

# The Theme of Relocation and Migration in Armenian Children's Literature\*

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## Abstract

This study aims to analyze a children's and youth literature book taught as part of the so-called Armenian genocide teaching guidelines and curricula on the theme of "relocation, migration and the events of 1915". Rather than arguing for or against a certain historical view, it aims to perform an overall analysis of a literary work based on Reader-Response Theory.

In brief, despite some unsupported claims in the beginning and its occasional lack of objectivity, the fluency and richness of the language and its accurate representation of the cultural values of the historical period especially in the original edition of the book are among the factors that increase the quality of the work.

## Keywords

Relocation and migration, Armenian question, children's literature, biography, Reader-Response Theory.

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## Introduction

As a member of society, a person's memory is an integral part of the social memory, which is composed of visual, verbal and written elements. Karaca (44) states that memory "occurs and develops through the process of learning". Literary works are also an important source of communication as they reflect the language, religion, education, social lives and cultures of societies into social memory. The images created in all genres of literature (poetry, novel, memoir, letter, diary, story, legend) are transferred and conserved from generation to generation, with both negative and positive effects. While such literary works introduce the cultures from which they originate to other countries, they may at times criticize other cultures.

The works of literature have an important influence on the formation and shaping of Turkish-Armenian relations. For example, a literary piece written years ago helps us to learn how Turkish-Armenian communities lived together despite their religious and ethnic differences, and how both communities influenced each other. The memoirs from the period have an important documentary value not only in terms of gaining insights into the history of the period, but also identifying the cultural motifs of the period (Derderian 75, Fleming 48-51, Kankal 214). The Armenian community lived as a minority within the Ottoman Empire for many years. Turks and Armenians lived together in Anatolia during the principalities period of the Ottoman Empire. Apart from some minor incidents, there was no significant conflict between Turks and Armenians. Conflicts have begun after the emergence and politicization of the "Armenian question."

Some major issues in the literature of each society have maintained their influence for many years. In the Armenian literature, this often appears as the themes of "the relocation, migration and events of 1915." Our literature review revealed that hatred of Turks is promoted and Turks are "othered" especially in the literary works of Armenians living abroad. For example, in the US and other countries today, various methods are used to teach the Armenian genocide allegations. To teach and record Armenian genocide allegations in social memory some websites ([www.genocideducation.org](http://www.genocideducation.org), [www.teachgenocide.com](http://www.teachgenocide.com), [www.learn-genocide.com](http://www.learn-genocide.com)) were created and various curricula were designed by following specific teaching techniques.

Turkmen provides the following explanation to the question of why the hostility towards Turks is so strong today:

Keeping their future generations strong with the solidarity psychology of fighting an artificial enemy can be considered as the most important reason for the Armenians to avoid the risk of losing their identities, especially in the diaspora. (56)

In response to all these hostile efforts, in the recent past many countries have taken decisions against Turkey without taking into account the historical facts. Lütem (88) classifies these countries that have taken parliamentary decisions against Turkey as the countries under the pressure of their Armenian minorities or Armenian lobbies, countries (especially Greece and Southern Cyprus) with anti-Turkish attitudes, the European countries with anti-Muslim and anti-Turkish rhetoric in their legislations which are opposed to Turkey's EU membership, and those with a record of crimes against humanity which try to prove that these crimes were actually committed by some other countries. The high number (31) of countries officially recognising the alleged genocide claims shows that Turkey's rhetoric of "leave it to be judged by historians" fails to advocate its rightfulness. This is because historians, despite all difficulties, offer documents that will largely reveal the fact that the claims are unfounded. It is critical to share any related documents in scientific, political and legal platforms. A strong emphasis needs to be placed on the documentaries, works of literature, and exhibitions by holding events as often as possible and by ensuring their foreign press coverage (Beyoğlu 31).

## **Method**

This study analyzes a book from children's literature included in the so-called Armenian genocide teaching guide and curricula focused on the theme of "the relocation, migration and events of 1915." This is a scientific study that aims to present some significant information about the content of a literary work and to evaluate it in general terms, rather than promote any historical claims. As stated by Deveci Bozkuk (93), since the 20th century, the influence of the theme of relocated migration on Armenian writers has emerged as a bond that unites them. Deveci Bozkuş refers to this situation as "the break in the relations of these two communities, which have lived

together for centuries, has been reflected in Armenian literature as a theme of relocation and migration” (93). Thus, the study is important in terms of presenting the psychology of perceiving the *other* by the Turkish and Armenian societies which view each other asymmetrically. However, that these views are not uniform has been neglected in the previous studies on the Armenian question. As Şahin (3) points out, the Armenian community has not displayed a historically homogenous character, and has shown disparate views shaped by various political and economic events in different periods. Başkal (107-112) groups literary works based on the problems experienced by Turks and Armenians in three classes: Those written in Turkish by Armenians, those translated into Turkish from Armenian or English, and those with Turkish authors or written in Turkish whose authors do not have any ethnic or religious identification. The focal book in this study belongs to the second group of works that were originally written in English and translated into Turkish.

