

ARSHILE GORKY'S LIFE IN USA. THE HARD WAY OF SEARCH OF IDENTITY

LYUDMILA HARUTYUNYAN, HRIPSIME DAYAN *

Abstract

The life and formation of the great Armenian artist Arshile Gorky in the USA and the search for his own identity is examined in the traditions of the sociological theory of symbolic interactionism, based on the analysis of the rich documentary material left by the artist himself and his contemporaries. The key to understanding the essence of the artist's identity is his statements about himself as a "child of Ararat", an artist who carries in himself the values of the images and colors of the lost homeland (Van, Khorgom). An analysis of the history of the search for identity shows that despite the socio-cultural problems caused by racist policies and the reality of early 20th century American society, Arshile Gorky remained faithful to his purpose and mission: in his paintings he was able to preserve the image of the lost homeland. He used his brush to recreate the image of Western Armenia. He did not change his national identity, and remaining faithful to the inherited principles nurtured himself "mighty as a giant, but tender at heart, like a child". With his art, Arshile Gorky was able to achieve the freedom he strived for.

Keywords: *symbolic interactionism, national identity, images, values, behavioral model, Vostanik Adoyan, Arshile Gorky, Ararat, Van, Khorgom, USA, racism*

Introduction

A sociological approach to self and identity begins with the assumption that there is a reciprocal relationship between the self and society¹. The Self influences society through the actions of individuals thereby creating groups, organizations, networks, and institutions. And, reciprocally, society influences the Self through its shared language and meanings that enable a person to take the role of the other, engage in social interaction, and reflect upon oneself as an object. The latter process of reflexivity constitutes the core of selfhood². Because the Self emerges in and is reflective of society,

Lyudmila Harutyunyan is a Doctor of Sociology, Honorary Head of Chair | Faculty of Sociology - Chair of Applied Sociology, Yerevan State University

Email: lyudmilaharutyunyan@ysu.am

*Hripsime Dayan is a Researcher at Yerevan State University

Email: hp.dayan@yandex.ru

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¹ Stryker, S. (1980) *Symbolic interactionism: A social structural version*. Menlo Park: Benjamin Cummings.

² McCall, G. J., & Simmons, J. L. (1978). *Identities and interactions*. New York: Free Press.

the sociological approach to understanding the self and its parts (identities) means that we must also understand the society in which the Self is acting, and keep in mind that the self is always acting in a social context in which other selves exist³.

According to Peter Burke, "Identities tell us who we are and they announce to others who we are"⁴. The self-concept is the set of meanings we hold for ourselves when we look at ourselves. It is based on our observations of ourselves, our inferences about who we are, based on how others act toward us, our wishes and desires, and our evaluations' of ourselves. The self-concept includes not only our idealized views of who we are that are relatively unchanging, but also our self-image or working copy of our self-views that we import into situations and that is subject to constant change and revision based on situational influences⁵. Because the self emerges in social interaction within the context of a complex, organized, differentiated society, it has been argued that the self must be complex, organized and differentiated as well, reflecting the dictum that the "self reflects society"⁶. There are multiple views of identity within sociology. Some have a cultural or collective view of identity in which the concept represents the ideas, belief, and practices of a group or collective. This view of identity is often seen in work on ethnic identity, although identity is often not defined, thus obscuring what is gained by using the concept. Another view, growing out of the work of Tajfel⁷ and others on social identity theory, sees identity as embedded in a social group or category. This view often collapses the group/category distinction and misses the importance of within group behavior such as role relationships among group members. A third view of identities grows out of the symbolic interactionist tradition, especially its structural variant⁸.

Arshile Gorky's life story mirrored in the multiple identities

This idea of multiple identities highlights the fact that individuals are always acting in the context of a complex social structure out of which these multiple identities emerge. Having multiple role identities may be good for the self. Indeed, self-complexity theory shows that more complex selves are better buffered from situational stresses⁹. Consistent with this¹⁰, has shown that having multiple role identities is more beneficial than harmful to individuals because it gives their lives meaning and provides guides to behavior.

³ Stryker, S. (1980) Symbolic interactionism: A social structural version. Menlo Park: Benjamin Cummings.

⁴ Burke, P. (2020), Kivisto, P. (ed.), "Identity", *The Cambridge Handbook of Social Theory: Volume 2: Contemporary Theories and Issues*, Cambridge University Press, vol. 2, pp. 63-78. Within identity theory, an identity is a set of meanings defining who one is in a role (e.g., father, plumber, student), in a group or social category (e.g., member of a church or voluntary association, an American, a female), or a unique individual (e.g., a highly moral person, an assertive person, an outgoing person)".

⁵ Burke, P. J. (1980). The self: Measurement implications from a symbolic interactionist perspective. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 43, 18-29.

⁶ Stryker, S. (1980). Symbolic interactionism: A social structural version. Menlo Park: Benjamin Cummings.

⁷ Tajfel, H. (1981). *Human groups and social categories: Studies in social psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁸ Stryker, S. (1980) Symbolic interactionism: A social structural version. Menlo Park: Benjamin Cummings.

⁹ Linville W., Patricia (1987). