) concept of *lieux de mémoire,* or realms of memory, onto the community centres. Nora suggests that these "*lieux de mémoire* are established institutionally at the time when the environments of memory, the *milieux de mémoire,* fade"— as though the ritual of commemoration could help patch up the irreversability of time. In this sense, community centres can be perceived through Nora's nostalgic lens as institutionally established places that preserve the fading environments of memory. In reference to French history, Nora explains how our curiosity about the places in which memory is crystallized is associated with a turning point in history where a sense of rupture is bound up with a sense that a break in memory has occurred. This break has influenced memory enough to

question its embodiment. Sites or *lieux de mémoire* exist, in which the sense of continuity remains. *Lieux de mémoire* endure because the *milieux de mémoire,* meaning settings in which memory is a real part of everyday experience, no longer exist. Being a part of North America, Armenians no longer have direct access to *milieux de mémoire* or in other words, to settings in which memory is a real part of daily life, especially if we consider that one of the most important Armenian symbols, Mount Ararat, is in Turkey today. Jivan Tabibian, a diplomat living in Yerevan, explains the "paradox embodied in that mountain." He says that "we are not place bound, but we are place conscious." This perception is not surprising, given Armenia's "ceaseless traumas, metamorphoses, and peregrinations" (Viviano, 2004, p. 40).

This consciousness of place likely compelled transmigrant Armenians living in the diaspora to build new figurative dwelling places, in order to compensate for the ones that were taken away from them by force. For instance, after the Genocide was carried out and thousands of survivors arrived in Lebanon as refugees, the process of rebuilding their lives also consisted of naming the neighborhoods they inhabited with the names of the villages or towns from which they were evicted during the deportations. Tomarza, a town once densely populated by Armenians, became New Tomarza in Lebanon, Marash became New Marash, Sis became New Sis, and so on. For decades following the deportations and massacres, the cultural and territorial loss was amplified by the lack of direct access, as Armenians were not allowed to visit the occupied lands. With the advent of electronic, digital, and wireless communication, virtual access increase to the homeland increased. Kaplan writes: "Such diasporic societies

cannot persist without much corporeal, imaginative and increasingly virtual travel both to that homeland and to other sites of the diaspora" (Urry, 2000, p.155). Physical travel from the diaspora to Western Armenia, now Turkey, also increased with special tours that visit cultural and historical sites in the occupied lands. Armenians across the world are beginning to discover the ruins of an erased past in a more immediate and intimate manner. Therefore, new diasporic dwellings, built either in Beirut or Montréal, can be viewed as embodiments of *lieux de mémoire* in Nora's sense, thereby perpetuating the continuity of a distant homeland or absent pasts. According to Nora (1998), "memory is rooted in the concrete: in space, gesture, image, and object" (p.3). Based on his conceptualizations, I argue that ethnic community centres are such spaces, where collective memory is rooted and where experiences of the past are reshaped for communal sharing in the present, thus composing instances of collective memory. Nora (1998) writes,

> *Lieux de mémoire* are fundamentally vestiges, the ultimate embodiments of a commemorative consciousness that survives in a history which, having renounced memory, cries out for it. [...] Museums, archives, cemeteries, collections, festivals, anniversaries, treaties, depositions, monuments, sanctuaries, private associations—these are relics of another era, illusions of eternity. They are rituals of a ritual-less society; [...] signs of recognition and group affiliation in a society that tends to recognize only individuals, assumed to be equal if not identical. (p.6)

According to Svetlana Boym, Nora's own view is, in itself, nostalgic because it recalls a time when environments of memory were a part of life and official national traditions did exist. She claims that this leads to the paradox of institutionalized nostalgia: "the stronger the loss, the more it is overcompensated