This study draws on the literary theories that center around the reader. Among literary theories, structuralism and semiotics focus on the literary text itself and ignore the reader, while reader-centered theories take the reader to the center and place more importance on the reader than on the text itself. The analysis presented in this study is based on The “Reader-Response Theory” developed by Rosenblatt, which is one of the reader-centered theories. *The Transactional Theory of Reading*, which Louise Rosenblatt first described in her 1938 work *Literature as Exploration*, is the seminal work in this field. Rosenblatt, who treats reading as an interaction between the writer and the reader, states that while the author bases her/his book on personal life experiences, s/he also addresses readers with different life experiences, so each reader has a unique interpretation of the same text (1938, 1978). Reading is described by Akyol (33) as an active, effective, and dynamic communication process between the author and the reader. This definition shows that the approaches that place the reader into the center are used in the studies related to children's literature in Turkey as well.

To decipher the social codes in these works, it is important to analyze the ideology in a given language (Tüfekçi Can 156). The history of children's literature reveals the importance of carrying out these analyses because they are dealt through various approaches such as education, religion and

political teachings. Stephens (10) explains this situation with the concept of ideology, stating that ideologies can be evaluated in texts as open, passive, or in the form of ideology that is at the core of the text. The sections exhibiting such ideological approaches in the work were examined in the light of historical data.

### **The Fate of an Armenian Girl in the Shadow of the Crescent**

The book consists of 24 short chapters and 238 pages, in chronological order, which begins in 1907 and ends in 1924. David Kherdian recounts the events that his mother, Veron Dumhejian (with the surname Kherdian after 1924), experienced. Veron, the protagonist of the novel, was born in 1907 in Afyon/Azizya (Emirdağ). Veron's family is one of the two wealthiest families in Azizya, her father is a reputable businessman who travels a lot for business. Like other Armenian children, Veron attends the local church school which is attended by two Turkish girls who are the daughters of the governor. The family live a life of common cultural characteristics with the Turks but have negative views concerning the Turks due to the events of 1895 and 1909. During the World War I, two of her uncles are conscripted, and they are themselves sent into relocation after a three-day notice. But some families with some of their sons or fathers serving in the military are not included in the relocation. After the enactment of the Transfer and Relocation Decree, Veron was sent with her family to Meskene of Syria. Upon the announcement of the decree, the family leaves with all their belongings, and on the way, they visit the tombs of Nasreddin Hoca in Akşehir, and Mevlana in Konya. Then, joining the groups coming from other regions, they travel to Syria via Adana. Many deaths, especially of the elderly and children, are experienced due to hunger, thirst, diseases during this journey on foot. Veron loses her two brothers due to cholera and then her grieving mother dies as well. After all these hardships and deaths, and left in dire straits because the father also gets ordered by the army to work in some other place, the family flees to Birecik. Staying with her aunts for a while, Veron receives even some more harrowing news: the death of her father. The next stop for Veron is the orphanage in Aleppo. Here, Veron meets the other family members in relocation, and after a while, she gets the opportunity to return to her beloved grandmother, who lives in Afyon. The short-lived happiness in Afyon ends with injuries sustained in the

Greek bombardment as a result of the granting of this land to the Greeks according to the Treaty of Sevres. After being taken to a hospital where the Greek soldiers are treated, when a Greek general wants to adopt her, Veron escapes to the Armenian Church and hospital as she is overwhelmed by the urge to protect her identity. After having a short adoption problem at the orphanage school where she gets placed after leaving the hospital, she starts living with her aunt in Izmir. Veron settles in Izmir, but after the Greek occupation of this place and its recapture by the Turks, she first goes to the island of Lesbos and then to Athens. While here, she marries in absentia to an Armenian living in the United States, albeit reluctantly, and immigrates to the United States. She gives birth to a son and a daughter during this marriage. Her son David, who was born from this marriage, has written a novel about the difficulties Veron faced on her escape route from Afyon to Aleppo, which his mother told him about.

