

CHARLES AZNAVOUR'S BOOK ENTITLED D'UNE PORTE L'AUTRE (FROM ONE DOOR TO THE NEXT): HISTORICAL FACTS AND TURKISH-ARMENIAN RELATIONS

(CHARLES AZNAVOUR'UN "BİR KAPIDAN ÖTEKİNE" BAŞLIKLİ KİTABI:
TARİHSEL GERÇEKLER VE TÜRK-ERMENİ İLİŞKİLERİ)

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Abstract: *In his book entitled D'Une Porte L'Autre, apart from information regarding his own life, French singer Charles Aznavour has also presented his thoughts concerning Turkish-Armenian relations. Despite lacking knowledge, Aznavour has not refrained from making detections on the issue, but this has caused the singer to make mistakes regarding his own history. In the book in which the emigration from Istanbul to Europe of the singer's family, whose roots are based on Georgian Armenians, is also described, there are historical mistakes and lack of information. It could be seen that the singer identity of Aznavour, who states that he considers himself both French and Armenian, is used as propaganda to spread and to procure recognition of the Armenian allegations.*

Keywords: *Charles Aznavour, Identity Crisis of the Diaspora Armenians, guided art, Armenians of Turkey, Turkish-Armenian relations, 1917-1922 Russian Civil War*

Öz: *Fransız şarkıcı Charles Aznavour, D'Une Porte L'Autre adlı kitabında kendi yaşamı ile ilgili bilgilerin yanı sıra Türk-Ermeni ilişkileri bağlamındaki düşüncelerini de vermiştir. Aznavour, çok fazla bir bilgisi olmadığı halde konu ile ilgili tespitler yapmaktan kaçınmaz, ancak bu şarkıcıyı, kendi tarihi ile ilgili yanlışlara düşürür. Kökenleri Gürcistan Ermenilerine dayanan şarkıcının ailesinin İstanbul'dan Avrupa'ya geçişinin de anlatıldığı kitapta, tarihsel yanlışlar ve bilgi eksiklikleri vardır. Kendisini hem Fransız hem de Ermeni olarak gördüğünü beyan eden Aznavour'un sanatçı kimliğini Ermeni iddialarını yaymak ve kabul ettirmek için propaganda amacıyla kullanıldığı görülmektedir.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Charles Aznavour, Diaspora Ermenilerinin kimlik sorunu, güdümlü sanat, Türkiye Ermenileri, Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri, 1917-1922 Rus İç Savaşı.*

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to put forth some historical facts regarding Turkish-Armenian relations and to determine in which direction French singer Charles Aznavour has contributed to it based on the information presented in his book entitled *D'Une Porte l'Autre* (From One Door to the Next).

Within the framework of this purpose, we must first shortly mention the biography of Charles Aznavour. Then, information regarding the contents of the book that has become the subject of this article will be provided and the famous singer's viewpoint towards events on the basis of Turkish-Armenian relations will be determined and in order to do this, *D'Une Porte l'Autre* will be compared to another book entitled *Le Temps des Avants* (2003) (*The Past Tense Becomes*) also written by Aznavour.

Aznavour's identity, information concerning past and present Turkish-Armenian relations and the historical facts underlining the events explained in his book will also exist among the issues to be addressed in this article.

The Biography of Charles Aznavour:

By utilizing Charles Aznavour's autobiographies and his biographies existing in various sources, we will try to put together the significant turning points in the singer's life in this section of our article:

- 22 May 1924: Chahnour Varinag Aznavourian (Charles Aznavour) is born in Paris.

His father from among Georgian Armenians is Misha Aznavourian and his mother from among Adapazarı Armenians is Knar Baghdassarian.

- 1924: Father Misha Aznavourian opens a restaurant in Paris and the family decides on moving to this city.
- 1933: Charles Aznavour appears on stage for the first time.
- 1946: He meets the famous French singer Edith Piaf who had

discovered him and caused him to gain recognition. In the same year, he marries Micheline Rugel.

- 1947: His first child Seda is born.
- 1950-1955: He works as tunesmith for Gilbert Bécaud.
- 1952: His second child Misha is born.
- 1956: The positive reaction of the audience during a recital in Casablanca shows that Aznavour has been accepted as a star. His song "Sur Ma Vie/About My Life" written for his premier in Olympia is his first significant success. In the same year, he marries Evelyne Plessis and his third child Patrick is born.
- 1959: Due to this role as Heurtevent in the movie *Head against the Walls* directed by Georges Franju, he receives the award for the best singer by the French Cinema Academy.
- 1960's: He writes many songs which becomes popular. The themes of these songs are generally about love and the rapid passing of time.
- 1964: His "La Mamma" song becomes the first French song to receive an award in Japan.
- 1968: He marries Swedish Ulla Thorsell in Las Vegas.
- 1969: Aznavour is granted the Ruby Medal of the City of Paris. In the same year, his marriage to Ulla is solemnized in an Armenian church. His daughter Katia is also born in 1969.
- 1971: He receives the Golden Lion Honorary Award at the Venice Film Festival for the Italian version of the soundtrack of the movie *Mourir d'aimer (Dying of Love)* directed by André Cayatte.
- 1972: The smallest of his children Nicolas is born.
- 1976: In commemoration of the so-called Armenian "genocide", he writes the song "Ils sont tombés/They Fell".
- 1988: Following the earthquake of a magnitude of 6.9 in Armenia, he establishes the "Aznavour for Armenia" charity organization and sends aid in high amounts of money to Armenia.