with commemorations, the starker the distance from the past, and the more it is prone to idealizations" (Boym, 2001, p.17). In this sense, trauma, such as the Armenian Genocide, can generate eventual nostalgia, as loss underlies trauma. Boym postulates, "In the national ideology, individual longing is transformed into a collective belonging that relies on past sufferings that transcend individual memories" (p.17). Huyssen also adds a useful and timely interpretation to Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire.* Nora's *lieux* do have a temporal and historical dimension. The *lieux de mémoire* emerge only when collective memory has lost its power, due to the constant shift in the politics of location, affecting memory and notions of home. In this aspect, I concur with Huyssen who argues that the *lieux de mémoire* today function not just in an expanded field but also in a field altered by globalization. If we are to consider the deterritorialized nature of transnationalism and how diapsoric communities are tightly gripping on to what is left of these fading environments of memory, we can conclude that creation of spaces such as community centres salvage what can be recuperated as collective memory amid assimilation into the host culture. Furthermore, elements in community centre spaces act as triggers—materially, symbolically and functionally (to use Nora's terminology)— in the terms of developing sentiments of collective memory, by creating tangible connections to the past. In this sense, Halbwachs (1992) observes that collective memory needs to be continuously nurtured by collective sources and it is sustained by a social and moral backbone. Within the context of community centres, these collective sources can range from religious groups and intellectual leaders to the media, grassroots organizations, artistic collectives, and political organizations.

In *How Societies Remember,* Paul Connerton (1989) also questions how memory of groups is conveyed and sustained. He examines two points: memory and social memory. In terms of memory as such, the author states, "our experience of the present very largely depends upon our knowledge of the past" (Connerton, 1989, p.2). In other words, our present is experienced in a context that is causally connected with past events and objects, and therefore in reference to events and objects that we are not experiencing when we are experiencing the present. Accordingly, we will experience the present differently with the various pasts to which we are able to connect that present. This explains the difficulty of extracting our past from the present: not only do present factors usually influence, or even distort, our recollections of the past, but past factors also tend to influence, or distort, our experiences of the present. The author stresses that this process touches "the most minute and everyday details of our lives"(Connerton, 1989, p.2). Whether diasporians attending community centres are conscious of it or not, they do tend to engage in a ubiquitous dialogue between the past and present on a daily basis, considering that the activities taking place at the community centres tend to revolve around commemoration and tradition. If there is such a thing as social memory, claims Connerton, we are likely to find it in commemorative ceremonies. He writes, "commemorative ceremonies prove to be commemorative only in so far as they are performative; performativity cannot be thought without a concept of habit; and habit cannot be thought without a notion of bodily automatisms" (1989, p.5). He also argues that it is an implicit rule that participants in any social order must presuppose a shared memory. The underlying shared memory for the Armenian community tends to be the

Armenian Genocide. In fact, the children and grandchildren of the Genocide survivors are those who typically frequent the community centres, adding dimensions of personal memory to the collective one.

Paul Connerton notes, “images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order”(1989, p.6). Community centres do in fact maintain a sense of present social order in relation to the past through various frameworks of recollection. Although Armenian community centres in Montréal are far away from the locus of the homeland, it does create a sense of stability, as individuals have incorporated the community centre in their daily lifestyles. Connerton postulates, “our images of social spaces, because of their relative stability, give us the illusion of not changing and of rediscovering the past in the present.” In fact, the way we conserve our recollections is by relating them to the material milieu that surrounds us. Applying Halbwach’s, Connerton's and Nora’s notions of collective memory reinforce how the community centre does in fact become a *lieu de mémoire*, considering that the unrecognized past is dealt with on a daily basis within the centres in the present.

Conclusion: Revisiting Home

Opou zeis ekei patris *[Your native land, your home, is wherever you live]*

-Greek proverb

There is no place like home

Through this thesis, I set out to comprehend the dynamics of Armenian community centres in Montréal, and whether the perception of them representing extended homes is still valid within the current transnational context. Furthermore, one of my objectives was to outline how these spaces reconcile the local dwelling place of Montréal with other diasporic communities and Armenia. Finally, I sought to examine the ways, in which these mediated spaces, or diasporic dwellings, embody collective memory.

In order to shed light on the questions I proposed, I utilized several theoretical frameworks and discourses that are ultimately interconnected; including diaspora, immigration, and collective memory, as well as notions of cultural identity, social space, and nostalgia. I also conducted interviews with active members and leaders of the two largest Armenian community centres in Montréal. By means of the participant observation method, I studied the local reality and the interaction of Armenian community centres, as well as the subtext of home, with respect to Montréal, the diaspora, and Armenia.