### **Rationale for the selection of the book and its stylistic features**

The book is catalogued in the library system under the “youth literature and biography” title. The work can be described as a partial biography in which certain events selected from the life of the protagonist are presented to readers of a period, rather than recounting his or her entire life. The work gives the reader the impression of being a historical novel at times. Considering the fact that biographies fill the gap between historical stories and novels and informative works for children and young people, they definitely address a significant need in the reading culture for children and young readers (Huck et al. 566).

The reason why the work of David Kherdian of Armenian origin is preferred as a research subject is that it is included in the so-called Armenian genocide teaching guidelines and curricula and that an Armenian author describes others (Turks) in his work. The original language of “The Road from Home: The Story of an Armenian Girl”, written by David Kherdian, is English. The novel, whose Turkish title is “Evden Gelen Yol: Bir Ermeni Kızın Öyküsü” was first published in 2001 as 160 pages by Peri Publishing House under the title “Hilalin Gölgesinde Bir Ermeni Kızın Yazgısı (The Fate of an Armenian girl in the Shadow of the Crescent)”. The book was translated into Turkish from its German translation, instead of its original language of English and presented to the readers. Some discrepancies between the original edition

of the book and the Turkish edition are observed in some sections. These discrepancies generally appear to be due to the fact that the book was translated from a different language rather than the original source. Some comments about the book are presented as needed by indicating the page numbers on the translation edition of the book.

The first-person narrative viewpoint is the primary narrative used throughout the text. However, we can see that the author uses two different points of view. While, the events in some sections are presented with the neutral narrative, some other sections are presented with the judgmental personal narrative. One feature that may grab the reader's attention is the examples of common cultural motifs and important linguistic similarities. The characteristics of the period, eyewitnesses' accounts of the ancient traditions and daily lifestyles of their time, their social and political environment, some significant historical events, political actions taken by the Young Turk government (mobilization, weapons collection), the suffering of the Armenians during the relocation and forced relocation (walking for so long that they would collapse from exhaustion, thirst, hunger, contagious diseases, death) is reflected in the memories.

The cover of the book (the front and back together) is adorned by a photograph taken in 1900 of the city center of Afyon Karahisar, and on the front cover we see a passport photo of Veron. The book was published by Greenwillow Books in 1979. The book is dedicated to Lousapere Dumehjian, Veron's aunt-in-law.

Preceding the author's note are two official and dated texts supposedly written by Talat Pasha and Adolf Hitler. However, no reference information is provided for either. The first of these was sent by Minister of the Interior Talat Pasha:

September 16, 1916.- To the Government of Aleppo. It was at first communicated to you that the government, by order of the Jemiet, had decided to destroy completely all the Armenians living in Turkey...An end must be put to their existence, however criminal the measures taken may be, and no regard must be paid to either age or sex nor to conscientious scruples. (Kherdian)

The other text was written by Adolf Hitler:

August 22, 1939.- I have given orders to my Death Units to exterminate without mercy or pity men, women, and children belonging to the Polish-speaking race. It is only in this manner that we can acquire the vital territory which we need. After all, who remembers today the extermination of Armenians? (Kherdian)

The fact that these two examples of writing which may have a shocking effect on the reader are given at the beginning of the book indicates that the book was driven by political motivations and written to support the genocide allegations. Kherdian did not support these words, which are one of the mainstays of the Armenian genocide allegations in his work, with referential evidence or historical documents. These words that Kherdian claims to have been written by Adolf Hitler could not be proven by the Armenians, which is described by Karaca as follows:

While conducting archive research to prepare a special newsletter on the so-called 'Armenian Genocide', Kevork Bardakçyan of the Armenian Diaspora intended to end this bulletin by quoting Hitler, who allegedly mentioned Turkey in an attempt to defend himself for committing the Holocaust, however, Bardakçyan failed to verify the source of this quote. (66)

From another perspective, Sutherland describes these ideological reflections as

...the author's views are the author's politics; and the books expressing these views, when made accessible to the public, become purveyors of these politics, and potentially persuasive. (143-144)

In some places, the work is not only literary, but also political text. The unrest exhibited by various ethnic peoples living in the Ottoman Empire in the early 19th and late 20th century is also evident in the Armenian community. The work often highlights the subject of unjustified deportation of the Armenian people who adhered to the laws of the state, how the Armenian families were torn apart, the vulnerability of the people who were robbed and killed by bandits, and suffering of the people on the road during the relocation. Kherdian's novel underlines the deep suffering that stem from the break between the Turkish and Armenian community caused

by the actions of the political authority. The issue of relocation is given a remarkable degree of attention as well. Similar cultural elements are also included in the work.