- 1989: The song “Pour toi L’Armenie/Armenia for you” performed by more than eighty singers to help Armenia reaches the top among the most preferred songs list in France. This situation symbolizes how successful Aznavour’s propaganda in supporting Armenia is.
- 1995: He is appointed as Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Armenia to UNESCO.¹
- 2001: In order to thank him for the aids given to Armenia, Aznavour’s name is given to one of the squares present in the center of Armenia. Moreover, a statue is built on his behalf in Gyumri.
- 2002: He plays a role in Atom Egoyan’s movie *Ararat* which is about the so-called genocide.
- 2003: His book *Les Temps des Avants (The Past Tense Becomes)* is published.
- 2004: He receives the title of “national hero of Armenia” by Armenian President Robert Kocharyan.²
- 30 September 2006: He gives an open air concert in Yerevan.³
- 26 December 2008: Armenian President Serj Sarkisian grants Aznavour Armenian citizenship.⁴
- 2009: He accepts the Armenian President’s proposal of being appointed as Armenian Ambassador to Switzerland.⁵ In the same year, he is awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Montreal.
- 2011: Aznavour’s book *From One Door to the Next*, which we are examining, is published.

1 *Répertoire des Délégations permanentes auprès de l’UNESCO*
http://www.unesco.org/eri/permdel/ProtocolList_complete_p.asp?region=&language=F&contr=
(Date of retrieval: 27.01.2012)

2 The Highest Title of the Republic of Armenia, Awards, National Hero of Armenia
<http://www.president.am/library/awards/eng/?award=1> (Date of retrieval: 27.01.2012)

3 Krikor Amirzayan, http://www.armenews.com/article.php3?id_article=47789 (Date of retrieval: 19.01.2012)

4 “President Serzh Sargsyan decrees to grant Armenian citizenship to Charles Aznavour and Levon Sayan” <http://president.am/events/news/eng/?search=aznavour&pn=2&id=344> (Date of retrieval: 27.01.2012)

5 “Charles Aznavour, new Ambassador of Armenia to Switzerland”
http://www.armenian.ch/index.php?id=embassy_pr&L=1 (Date of retrieval: 19.01.2012)

The Content of Charles Aznavour's Book *D'Une Porte L'Autre*:

Aznavour's book entitled *D'Une Porte L'Autre (From One Door to the Next)* has been published in French by Don Quichotte publications in 2011. The volume of the book is 164 pages. Apart from providing information concerning his own life, the famous singer has also conveyed his thoughts, which requires explanation, regarding Turkish-Armenian relations.

In this book, which is composed of nine sections including a "Preface", "At the Doors of Information", "On the Verge of Autumn", "The Final Door", "A Gateway as Large as Hope", "I Needed a Megaphone", "On the Verge of Power", "On the Verge of Nature" and a "Conclusion", Aznavour conveys his thoughts to the readers without any particular order.

In his book which is told by a first-person singular from the beginning to the end, it could be seen that Aznavour has not only explained his life as a singer, but has also addressed many current issues. In the "preface" of his book, Aznavour explains that he has written his thoughts going from one issue to another and the reason for this is that putting his thoughts in order refers to the course of his life, but that his life is not comprised of a straight line. Moreover, Aznavour also expresses in this section that his goal is to explain his past.⁶

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In the section entitled "At the Doors of Information", Aznavour starts with explaining his views on education. Aznavour, who indicates that he was able to go to school for only a short period of his life and that later on he improved himself on his own, also states that he received a list of books from the famous author Jean Cocteau, which he had a chance to meet, and that this list mentioned below benefited him greatly:

Adolphe, Benjamin Constant

Impressions of Africa, Raymond Roussel

War and Peace, Lev Tolstoy

Gösta Berlings Saga, Selma Lagerlöf

6 Charles Aznavour (2011), *D'Une Porte L'Autre*, Ed. Don Quichotte, p. 7.

Pan, Knut Hamsun

Pelléas and Mélisande, Maurice Maeterlinck

The Red and the Black, Stendhal

Manon Lescault, L'Abbé Prévost

The Knight of the Red House, Alexandre Dumas

The Splendors and Miseries of Courtesans, Honoré de Balzac

The Devil in the Flesh, Raymond Radiguet

The Ballad of Reading Goal, Oscar Wilde

The Idiot, Dostoyevski

The Magic Mountain, Thomas Mann

The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', Joseph Conrad

Wuthering Heights, Emily Brontë

The Dramatic and Fantastic Stories of Edgar Allan Poe, Edgar Poe

White Fang, Jack London

The Princess of Cleves, Madame de Lafayette”⁷

The well known singer wants to explain how he improved himself by introducing this list to his readers. This way, he indicates that he has matured in writing lyrics and writing.⁸

Furthermore, by arguing in his book that for French artists to write English songs instead of French ones is an irrational act and a great mistake, Aznavour criticizes them. Aznavour, whose songs have been translated to various other languages, emphasizes that French songs have not been translated into other languages for a long time. He states that French singers should not make songs for the English or Americans, but for the French. He expresses that the opposite will be of no use except to create “fake Madonna’s”. These ideas are important for displaying Aznavour’s devotion to the French language and France.