One of the objectives of this thesis was to understand the implications of home in the age of globalization, displacement, migration, and the multiplication of dwellings within a diasporic context. Not surprisingly, the homeland of Armenia still remains an important element within these diasporic dwellings, namely through cultural representations, the language, the Church, the projects

carried out for Armenia by various organizations, as well as the visits to the country. On the other hand, Armenians living in Montréal are highly conscious of the cultural freedom Montréal grants them, as they go through their daily interactions in the local setting of the city. As Brah (1996) points out, there is a constant creative tension between the discourse of "home" and "dispersion", which inscribes "a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins" (p.192). Yet, this thesis brought to light that there is no longer a strict opposition between local reality and the homeland, or the "mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination" as Brah explains (1996, p.192).

By examining the implications of the subtext of home within the diaspora expressed through the community centres, it became evident that Armenians living in the city of Montréal affirmed with conviction that they consider this city to be home. Therefore, home for Armenian-Montréalers is above all the lived experience of a locality, where Armenian cultural identity and collective memory is expressed. The community centres occupying new dwelling places are not simply a space where individuals sharing a common history and language converge. Although these distinctly Armenian spaces enact a form of subtle resistance on a daily basis, through their organizational structures and by attempting to reinforce cultural identity and maintain collective memory, they do interact with local society. This perception brings additional layers of complexity and allows us to re-question what we understand by integration. The hybridized identities of Armenians-Montréalers do not rule out one another; instead, they co-exist in dialogue, constantly influencing and altering each other.

In this light, I suggested that the performative aspect of Armenian

community centres occurs through the model of "superimposed transnationality", which entails the superimposition of the local dwelling place, the homeland, as well as other diasporic communities. Having portrayed the nature of the centres and the motivating factors of those attending them, it became clear that these spaces no longer function in a purely unilateral relationship with the point of departure being solely the locus of Armenia. This finding is intriguing because it adds a nuance and challenges the naturalized centrality of the homeland of Armenia in the traditional reciprocal diasporic relationship. Hence, by studying the concrete example of the community centres, it became evident that these mediated spaces break the linear and classic relationship between the diaspora and Armenia. Instead, this old model Armenians functioned on, can be replaced with a more dynamic and circular pattern, where the point of origin and the locus is no longer explicit. Although Montréal plays a central role, other diasporic communities, such as Beirut, Cairo, Athens, Istanbul, and Aleppo, are also significant for Armenian-Montréalers. In this sense, the Armenian diaspora must be viewed as part of a segmented diaspora, meaning that the diaspora in Montréal maintains allegiances to other countries, where Armenians in large numbers had settled as refugees, during the beginning of the 20th century following the Genocide. Many Armenians in Montréal, having been born in various other countries, particularly in the Middle East, maintain personal, emotional, and financial ties with these countries, and the vast majority of the organizations working within the community centres in Montréal are also part of a diasporic network. Therefore, the triple-affiliations of the majority of Armenians living in Montréal, in addition to the diasporic network of Armenian organizations, are

factors that cannot be ignored when discussing the Armenian diaspora in a particular local setting, and how it is connected to communities, real or imagined, on a global level. The multi-locationality across geographical, cultural, and psychic boundaries inherent to a diaspora surfaces within the Armenian community in Montréal, as the more recent wave of immigrants who retain triple-affiliations, go beyond Tölölyan's claim of "dually-rooted" identity (1996, p.61) within diasporic subjects.

In terms of how these spaces embody collective memory, I have found Pierre Nora's theory of *lieux de mémoire* useful in theorizing the ways in which community centres in Montréal articulate the past in the present. I emphasize the particular historical event of the Armenian Genocide, because of the omnipresent trauma and the extent of the loss brought forth by the Armenian Genocide during World War I, which created a drastic rupture on several levels, generated a considerable diaspora, and is a reality that Armenians throughout the world continue to cope with today. In fact, the feeling of loss and ongoing denial on behalf of the perpetrating country remains the centrality of Armenian cultural identity, which can also explain the need to protect Armenian identity and culture, a role that is often attributed to the Armenian community centres, where culture, language, and spirituality are preserved. Furthermore, the centrality of the Armenian Genocide with respect to cultural identity motivates centres' the political activities that are dedicated to the recognition of the Armenian Genocide throughout the diaspora. The community centres rely on Armenian-Montréalers in order to continue to define and position themselves in relation to the past. In fact, the feeling of protecting Armenian heritage arose in all six interviews, although

assimilation was never addressed as a concrete threat. However, judging from the degree of integration and personal success of my interview subjects, their perception of preserving cultural heritage was not expressed in the form of cultural retention. Instead, they all fully acknowledged the active role that Montréal plays with respect to the Armenian community centres and that their belonging is not limited to an Armenian sense of belonging amid Montréal's multicultural landscape.