The back cover of the book contains information on David Kherdian. Here, it is stated that the author has seven books of poetry, is the editor of the *Ararat* magazine and that he works at the California State University. He is listed as the editor of eight poetry anthologies, and noted that he is married to Caldecott award-winning Nonny Hogrorian, and living in Oregon. In the three-page author's note section, some key political events of the period are listed to give the reader some background information. After the author's note, Veron's relocation journey and escape route are shown on a map spread over two pages, providing the reader with some visual information. The last page of the book presents some information about Veron Dumehjian as far back as 1979. In light of this information, we learn that she married in 1924, settled in Wisconsin, and that they had a son named David, followed by a daughter named Virginia. Finally, Veron lived in California as a widow.

The map and historical data in the introduction section of the book may have been added to facilitate both Turkish and non-Turkish readers' understanding of the period of the events described, who may lack the necessary background knowledge of the events. Another possibility is pointed out by Başkal:

...The majority of authors who advocate a certain thesis and try to get the reader to accept this thesis seek the help of historical elements besides literary or fictional elements in getting their message across.  
(32-33)

### **Cultural Factors**

Turks and Armenians have led a peaceful life together for centuries on the Anatolian land, with their intertwined cultures and lives mutually influencing each other's language and literature. Artun states that Turks and Armenians have lived together in different social and economic conditions, and naturally, they have become representatives of a common culture. It is possible to see the clear influence of Turkish culture especially in "scientific

studies, in the works of various travelers and most importantly in the products of culture” (128). The part about Nasreddin Hodja in the text is a clear example of this interaction. Their conversations on their way to Akşehir during the relocation indicates that they exchanged Nasreddin Hodja jokes in the family and that they knew about the Hodja:

After a while Uncle Haig called out to Father, who was driving the wagon, “Benyat, according to the sign I saw awhile back, this must be Akşehir we are approaching. Isn't it the birthplace and burial site of Nassredin Hodja?”

“Yes,” Father called back, “this is the town. I had occasion to visit his sepulcher once, several years ago.”

At this Grandpa's ears perked up, because Nassredin Hodja was his favorite storyteller, and he knew more of his tales than anyone in the family. Normally, he would have told a Nassredin Hodja story; but his smile quickly turned into a frown, and he didn't open his mouth. (Kherdian 27)

Examining the cultural and literary works of Caucasian peoples, Üstünyer underlines this as a common cultural value that he often encountered in his study:

The number of caravans traveling between Tbilisi, Erzurum and Istanbul increased to two thousand and the stories of Dede Korkut, Arabian Nights, Nasreddin Hodja jokes, Köroğlu stories were told in caravanserais. (95)

The cultural common ground of the two communities is evident in the language that is the medium of social life. Especially we often encounter some common words in the sections of the first two chapters of the book, where the life before relocation is described. We see that these words appear in many spheres of the social life. Some common words, especially those related to food and daily life, are often included in the book. Pointing at the frequency of common words used by these two societies whose daily lives are very similar to each other, Kuzucu states that “while there are over 800 words taken from Armenian in Turkish, more than 4,000 words have passed from Turkish to Armenian.” Reflecting on the currency of this phenomenon, Kuzucu states that:

Many Armenian families who migrated to the west from various parts of Anatolia have preserved their Turkish memories in their last name either denoting to a profession (Kuyumcuyan-*Goldsmithson*) or hometown (Maraşlıyan-*Marashian*). It is also evident that Turkish words are used in proper names. (<http://turksandarmenians.marmara.edu.tr/tr/turk-ermeni-kulturiliskileri/>)

In a similar study, Karaağaç (25-114) presents 3166 words compiled from historical data and documents on his list of Turkish words in the Armenian language spoken by Armenians, the third oldest neighbors of Turks after the Chinese and Persians. We can say that these common concepts and definitions used especially in the food culture are an important element in terms of showing the intertwined history of the two societies. Some of these common words are listed below with their Turkish counterparts and page numbers:

Pahklava (Baklava, 1); Khoulabia (Kurabiye, 1); khashkash (keşkeş, 2), Vakh vakh (vah vah, 2); saz (saz, 5); mangal (mangal, 6); dolma (dolma, 7); minders (minderler, 7); soujoukh (sucuk, 7); choereg (çörek, 7); somen hatz (somon ekmek, 7); tarkana (tarhana, 7); pilaf (pilav, 7); patlijan (patlıcan, 7); yogurt (yoğurt, 7); manti (manti, 8); shureb (şurup, 8); basterma (pastırma, 8); lablabie (leblebi, 8); youka (yufka, 9); keglig (keklik, 9); mezas (meze, 9); raki (rakı, 9); Kaimakam (kaymakam, 13); lavash (lavaş, 16); peda bread (pide ekmeği, 16); loukhoun (lokum, 18); halva (helva, 18); shish kebab (şiş kebab, 19); peshdimbal (peştamal, 26); tourshi (turşu, 26); hamam (hamam, 26); havloo (avlu, 100); ojack (ocak, 101); doudous (dadı, 101); hanum (hanım, 109); gahuorma (kavurma, 110); sarma (sarma, 111); koufta (köfte, 113); khadeif (kadayıf, 113); kessmeh (kesme, 113).

The high frequency of the common words in the food culture has been established by many other researchers (Bostan, Tovmasyan). Bostan (160) states that Anatolian cultural richness manifests itself in the culinary culture as it does in all areas, that Turks have been influenced by the culinary habits of the regions they stayed in on their journey to Anatolia:

A dish having a Turkish, Greek or Armenian name should not be considered as an indication that the dish belongs to that nation. All the dishes produced in Anatolia belong to Anatolia and bear traces of different cultures... Here is the Anatolian cuisine: a glass of water from this culture, a tablespoon from that culture, a pinch of spice from another culture... rule of thumb from this, a flick from that... Bon Appetit. (169-170)

However, Bostan emphasizes that the rich cultural sharing arising from the coexistence of Turks with different nations remains ignored due to the history books' heavy focus on wars.

### **Before the Relocation**

Although the Armenian families live in the same neighborhood as the Turks, it is as if a wall has been built between them in time. We learn the attitudes of the Armenian family members towards the Turks, their broken relations with them, and their minority psychology through their dialogues among themselves. At the beginning of her memoirs, we witness the events relating to Veron's family life, her daily life, and her relations with the Turks. In relation to the events of the period, the following statements regarding the Turks are striking:

For the first time I began to sense the seriousness of our problem with Turks. I had always known that they were not our friends, even though there were some with whom we were friendly, but now it seemed, in truth, that they were our enemies. We were Christians, and they were Moslems, but it was not this alone that separated us; we were also different in language, race and custom. We did live on the same soil, but I was told that soil could be owned and that the present owner of this soil, which we had always called home, was Turkey. (Kherdian 23)

In some parts of the text, the emphasis on religion is mentioned as in the excerpt here, and is interpreted as follows in Başkal's work in which he examines the literary reflections of the Turkish-Armenian question:

Authors writing for an international readership, especially for readers in America, naturally want to appeal to a large readership, but have a problem to address: both Turks and Armenians are not groups known

to ordinary American readers, and therefore, whose lives, histories, and wars are not something to be wondered about. Associating these two groups with other larger groups for which Americans can either take sides or take a stand is the right step for a broader readership. These large groups appear in the works of the authors in the form of Muslims and Christians. Armenians are naturally associated with Christianity and Turks are associated with Islam, and in a sense the struggle is not between Armenians and Turks but between Christians and Muslims. (114-115)

Another noteworthy situation in the pre-relocation period is the sharp change in the perspectives of the two communities. The information given in Turkish historical sources about the Turkish-Armenian relations during the rise of the Ottoman Empire is generally positive. However, especially in the stories describing the World War I period, negative expressions are used more frequently than those describing the mutually positive effects of the two societies. In other words, statements that highlight the coexistence culture and neighborly relations of the two communities begin to disappear. Indicators of this change often appear in the text. The following exemplifies the heroine's impressions from some rumors before the relocation:

Grandma had hinted in the past that there might be trouble between the Armenians and the Turks, but now it was being talked about more openly-not only by her, but by everyone in our quarter. I was told that the Turks had massacred several hundreds thousand Armenians a few years before, in 1895, and then again in Adana, in 1909, when I was two years old. And now there were rumors that there would be more massacres. (Kherdian 23)

### **The Period of Relocation**

The troubles experienced during the Transfer and Relocation, the deaths that occurred or the government's practices are narrated with similar examples of events in other literary works published on the subject. We can see that the period of relocation and the events on the road are depicted in a flow that parallels the historical events:

It happened on a Sunday.