7 Ibid., pp. 15-16.

8 Ibid., p. 17.

In this section where current French singers and television programmes directed towards discovering good singers is criticized, Aznavour indicates that he not only loves his job, but also colleagues and adds the following:

“Introducing yourself on a stage with a cycle of songs organized well or poorly is not an easy task to do. There is no school to teach this”⁹

In the section “On the Verge of Autumn”, he expresses that time passes by quickly and regarding health, expresses that the costs of things that should not be done during youth are paid later in life. The French singer states that humans learn by living, but when looking back on the past when grown old, they realize that they have not learned anything. According to Aznavour, youth lasts very short. The singer, who advises that health should be taken care of during this short time, also explains his adventure of quitting smoking in order to set an example for the readers.

Aznavour, who states that he seems very young and vigorous compared to individuals of the same age as him, also expresses his thoughts on plastic surgery in this section. By indicating that he has not undergone any plastic surgery besides a nose job, Aznavour puts forth that these kinds of operations are only suitable for women and that he hugs men of the same age just like how everyone hugs their family elders.

Aznavour, who also explains in this section the reason for no projects regarding the future taking place, believes that projects could only be designed by those having a future and adds the following:

“My future disappeared on the horizon a long time ago. Now I am only left with living my life. To continue, to hang on, there is my project”.¹⁰

In the mind of the singer, who thinks that his life has passed by quickly just like leaves of autumn, many bittersweet memories come flooding back when looking upon the past. However, he questions whether or not he really lived through these. He clearly sees that he has now reached the end of his life and states that he wants to write everything he has experienced by not looking at the future, but the past.

In the section entitled “The Final Door”, actually as a continuation of the previous section in which senescence is addressed, Aznavour shares his thoughts on death. Firstly, he dwells upon the issues of retirement and

9 Ibid., p. 30.

10 Ibid., p. 51.

working: by mentioning that he is among those individuals born to work, he says that he will continue as long as his life and health lasts long enough. He believes that the essential reason for some artists wanting to abandon their artistic life because they have aged is actually some kind of fear.

In this section where the singer has also criticized the news that he has died, Aznavour condemns the press which publishes the news by only pursuing the goal of selling/to be watched and does not conduct any research on whether the news is right or wrong.

Aznavour, who explains towards the end of this section the pain suffered after the death of his parents, also examines the issue of belief. He argues that the belief that all Muslims, Christians and Jews will be accepted by Allah, God or Jehovah when they die is a comforting idea. He indicates that no matter what it is called, this shows that God is the same for all and has banished humans to earth after the apple incident of Adam and Eve.

At the last page of this section, by providing the example of Adam and Eve, Aznavour states that their fault could not attributed to us and for the first time uses the word “genocide” in the book in the following context:

“Is this story of the apple our fault? No. We do not have a greater fault than those of the ancestors of the Turkish youth and those responsible for the genocide of mine. Then why are we accepting this? Instead of accusing those having to take the responsibility for this, why are we still and always keeping quiet?”¹¹

In the “A Gateway as Large as Hope” section, Aznavour continues to convey his views concerning the quoted passage given above; in other words, the genocide allegations. Starting from his birth which he classifies as the “gateway”, Aznavour explains why he was born in Paris, who his ancestors are and how they came to these days, how his parents met, his loyalty to France, the visits his ancestors have conducted (or not conducted) to his country, the difficulties he experienced in France, the origins of his identity and how Turkish-Armenian relations came to a deadlock. The issues mentioned in this section will be explained in detail later on in this article.

In the section entitled “I Needed a Megaphone”, Aznavour, who provides information regarding his current life, also talks about the problems encountered during his artistic life and his own personality. In this section, he questions himself on why he became a famous singer and reaches the

¹¹ Ibid, p. 86.

conclusion that he is talented. Moreover, by expressing that he is hard-working and likes his job, he says the following:

“... I never was someone who got my own way, but I am ambitious; I was never assertive, but I am prideful, I am frequently open to others; I always kept my troubles and doubts, the questions I asked to myself private. I do not know who I am, where I came from and unfortunately where I am going. I know the fragility of success and our careers”.¹²

In the section entitled “On the Verge of Power”, Aznavour talks about his ideas regarding politics. Stating that due to the government not allowing him to explain everything he has not been able to clearly respond to the questions asked after being appointed as Ambassador, the singer indicates that right from the moment he took office, he tried adapting to his new status, but that he knows this will take time. The interesting point here is that Aznavour works as Ambassador without having any diploma. He explains this in the following way:

Stating that due to the government not allowing him to explain everything he has not been able to clearly respond to the questions asked after being appointed as Ambassador, the singer indicates that right from the moment he took office, he tried adapting to his new status, but that he knows this will take time.

“You will ask me “isn’t a diploma required to become an Ambassador?”.

I definitely have a diploma: my education certificate I received without a degree when I was ten and a half years old. But I do not think this is enough.

Then, is this an issue of experience?

That is not it either. I have no experience at all.

Perhaps a diplomatic courtesy?