Rather than remaining fixed in post-genocidal mentality of victimhood and over-protection of identity, the centres should re-examine their *raison d'être* and continue to extend themselves to other local communities, as the struggle for recognition of the Armenian Genocide is pursued. While preserving Armenian identity is important, Armenian community centres in Montréal should no longer be viewed simply as a space representing a distant homeland in the diaspora. Instead of being considered as extensions of a real or imagined homeland, it would be useful to view the centres as extending themselves more actively to the local society, beyond the sporadic cultural exchanges and political activities, especially in terms of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

Having outlined my perception and interpretation of Armenian community centres in relation to the broader urban context of Montréal, I wish to conclude with Svetlana Boym's notion of "diasporic intimacy". Can human beings ever overcome the necessity of defining a specific home? Home will always fluctuate in the diaspora, in a world where new communication technologies are mobilized in the (re) creation and maintenance of traditions, of cultural and ethnic identities that transcend any easy equation of geography,

place, and culture, creating symbolic networks"(Morley, 1996, p.338).

Perhaps this multiplication of homes is leading us to world citizenship in an age where borders are being assigned new meanings amid political conflicts and immigration policies. The location of home is increasingly arbitrary and is perhaps even obsolete. As migration and refugees multiply across the world, dual-citizenship and immigration formalities are becoming world-currency. Border politics in a politically complex post-9/11 era continue to destabilize us, and technology and travel continue to gain momentum. In this setting, our mobile society will surely continue to dwell on the question of home for a long time.

---

[1] Parc de l'Arménie is located in Montréal's Ahuntsic-Cartierville borough, at the intersection of Elie-Blanchard Avenue and Olivar-Asselin. The park, across the street from the Montréal Armenian Community Centre, was inaugurated on May 15, 1988 by the City of Montréal and the Armenian community in Montréal.

[2] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and diaspora" http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/Literary_Criticism/postcolonism/Hall.html

[3] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and diaspora" http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/Literary_Criticism/postcolonism/Hall.html

[4] Yerevan is the capital of the Republic of Armenia.

[5] United Nations International Migration Report 2002, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. www.un.org.

[6] Horizon TV in Los Angeles

[7] Expression used to describe Armenian diaspora by poet Gevorg Emin in his poem entitled "We"

[8] Kharpert (or Harput) was one of the six eastern provinces, known as Turkish Armenia or Western Armenia. During the genocide, some of the worst massacres took place in Kharpert, which as American witness labeled as the "slaughterhouse province". Ironically, a large number of women and children there escaped deportation through religious conversion and adoption by Muslim households (Hovannisian, 1992, p.178).

[9] Canada's Digital Collection:http://collections.ic.gc.ca/heirloom_series/volume7/countries/armenia.html

[10] First joint performance was in 1993

[11] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and diaspora" http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/Literary_Criticism/postcolonism/Hall.html

[12] City of Montréal website: http://www2.ville.Montréal.qc.ca/cmsprod/fr/arr01/voir/elus/1.xml

[13] Armenian Youth Federation: www.ayf.org

[14] Canadian Multiculturalism: http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/936-e.htm

[15] Ibid

[16] GALAS: www.galasla.org

[17] City of Montéal web page: http://www2.ville.Montréal.qc.ca/portail_VM/accusomf.shtm