We were going to be deported-and now I understood that "deportation" meant. We were given three days to gather together

our belongings and to leave. No one knew where we were being sent. (Kherdian 24)

“That afternoon a few of the older people began to fall down, but the gendarmes wouldn't let anyone stop and help them” (Kherdian 40).

We see Veron's father giving information in some sections referring to the historical and political events of the period. For example:

As we passed below them, I heard one-man shout, “Infidel dogs.” This prompted two young boys to pick up stones and hurl them at our procession. (Kherdian 44)

With these accusations, Veron's father informs us about the background of the Armenians, stating that they were to be exterminated, especially politically.

Fighting diseases during the relocation is mentioned in many places:

There are no Turkish gendarmes in Meskene, he said, “but we cannot go into town; they say we are sick and will spread our diseases to the townspeople. (Kherdian 62)

More and more people were getting sick. The fist to die were the very old and the very young. But no one was grieving anymore. (Kherdian 63)

Although there is a negative image of Turks in general, there are also Turkish images in some sections that do not fit in with this classification. However, one of the most striking issues in these sections is the lack of a future vision or statements about living together again. Veron shares the following impressions after she returns to Azizya:

The Turks I knew or spoke to in Azizya all said they were sorry about what had happened. They blamed the government, not the civilian population, which they said was innocent. It was true that many had harbored Armenians and had protested their treatment by the gendarmerie, the bashi bouzouks (irregulars) and the Kurdish brigans, but it was impossible now for us to trust the Turks again or to forgive them. (Kherdian 104)

## Political Events of the Period

In some parts of the work, the events are discussed together with the political events of the period and presented to the reader. We see the travelling group discussing the following during a conversation at the stopover:

The cold and deadly hand of the German has organized all this. Germany wants us out of the way, as we alone are capable of quaranteeing economic and political independence for Turkey in Asia Minor. Remove us and you remove the industry and talent and intelligence on which this empire rest. (Kherdian 33)

On one of his travels, Veron's father greets a mullah sitting in a coffee shop and tries to find out the cause of the events. In these conversations:

At the entrance I saw something that made the blood rush to my temples. Tacked to the wall was a small card on which printed a map of Cilicia, with writing in Armenian...I turned the card over and read, in Armenian: The Future Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia...

But what does the card itself mean? I asked...

As you know, when Abdul Hamid was dethroned in 1909, the new government of Young Turks promised certain freedoms to the Armenians and other subject areas. The Armenians in a burst of riotous folly, foolish even them, began shouting from their clubs and meeting chambers of the freedom that would soon be theirs. It was then that they sent those unfortunate cards you ask about through the mails, and marched through the streets bearing banners of Lesser Armenia. They even began speaking of a royalist army hiding in the mountain fasts of Hadjin and Zeitun, which was of course a bluff...

Christian and Moslem have always been neighbors, if not always friends. The accusation that the Turk is persecuting the Armenians on religious ground is the work of Western journalism. Until now a single act of desecration had been committed against the Armenian church, but now...what can we say, effendi, it is a disgrace... (Kherdian 47-49)

In addition, the author criticizes the strife, stratification, and conflicts between social classes among the Armenian community throughout the novel:

As we walked along, French and American dignitaries moved up and down our ranks, asking if any of us were their citizens.

Why are they asking for their citizens? I called out.

...It means they are only saving their own. (Kherdian 130)

Başkal (33-61) discusses some different perspectives adopted by the literary works on the Armenian revolts in the Ottoman period. The first is the argument usually made by Turkish writers that the Armenians, in the process of weakening the Ottoman Empire, cooperated with the foreign states and thus betrayed the country. Another perspective usually adopted by Armenian writers or those promoting the Armenian theses is that Armenians' demands for justice, equality, and freedom was aggressively responded by the Turks, and what the Armenians did was just "civil protest, self-defense and resistance to massacre." The literary works adopting this perspective often emphasize that Armenians are hated because of their race or religion. In contrast to the other parts of the work and the points of view described above, Veron's father's conversations in the coffeehouse and the group's own conversations on their journey into relocation indicate a more realistic approach.