Not at all.

Then, origin?

There you go. If I was appointed and kindly accepted by my ‘comrades’, there is a single reason for this: I represent the country of my roots in a suitable manner”.¹³

12 Ibid., p. 138.

13 Ibid., p.145.

As can be seen, despite Aznavour, who was later on granted Armenian citizenship, not having any education concerning this issue, the only reason for him being appointed to an important position as Ambassador is for him being a famous singer of Armenian origin and this has also been acknowledged by the singer himself.

In the short section entitled “On the Verge of Nature”, Aznavour underlines his discomfort towards nature being destroyed and provides the explanation that humans’ poisoning the world in order to obtain unearned income is not advisable. The writer, who considers the mentioning of this issue as a task of mankind, states that as he grows older his artistic spirit has started giving way to the spirit of the villager and that this is somehow a transition to nature.

In the final section, Aznavour indicates that “life consists of doors opening towards each other”. Some doors lock individuals in by closing on them, while some are doors of happiness which we realize later on that we hold their keys in our hands. By expressing that he has skipped all thresholds of life, Aznavour ends his book by stating that there is “only a step from the shadows into the light” and that “his entire existence” strives to take this step.

Charles Aznavour’s Problem of Identity:

In this section of our article, we will utilize the works Charles Aznavour wrote based on his life and will address the problem of identity. First of all, let us give an example for this situation seen frequently among the Diaspora Armenians besides Aznavour.

The problem of identity reflected in the memory-novel *Voyages* of Peter Najarian, the Armenian author living in the US, is conveyed as not being able to belong to neither of the two cultures and being foreign to the culture of origin and the culture they live in. In the preface of the book, the following is stated:

“I grew up in the US, but just as many other children of immigrants, I am also deeply devoted to lands which could never be travelled to again... In the end, whether I like it or not, I grew up as an American and I am still trying to cope with this reality”.¹⁴

It could be seen that on the one hand commitment to their roots, while on

14 Peter Najarian (2004), *Voyages*, Translator: Ece Erođlu, Aras Yayıncılık, İstanbul, p. 16.

the other, the necessity in conforming to the community lived within creates some kind of an identity crisis for the Diaspora Armenians. In Aznavour, this crisis does not emerge as becoming foreign, but as adapting to both cultures.

If considering the origins of Charles Aznavour, his father from among the Georgian Armenians is Misha Aznavourian.¹⁵ Aznavour's family which he actually indicated was of Erzurum origin, has migrated from there in 1825. On the other hand, his mother has been born into an Armenian family in Adapazarı.

Therefore, Charles Aznavour has no link to Armenia except for being Armenian. As a matter of fact, he states the following when describing what he experienced when he first went to Armenia to perform a concert:

“They said ‘welcome’ in Armenian and said the following: ‘Welcome to your home, we are pleased to see you have returned’. Return? What return? I had never set foot here. In fact, my parents were born in other countries and had never set foot here”.¹⁶

As mentioned above, although Charles Aznavour's point of origin is the same, he has a different crisis than the identity crisis of the Diaspora Armenians. He thinks about where his roots come from. The singer, who complains that he has no past, eventually embraces a culture which he accepts as not belonging to him.

“My roots are buried within the very depths of territory which I cannot remember. Really, where is that territory? Is it at the dry lands at the end of Turkey where my relatives have turned into dust and mixed in with the Asian wind? Is it in Georgia, my father's homeland? Is it in Armenia where we came from? I am a migrant, an immigrant, the son of a landless. I am someone who has embraced another country, another culture, another language without finding a real past”.¹⁷

Aznavour, who has indicated that he embraces another country – France, has responded to the question “do you feel as if you are French or

15 As a word passing from Georgian to Turkish, in dictionaries of the Turkish Language Society, Aznavur means “husky, offensive, angry, sulky, tough”. Moreover, “like aznavur” means “acting cruelly”. (http://www.tdk.gov.tr/index.php?option=com_gts&arama=gts&guid=TDK.GTS.4f2316b5e65f32.55537234 – Retrieved date: 27.01.2012)

16 Charles Aznavour (2005), *Geçmiş Zaman Olur Ki (The Past Tense Becomes)*, Translator: Emre Aral Altuntaş, Aras Yayınları, p. 218-219.

17 Ibid., p. 218-219.

Armenian?” by saying “A hundred percent French, a hundred percent Armenian”. However, he also adds that he does not have much knowledge about the Armenians in France:

“They were asking me ‘where are you from?’