[18] Hamazkayin: www.hamazkayin.com

[19] Armenian Relief Society: www.ars1910.org

[20] Armenian Revolutionary Federation: www.arfd.am
[21] Ibid
[22] In the mid-19th century, Armenia was divided between the Ottoman and Russian Empires. This deepened the separation between the eastern and western segments of the Armenian people. Ottoman persecution and the intellectual Renaissance of both segments of the Armenian people gave rise to the initial conception of the Armenian Question demanding respect for Armenians' fundamental human rights. Not only did the Ottoman response disregard the Armenian people's demands, but it intensified persecution. Motivated by the elemental need for self-defense, uprisings ensued in various parts of Western Armenia. Source:www.arfd.am
[23] Armenian National Committee of America: www.anca.org
[24] Armenian General Benevolent Union: www.agbu.org
[25] AGBU Commemorative Booklet published by the AGBU Montréal, October 30th, 2004
[26] City of Montéal web page: http://www2.ville.Montréal.qc.ca/portail_VM/accusomf.shtm
[27] Armenian is the official language in Armenia and is used in schools and by the media. Armenians of the diaspora have gained renewed interest in their homeland as a result of the Armenian revolution and the establishment of the Republic of Armenia. Although many Armenians of the diaspora do not intend to return to their Armenian homeland, they consider continued use of the language of critical importance to the maintenance of a unified Armenian sense of history and identity. Because many second generation Armenian immigrants in the United States have lost proficiency in their native language, attempts are being made to preserve their cultural heritage. Thus, the Armenian community in the United States has recently published many books that are intended to re-introduce Armenians to their mother tongue, generally the West Armenian dialect. In addition to textbooks, Armenian language newspapers are printed in Boston, Fresno, and New York. http://www.lmp.ucla.edu/Profile.aspx?LangID=55

Bibliography

Anand, Dibyesh. (2003). A contemporary story of "Diaspora": The Tibetan version. *Diaspora, 12:2,* 211-229.

Anderson, Benedict. (1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and the spread of nationalism.* London; New York: Verso.

Appadurai, Arjun. (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization.* Minneapolis, MN; London, UK: University of Minnesota Press.

Balakian, Peter. (1998). *Black dog of fate.* New York: Broadway Books.

Bannerji, Himani. (2000). *The Dark side of the nation: essays on multiculturalism, nationalism and gender.* Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc.

Bauman, Zygmunt. (2001). *Community: Seeking safety in an insecure world.* Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Bissoondath, Neil. (1994). *Selling illusions: the cult of multiculturalism in Canada.* Toronto: Penguin Group.

Boym, Svetlana (2001). *The Future of nostalgia.* New York: Basic Books.

Boudjikanian, Aida. (2004). *L'insertion résidentielle et économique des Arméniens de Montréal: Comportements d'une communauté culturelle ou d'une communauté diasporique?* Doctoral dissertation, Université de Montréal, Québec.

Brah, Avtar. (1996). *Cartographies of diaspora: contesting identities.* London, New York: Routledge.

Burman, Jenny. (2001). At the scene of the crossroads, 'Somewhere in this silvered city': Diasporic public spheres in Toronto. *Public*, 22/23, 195-202.

Castells, Manuel. (1997). The spaces of flow. *The Network Society.* 367-428

Chalk, Frank, & Jonassohn, Kurt. (Eds.). (1992). *The History and sociology of genocide: Analyses and Case Studies.* New Haven, CT; London, UK: Yale University Press.

Cohen, Robin. (1997). *Global diasporas: an introduction.* Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Connerton, Paul. (1989). *How societies remember.* Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Davies, K.D. Wayne & Herbert T. David. (1993). *Communities within cities: an urban social geography.* London: Belhaven Press.

Edwards, Brent Hayes. (2001). The uses of diaspora. *Social Text 66, Vol.19 (1),* 45-73.

Dadrian, N. Vahakn. (1995). *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus.* Oxford: Berghahn Books.

DeWalt, M. Kathleen & DeWalt, R. Billie. (2002). *Participant observation: a guide for fieldworkers.* Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.

Glick Schiller, Nina & Fouron, Georges Eugene. (2001).*Georges woke up laughing: Long-distance nationalism and the search for home.* Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press.

Glick Schiller, Nina, Basch, Linda & Blanc, Cristina S. (1994). *Nations Unbound: transnational projects, postcolonial predicaments, and deterritorialized nation-states.* Luxembourg : Gordon and Breach.

Ginsburg, Faye. (2002). Fieldwork at the movies: Anthropology and media. In J. MacClancy (Ed.), *Exotic no more: Anthropology on the front lines.* Chicago: U of Chicago Press.

Hall, Stuart. (1996). Introduction: Who needs 'identity'? In S. Hall & P. du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity.* (pp.1-17). London: Sage Publications.

Hall, Stuart. (2003). Cultural identity and diaspora. In J. Evans Braziel & A. Mannur (Eds.), *Theorizing diaspora: a reader.* (pp.233-246). Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell.