## **Conclusion**

Literary works play a very powerful role in a culture's perception of another. The issues described in these works play a particularly important part in improving or breaking off intercultural relations. This book also shows the role of literature, which appeals to a very broad segment of the society, in the formation of the social memory and shaping future social relationships. As stated by Başar, the term "Turkish-Armenian relations" has never been without certain diplomatic connotations. Başar (131) views this as an attempt to deny the fact that the two communities have lived together for many years and states that diplomatic terminology is inadequate to describe this relationship. From this point of view, it is evident that the book serves this diplomatic approach with the discriminatory and biased language it uses in various parts and with the sections added by the author without citing any sources. It was later revealed that the telegram shown at the beginning of the book supposedly taken from Andonian, which was claimed to have been written by Talat Pasha, was a forged document

prepared by Andonian himself (Orel and Yuca). Here we see that the author digresses from the story and tries to make an impressive presentation of some (forged) correspondence examples, without documenting their authenticity, to support the claims of the diaspora.

In addition, this study reveals that the perceptions of Turks and Turkey by different cultures and nations in various periods vary according to the political, economic and social structure of the period. Many researchers who have analyzed literary works for perspectives on the Turkish-Armenian question emphasize two main categories: The first is that the Turks and Armenians have been fighting for centuries, and that migration is not a development specific to a certain time or political conditions, but a result of the accumulative historical process. The second category argues that Turks and Armenians have had a long-lasting friendship during which they have experienced negative as well as positive events, including the decision to relocate and the events in its aftermath are limited only to the context of a certain period and its specific set of unfortunate conditions (Başkal). In his study of literary works on the Turkish-Armenian question, Başkal (107-112) states that authors who have written works by listening to narratives such as David Kherdian have a biased point of view towards the past events. In describing these authors, Başkal (111-112) states the following:

They grew up within Western societies and largely explored life there. The works of the authors in this group have a very negative view of the common past. Turks are often bad for reasons arising from their character, religion, and nationality. The events of 1915 are no exception, they are but the product of hundreds of years.

Although the work examined is usually placed in the first category by researchers, it also bears significant marks from the second category. In some sections, emphasis is placed on the historical process of cultural and friendship ties between the two communities, while in some sections, emphasis is placed on the relation of relocation to the events in a particular period. On the basis of the “Reader-Response theory,” the work offers a unique reading experience for each reader with different life experiences and also opens the door to an experience where we put ourselves in the shoes of the protagonist.

The narrative point of view in literary works is also analyzed in terms of the relationship of authors with other cultures. It is observed that the works of Armenian writers who have lived with the Turks even for a short time feature good Turks as well as bad Turks, and that ignorance is associated with the origin of evil rather than the concepts of nationality and religion. However, the works of Armenian or non-Armenian authors who have never lived with Turks have almost no good Turkish characters, which is based on nationality and faith (Başkal 107-112). It is emphasized by many researchers that Armenian children born in the diaspora are more hostile to Turks than their parents. Reading the novel, it is clear that the son David harbors more hatred towards the Turks than his mother, although the mother, who lived together with the Turks for a certain period of time, describes the events of her life by including some cultural partnerships and good relations. Therefore, some other reasons underlie this negative attitude in the Armenian literature, one of which is suggested by Erol Göka as follows:

For the Diaspora Armenians, there is no chance of having a national identity except for embracing the identity of the rich western country in which they live, but in terms of group (Jamaat) identities, Turkish hostility and revenge feelings can have a foundational function. They can enjoy the advantages of having a group identity and victimization psychology thanks to their Turkish hostility. (128)

Kankal (223) explains it as follows:

In the works of writers living outside Anatolia (who left Anatolia after the relocation or were born in the diaspora), the only people to blame are the Turks. To them, while other nations were leaving the Ottomans one by one and gaining their independence, the Armenians were begrudged this right. The leaders of the Union and Progress Party are the main actors of this, but this situation is not limited to them alone. The Turkish nation as a whole, with its will and activities, is behind all the events of this project, and is therefore guilty of these all. This is the main idea and the main discourse of these works.

While the idea of protecting children from evil was emphasized in children's literature until the mid-20th century, later this idea disappeared and the

idea that the child needs to face the evil has gained popularity. However, authors try to end the dismal events experienced in such texts with a happy ending, and often this struggle for survival is dealt with within the framework of the search for identity. Higonnet, explaining the popularity of such works with a wide readership in America, attributes this to the fact that the United States is “a child who was sadly or poignantly cut off from his mother, Great Britain.” (Higonnet 150). We see that the situation, which is labeled as the “trauma effect” in children’s literature, is often used in the works written in English on the Armenian question. Although the subject of trauma often appears in the West, it is not addressed in Turkish children’s literature. Although there are numerous examples of massacres carried out by Armenian gangs and other countries on Turkish society, especially during the late Ottoman period, these are not reflected in children’s literature works in an age appropriate way. As such, reflecting Turkey’s rich cultural background and its historical facts on children’s literature will clearly foster Turkish children’s identity and contribute to their cultural growth.