- I am from France. I was born in Paris.
- Alright, then this name, Aznavourian, where that does that come from?
- From Armenia. I am of Armenian origin.
- Armenian, Armenian, where is this Armenia?
- In the Caucasus.
- Alright, which language do you speak?
- Armenian.
- Is it similar to Russian?
- No, to Armenian.
- Is it like Aramice?
- No, like Armenian.
- Ah.
- It is not like any other language”.¹⁸

The singer states that when people talked about him when he first started his profession, they called him “little Armenian” in the pejorative sense, but that currently he is regarded as the representative of France in areas outside of France. Aznavour, taking pride in being a child of an immigrant family, indicates that the French see Armenia “like Aznavour”, while the foreigners identify France with the name Aznavour. By expressing that his ancestors have looked towards his country after the earthquake of 1988 in Armenia, Aznavour compares himself to “coffee with milk”:

18 Charles Aznavour, *D'Une Porte L'Autre*, p.104.

“Do I feel more Armenian than French? There is only a single response I could provide for this: A hundred percent French and a hundred percent Armenian. I am like coffee with milk; once the two substances are mixed, they cannot part from each other anymore. French and Armenian influence made me gain a lot of things and formed a style unique just for me. While others bothered with learning, there were already two cultures present in my genes. Therefore, despite the countless troubles and difficulties I experienced, this composite structure I possess ever since I was born became an opportunity for me”.¹⁹

As a result of all these quotations, it could be thought that Aznavour experiences a crisis of identity just like all other Diaspora Armenians, but that he differs from the others by embracing both cultures (at least through his statements) as a result of this crisis.

Charles Aznavour's Views in the Context of Turkish-Armenian Relations and His Approach towards the Turks

In this section of the article, Charles Aznavour's views regarding Turkish-Armenian relations and his thoughts on the Turks which he shared in his book entitled *From One Door to the Next and The Past Tense Becomes* will be addressed.

In order to understand Aznavour's views regarding the Turks, it is necessary to look at the first sections of his *Le Temps des Avants* book. This section entitled “A Bad Beginning” clearly puts forth Aznavour's stance towards the Turks.

“Deir ez-Zor: About one and a half million of those close to me, my relatives stripped, raped and slaughtered in the name of race and religion, the graves my ancestors lie in; I ask you, on what behalf did all these really take place? On behalf of Enver's and Talat's whose statues were put up in their memory; on behalf of pashas of crime who interpreted the Quran at their own pleasure which was impossible to justify these bloody acts and murderers not knowing what religion is and not recognizing any kind of law.

The ultimate solution? You missed, you couldn't capture me. Although some might not like the idea, I always remained a person committed to memories. But I never became a ruthless enemy of

19 Charles Aznavour, *Geçmiş Zaman Olur Ki (The Past Tense Becomes)*, p. 224.

Turkish society. Today I have a dream of visiting the country my mother was born in, but...but...but”.²⁰

Aznavour instilling hostility by making comments with shallow knowledge exceeds the borders of racism. In the first section of the book, if he had included in the list of books, which he argued contributed to his own development, the names of those he listed with revulsion in the quoted paragraph just given above, he would have been more conscious when forming his sentences”.²¹ Here, through a racist attitude, the singer infuses Turkish hostility into the young Armenians by stripping the decision of relocation from historical facts and by making statements that could be shown as an example for contributing to the Armenian approach which

Aznavour instilling hostility by making comments with shallow knowledge exceeds the borders of racism.

recognizes the decision as one only taken to annihilate the Armenians for no apparent reason and for it being passed on by the second generation that have not been subjected to relocation.

At this point, it is necessary to indicate that Aznavour’s image of Deir ez-Zor is inaccurate. Deir ez-Zor is a province of the Ottoman Empire. This province was a place of settlement before the Relocation and is known that there are Armenians who have settled there after the Relocation. Concerning this area for which a negative image of it has been formed all over the world as prejudice, it would be necessary to address at this point Prof. Dr. Birsen Karaca’s article entitled “A Serious Ground for Armenian Allegations: Prejudices”:

“...Turkey never questioned the image of Deir ez-Zor existing in its mind. However, not only the image of Deir ez-Zor among the Armenians and the West, but also within the memory of Turkish public opinion has been created by the builders of the so-called

20 Ibid., p. 11.

21 The books that should be read on this issue is the following:

-Şevket Süreyya Aydemir (1999), *Enver Paşa Volume 3 1914-1922 Makedonya’dan Orta Asya’ya (From Macedonia to Middle Asia)*, Remzi Kitabevi, İstanbul.

-Ari İnan (Yay. Haz.) (1997), *Enver Paşa’nın Özel Mektupları (Enver Pasha’s Private Letters)*, İmge Yayınları, Ankara.

-*Enver Paşa’nın Anıları (1881-1908) (Enver Pasha’s Memories, 1881-1908)*, İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul, 2012.

-Talat Paşa (2006), *Hatıralarım ve Müdafaaım (My Memories and Defense)*, Kaynak Yayınları, İstanbul.

-Cemal Paşa (2009), *Anılarım 1913-1922 (My Memories, 1913-1922)*, Haz. Fahri Parin, İskenderiye Yayınları, İstanbul.

genocide and the continuity of this image is maintained through the prejudices (or models of judgment) established by the same allegations. Let us concretize our example. The image of Deir ez-Zor, which Turkey has not gone through the trouble of questioning, the image of the homeland of Ahmet, the son of Mehmet from Deir ez-Zor born in 1888 and martyred on 26 August 1922 during the War of Independence (when defending the areas of Kalecik and Kurtkaya which are the only passageway to Kocatepe where the Supreme Headquarters is located)²² is torn down. I wonder how Ahmet, the son of Mehmet described Deir ez-Zor to his friends? Didn't Ahmet, the son of Mehmet, have any family, children, relatives or neighbors living in Deir ez-Zor? Following the war, didn't Ahmet, the son of Mehmet, ever imagine returning to his homeland after rescuing the country? This example is a concrete indication of lazy thinking created by prejudices which we try to show. The comparative analysis of the image of Deir ez-Zor as a "place of genocide" created through the Armenian allegations and the image of Deir ez-Zor of Ahmet, the son of Mehmet, and all other Ahmet's coming to Anatolia to defend their homeland is qualified for being the subject of independent studies and awaits the attention of researchers".²³