Halbwachs, Maurice. (1992). *On collective memory.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Helton, Arthur C. (2000). Forced Displacement, Humanitarian Intervention, and Sovereignty, *SAIS Review, Volume 20(1),* 61-86

Hovannisian, G. Richard. (1990).The Historical dimensions of the Armenian question. In F. Chalk & K. Jonassohn (Eds.), *The History and sociology of genocide: Analyses and Case Studies.* (pp.249-266). New Haven, CT; London, UK: Yale University Press.

Hovannisian, Richard.G. (1992). Intervention and shades of altruism during the Armenian Genocide. In R. Hovannisian (Ed.), *The Armenian Genocide: History, politics, and ethics.* (pp.173-203). New York: St-Martin's Press.

Huyssen, Andreas. (2003). *Present pasts: Urban palimpsests and the politics of memory.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Jorgensen, L. Danny. (1989). *Participant observation: a methodology for human studies.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Kaprielian, Isabel. (1982). *Armenians in Ontario*, Vol. 4, no.2 of Polyphony, the bulletin of the Multicultural History Society of Ontario, Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario

Laguerre, Michel S. (1998). *Diasporic citizenship: Haitian Americans in transnational America.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

Lefebvre, Henri. (2000). *The production of space.* (D.Nicholson-Smith, Trans.). Oxford, UK; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers. (Original work published 1974).

Letourneau, Jocelyn. (1997). The Current Great Narrative of Quebecois Identity. In V.Y Mudimbe (Ed.), *Nations, Identities, Cultures*, Durham and London: Duke University press.

Miller, Daniel. (2000).Chapter 1: Conclusions. In *The Internet: An ethnographic approach.* Oxford, New York: Berg.

Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary (10th ed.). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster.

Morley, David. (1996). The Geography of television: Ethnography, communications, and community. In J. Hay, L. Grossberg, & E. Wartella (Eds.), *The audience and its landscape.* (pp. 317-342). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Nora, Pierre. (1998). *Realms of memory: Rethinking the French past.* (A. Goldhammer, Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press. (Original work published 1996).

Panossian, Razmik. (1998). Between ambivalence and intrusion: Politics and identity in Armenia-diaspora relations. *Diaspora, 7:2,* 149-185.

Press, L. Andrea. (1996). Toward a qualitative methodology of audience study: Using ethnography to study the popular culture audience. In J. Hay, L. Grossberg, & E. Wartella (Eds.), *The audience and its landscape.* (pp. 113-130). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Pries, Ludger. (2001). The Approach of Transnational Social Spaces. In L.Pries (Ed.), *New Transnational spaces: international migration and transnational companies in the early twenty-first century.* London and New York: Routledge.

Rinaldo, Rachel. (2002). Space of Resistance: The Puerto Rican Cultural Centre and Humboldt Park. *Cultural Critique, #50,* University of Minnesota Press, 135-174

Ritivoi, Andreea. (2002). *Yesterday's self: Nostalgia and the immigrant identity.* Lanham, MD.; Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield.

Sayad, Abdelmalek. Preface by Pierre Bourdieu. (2004). *The Suffering of the immigrant.* (David Macey, Trans.). Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. (Original work published in 1974)

Simon, Sherry. (1996). National membership and forms of contemporary belonging in Québec. In Lapierre, L., Smart, P., & Savard, P., *Language, culture and values in Canada at the dawn of the 21st century* (pp.121-131).Ottawa, ON: International Council for Canadian Studies and Carleton University Press.

Smith, Anthony. (1999). *Myths and memories of the nation.* Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

Taylor, Charles. (1992). *Multiculturalism and the "politics of recognition".* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Tölölyan, Khatchig & Beledian, Krikor. (1998). Fresh perspectives on Armenia-Diaspora Relations. *Armenian Forum: A journal of contemporary affairs*, 3, 61-66.

Urry, John. (2000). *Sociology beyond societies: Mobilities for the twenty-first century.* London; New York: Routledge.

Viviano, Frank. (2004). Armenia reborn. *National Geographic, Vol. 205, No. 3*, 28-49.

Werbner, Pnina. (2002). *Imagined diasporas among Manchester Muslims: the public performance of Pakistani transnational identity politics.* Oxford, UK; James Currey; Santa Fe, N.M.: School of American Research Press.

Wertsch, James. (2002). *Voices of collective remembering.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.