The period on which the literary works focus also seems to make a difference. The research indicates that the works focusing on the pre-1915 period written in Turkish by Armenians, present the two societies as accepting and respecting each other, that is, those who tell their own story show a more moderate attitude, avoiding any take-no-prisoner condemnations of the other side altogether while the authors who tell another’s story take a more strict, generalising attitude (Başkal 107-112). Underscoring the fact that Armenians lived with Turks for nearly seven hundred years in legal and scattered settlements in the region, McCarthy, as a historian known for his impartiality, criticizes passing such overall judgments by asking “Why would the Turks do such a thing?” (7).

No matter how one looks at the Turkish-Armenian question, the most important feature that stands out in the works is the partnerships between Turks and Armenians. Our analysis of this literary work reveals numerous partnerships forged by these two groups, from common words and concepts used in the language to food culture, from folk heroes to relationships between family members. The stories in the work about cultural life and traditions show that there are no major differences in the lives of the Turks and Armenians, which is supported by the research findings of Kankal

(214) and Derderian (75). Despite much evidence that it was written in hatred of the Ottoman state and the Turks (Kankal 75) the book makes implicit and explicit descriptions and explanations on the war conditions, political events and the activities of the Armenian committees of the period, contrary to many works written on relocation and migration. Despite the lack of references at the beginning and occasionally questionable objectivity, the fluency and richness of the narration and presentation of the historical period together with the cultural values positively affect the quality of this original edition of the book.

Instead of teaching children history through history textbooks written from a narrow perspective on heroism, wars and their consequences, teaching it by using content-rich children's literature that draws on the research of qualified writers can make a significant contribution to raising their historical awareness. Researching the selected subject well, presenting the events in an impartial manner, and the truthful portrayal of the time period of the events emerge as some key criteria for the evaluation of historical novels and biographies.

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# Ermeni Çocuk Edebiyatı Eserlerinde Sürgün ve Göç Teması\*

Hakan Dedeoğlu\*\*

## Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı “sürgün, göç ve 1915 olayları” temasına odaklanmış sözde Ermeni soykırımı öğretim rehberi ve programlarında yer alan, çocuk ve gençlik edebiyatı kapsamında ele alınabilecek bir kitabın değerlendirmesini yapmaktır. Bu çalışma, herhangi bir tarihsel iddianın sahibi ya da savunucusu olma amacından uzak, Okur Tepki Teorisi temelinde bir edebî eseri genel hatlarıyla ele alıp değerlendirme, içerik konusunda önemli sayılabilecek bilgiler sunmayı hedefleyen bir çalışmadır. Sonuç olarak eserin başında kaynak gösterilmeyen ifadelerin yer alması ve tarafsız sunumun zaman zaman sorgulanabilir olması eksiklikler olarak karşımıza çıkmasına rağmen özellikle kitabın özgün baskısında kullanılan dil ve anlatımın akıcılık ve zenginliği ve tarihsel dönemin kültürel değerleriyle birlikte sunulması eserin niteliğini olumlu etkileyen etmenler arasında yer almaktadır.

## Anahtar Kelimeler

Sürgün ve göç, Ermeni sorunu, çocuk edebiyatı, biyografi, Okur tepki teorisi.

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# Тема переселения и миграции в армянской детской литературе\*

**Хакан Дедеоглу\*\***

## **Аннотация**

Цель данного исследования – анализ одной из книг детской и молодежной литературы, преподаваемой в рамках учебных пособий и учебных программ по так называемому геноциду армян на тему «переселение, миграция и события 1915 года». Автор стремится осуществить общий анализ литературного произведения, основанный на диалоге между текстом и читателем, а не высказываться за или против определенной исторической точки зрения. Автор полагает, что, несмотря на некоторые необоснованные утверждения в начале и отсутствие объективности, которые можно назвать среди недостатков издания, нужно отметить факторы, которые положительно влияют на восприятие произведения, – беглость и богатство языка, образное представление культурных ценностей исторического периода, особенно в оригинальном издании книги.

## **Ключевые слова**

Переселение и миграция, Армянский вопрос, детская литература, биография, теория реакции читателей.

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