Aznavour's thoughts on dreaming of travelling to Turkey are completed in his book published in 2011. The reason for him not going to Turkey is because being Armenian is not welcomed there. However, the statements Archbishop Aram Ateshyan, deputy Armenian Patriarch of Turkey, provided to Aksiyon Journal allows us to make an evaluation of the living conditions of Armenians living in Turkey:

"Presumably, there are approximately 70 thousand Armenians present in Turkey. Our community has 45 churches. 38 of them are in Istanbul, one is in Kayseri (and it is over a thousand years old), 3 of them are in and around Iskenderun... Moreover, we have 16 schools in Istanbul. We have a weekly (Agos) and two-day newspaper (Jamanag and Marmara). We have a very big hospital; the Yedikule Surp Pirgiç Armenian Hospital. The Armenians have built a church and a school next to it in all places they have settled. This tradition is an expression of giving equal value to spirituality and education".

22 The grave of Ahmet, the son of Mehmet from Deir ez-Zor is in Afyonkarahisar . For information on the cemetery and martyred officers and soldiers on 26 August 1922 in Kalecik and Kurtkaya see: <http://www.afyonkarahisar.gov.tr/sehitliklerimiz.aspx> (23.02.2011) and <http://www.kulturturizm.gov.tr/TR/belge/1-19095/afyon-yuzbasi-agah-efendi-sehitligi.html> (23.02.2011)

23 Birsen Karaca (2010-2011), "A Serious Ground for Armenian Allegations: Prejudices", *Ermeni Arařtırmaları*, 10th Year Special Edition, No: 37-38, Ankara, p. 71-82.

In response to the question of “do Turkish Armenians have problems in terms of family?” posed to him, Ateshyan says the following:

“They are all free. They have no such problems as Christian citizens. Schools, foundations and churches are open and active. We have no problem at this point”.

As can be seen, the information conveyed by Aznavour in regards to being Armenian in Turkey is incorrect. Another data which proves this is the visit to Turkey conducted by the well known author of Armenian origin William Saroyan who lived in the US. The information regarding this visit has been gathered in the book published by Aras publications and entitled *Amerika'dan Bitlis'e William Saroyan (William Saroyan from America to Bitlis)*. In the preface prepared for Fikret Otyam's article published in 31 May-7 June 1964 in Cumhuriyet Newspaper, Saroyan states the following concerning his visit conducted in 1964:

“(Otyam) made my visit conducted to Turkey once of the greatest experiences of my life. Today, I believe that I learned the modesty, hospitality and dignity of the Turkish nation as a result of Fikret's leadership”.²⁴

As mentioned in the previous section, the father of Charles Aznavour, who was among the Georgian Armenians, could not be included within the scope of the Relocation decision. The singer especially underlines that the source for his contempt is not his parents and that his parents had not told him bad stories about the Turks:

“I never witnessed my father belittling and discrediting modern Turkey; they never infused a hatred against the Turkish nation. On the exact opposite, I always heard them saying that Turkey is a beautiful country, the women are attractive, its cuisine is the best of Middle Asia and that at the basis there are many similarities between that community and ours”.²⁵

But then right after, he contradicts himself:

“My mother and father, who were displaced despite my father having a Georgian passport, are able to board an Italian ship from Istanbul. While my mother has already stepped on to the deck, an officious

24 *Amerika'dan Bitlis'e William Saroyan (William Saroyan from America to Bitlis)*, Editor: Aziz Gökdemir (2008), Aras Yayıncılık, İstanbul, p. 17.

25 Charles Aznavour, *Ibid.*, p. 15.

soldier intercepts my father, disregarding his passport, after overhearing them speak in that loathed language. The captain runs to my father's rescue and rants and raves about the ship being an international place and that the boarding of a passenger could never be prevented. A wealthy American woman of Armenian origin has offered to pay the fare for all fugitives succeeding in boarding the ship. The ship sets out to sea, carries the Armenians and Greeks to Salonika and my sister is born there".²⁶

There are many inconsistencies in general in what Aznavour explains and his statements. Let us elaborate this text a little: In his books of *The Past Tense Becomes* and *From One Door to the Next*, he indicates that his family has not told him where and how his parents have met,²⁷ but is able to explain in detail how his parents escaped from Istanbul. Concerning his statement given in quotations, Aznavour family possessing a Georgian passport running away from the relocation has no meaning, because the Georgian Armenians are kept outside the Relocation Decision; in fact, Charles Aznavour expresses this in another section of his book.²⁸ In any case, since Georgia is in the hands of Russia during that period, it is not possible for the Ottoman Empire to interfere in Georgian Armenians. It is also strange for the Aznavourian's, said to have boarded the ship by running away, to talk in Armenian next to Ottoman soldiers at a time when it was alleged that the Armenians were being tortured. While there was a captain who ran to their rescue and allowed them to board the ship – and this means that the captain turned a blind eye to stowaways – a rich American woman of Armenian origin paying their fares is another aspect which is meaningless.

Aznavour family possessing a Georgian passport running away from the relocation has no meaning, because the Georgian Armenians are kept outside the Relocation Decision; in fact, Charles Aznavour expresses this in another section of his book.

If we dwell further into this subject, it will become evident that when writing this paragraph full of inconsistencies, Aznavour created his own history with unfounded information and without knowing the historical facts. It is apparent that Aznavour, who questions in another section of his book why his father, from among the Georgian Armenians, has come to

²⁶ Ibid, p. 16.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 15.

²⁸ "My father was of Armenian origin, Georgian Misha Aznavourian of Armenian origin was born in Ahiska. The Georgian Armenians had not been massacred". Ibid., p. 14.

Istanbul, has not conducted much research on the subject. In order to explain these ideas of ours, it will be appropriate to compare the information provided by the singer on his life and historical information.

Aznavour's date of birth is given in his autobiographies and many other biographies as 22 May 1924. Now let us go backwards from this date with the data we have. Charles Aznavour indicates that there is 16 months between his sister Aïda and him and that his sister was born in Salonika when escaping from Istanbul. In this situation, Aïda must have been born at the end of 1922 and therefore, the escape which the Aznavourian's talk about must have taken place in 1921-1922.

If we look at the events developing around the world in 1921, the table that emerges will be as follows: The Russian Civil War starting after the Bolshevik Revolution of Russia in 1917, had intensified with Lenin dispelling the Russian National Assembly. The communist forces known as the "Red Army" fought against the anti-communist forces of the "White Army" during this civil war and it was the "Red Army" that won a victory. Therefore, following the end of this civil war in 1922, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was created.

However, this civil war, which we could only explain in a few sentences here, had actually witnessed many bloody events. The research conducted in Turkey on this issue is limited. The consequences of this civil war have been very severe²⁹ and in order to escape death, many people have escaped towards Istanbul through Crimea and Georgia by boarding ships from the areas they had settled in. One of the prominent figures planning on escaping during this period of turmoil is Mihail Afanasyevich Bulgakov (1891-1940) of 20th century Russian classics. However, since Bulgakov catches typhoid fever, he cannot board the ship and go to Batum. Bulgakov has explained the story of this escape, taking place in masses, in his book entitled *The Escape*.³⁰ During this period, apart from Bulgakov's two brothers and his second wife, many Russians, including writers, high-status bureaucrats and Russian officers have escaped to different countries through Istanbul. Some of them have written their memories of Istanbul.³¹ For instance, Ivan Bunin,

29 For detailed information on the consequences of this civil war see: Nicolas Werth (April 2008), "Crimes et violences de masse des guerres civiles russes (1918-1921)", <http://www.massviolence.org/IMG/pdf/Crimes-et-violences-de-masse-des-guerres-civiles-russes-1918-1921.pdf> (Date of retrieval: 28.12.2012)

30 For detailed information on this issue see: Birsen Karaca, "Döner Kavşakta Bir Rus Klasiđi, Mihail Afanasyeviç Bulgakov (A Russian Classic Mihail Afanasyevich Bulgakov)", World Story Days, unpublished conference text, 12.02.2012.

31 Orhan Uravelli (2005), *İstanbul'dan Geçen Ruslar (Russian Passing Through İstanbul)*, Ümit Yayıncılık, Ankara.

owner of the Nobel Prize in Literature (1933) is just one of them.³² In short, Istanbul was no other place than a stopover for Russian and Georgian citizens when spreading all over the world during that period.

Let us return to Charles Aznavour once again: We had already mentioned above that according to the dates he provides, his father must have gone abroad in 1921-1922 by boarding a ship from Istanbul. It is supported by archival documents that on 4 January 1919, the Ministry of Interior of the Ottoman Government ordered for Armenians wanting to return to be transported to their former places.³³ In this situation, despite being an Ottoman citizen, it is pointless for Aznavour's father to run away from this implementation directed towards the Armenians. Furthermore, Misha Aznavourian, a Georgian Armenian, escaping to Istanbul despite the asserted implementation would be absurd. What is expected in this situation is for her to either prefer to stay in her country or to escape to Istanbul, or rather to territories outside the Ottoman Empire.

Therefore, it is obvious that the story of the Aznavourians' escape is not connected to the Ottoman Government's decision of Relocation or the events of torture, as alleged by the Armenians. If there is such an escape, this could only be an escape from the bloody events experienced during the Russian Civil War. Moreover, escaping through Istanbul shows that the most secure escape route in that period was Istanbul. Charles Aznavour's lack of knowledge becomes apparent here also. If the singer had some historical knowledge, or at least had included the works of Bulgakov and the memories of Bunin and other Russian authors and officers in the list of books he provided which we mentioned above, he would have had a good idea on the history of his family and the story of their escape.

Aznavour complains that the issue of Relocation, which is the primary subject in the context of Turkish-Armenian relations, and the genocide allegations, have become a taboo within the international arena. He links the reason for this issue not being discussed to the interests associated with the issue of "petroleum":

"I am troubled more each day for seeing that the recognition of the massacre of the masses is still a difficult step to overcome for the international community, especially if the executioner also smells of petroleum. To speak up is either facing the risk of losing money or gaining money according to the words expressed. Therefore, Ankara is being bowed in front of, as if nothing has happened and the smell

32 Ibid. p.109-161.

33 "Yerleri Değiştirilen Ermenilerin Geri Getirilmesi"

http://www.ermenisorumu.gen.tr/turkce/tehcir/geri_getirilmesi.html (Date of Retrieval: 28.01.2012)

of the victims' blood and flesh has been lost far away. Isn't the word 'genocide' a disturbing word? But let us not forget that for the Armenians, it withholds a tragedy and a task of memory. For our ancestors who have no graves, it is our duty for their murders to be recognized".³⁴

Based on this paragraph and especially the interests arising from "petroleum", which shows that the French singer lacks adequate information on Turkey, stating that discussing the Armenian allegations is being refrained from is interesting, because it would not be expected for anyone to have such an interest in Turkey³⁵ which imports 90% of petroleum to fulfill its needs.

Furthermore, in this paragraph and also in many other sections in the book concerning the issue, Aznavour calls on everyone to recognize the Armenian genocide allegations. It could be clearly understood from his statements that he has undertaken the mission of declaring this issue all over the world:

"We, who have been ignored and mocked for ten years, will definitely stay alive. Maybe we will forgive, but we will never forget. Even more, we will all mobilize so that the world remembers and all those rejecting to see it opens their eyes".³⁶

Aznavour, who states that all he thinks of is Armenia's future, also wants Turkey to open the Armenian border gate which remains closed. For his, he emphasizes eliminating disagreements and the necessity not to make inaccurate statements:

"Disagreements will be of no use but to delay the process of recognition and negotiation again and for a long time. This delay will also prevent the opening of the borders, elimination of the embargo and the opportunity for Armenians to conduct trade with their neighbors.

I know I disturb you by talking this way... but this is not important at all: my only thought is Armenia's future, the prosperity of its citizens and the young Turkish generation to escape the burden which the government's sneakiness makes them carry".³⁷

34 Charles Aznavour, *D'Une Porte l'Autre*, p. 114.

35 H. Naci Bayraç, "Türkiye'de Petrol Sektörünün Yapısal Analizi (A Structural Analysis of the Petroleum Sector in Turkey)", <http://www.turksam.org/tr/a1343.html>. (Date of Retrieval: 25.01.2012)

36 Charles Aznavour, *Ibid.*, p. 114.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 116.

Without associating the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border to Armenia withdrawing from the Azeri territories which it has occupied, Aznavour links it to the elimination of disagreements (or Turkey recognizing the Armenian genocide allegations). It could be seen that just as with the 1915 events, Turkey is also held responsible for the border being closed. However, as known, the main reason for the border being closed is Armenia's occupation of Azeri territories which are very close to the Turkish border.

“Turkey, which has been one of the first countries to recognize the independence of Armenia after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, closed its borders with Armenia in 1993. The reason for closing the Alican border gate between Turkey and Armenia, which remained open even during the Soviet period, was the occupation of the Kalbajar Rayon of Azerbaijan by Armenia. Actually, Turkey had warned Armenia over and over again against the attacks it started since 1988 and closed the border when Armenia did not take the warnings seriously”.³⁸

Without associating the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border to Armenia withdrawing from the Azeri territories which it has occupied, Aznavour links it to the elimination of disagreements (or Turkey recognizing the Armenian genocide allegations).

Based on all these information, Charles Aznavour attempts to make propaganda for the Armenian allegations without actually possessing much knowledge on Turkey and by using his identity as an artist. In conclusion, it is certain that creating tensions between countries is against the nature of art and considering his position as Ambassador, Aznavour must refrain from these kinds of actions.

Conclusion

Within the scope of our article, Charles Aznavour's books of *D'Une Porte l'Autre (From One Door to the Next)* and *Le Temps des Avant (The Past Tense Becomes)* have been examined from the aspect of his identity and Turkish-Armenian relations.

Concerning the singer's ethnic identity, it has been identified that different

38 Cavid Veliyev, “Türkiye Ermenistan Sınırlarının Anlamı (The Meaning of Turkey-Armenia Borders)”, <http://www.turksam.org/tr/yazdir1641.html> (Date of Retrieval: 25.01.2012)

from the other Diaspora Armenians who feel foreign and as if they cannot belong to any place, Aznavour has chosen to embrace both countries, but he uses his language better than his mother tongue, he has adopted better to France whose culture he nourishes on and he has started being concerned with Armenia following the earthquake in 1988.

Aznavour conducting works of propaganda for the recognition of the “genocide”, an issue which he dwells upon in the two books addressed in the article, is also among the information we have gained. It has also been identified that it is more rational for Aznavour’s family to escape to France through Turkey during the Russian Civil War and not during the Relocation. Furthermore, apart from lacking historical knowledge, we have also discovered that Aznavour lacks adequate information on the Turks and Turkey except for the fact that the Armenian allegations are not recognized and the Turkey-Armenia border remains closed.

The article has drawn the conclusion that through hearsay information and expressing that he wants Turkish-Armenian relations to improve, Charles Aznavour is among the figures using their identity as an artist for the recognition of the genocide allegations.

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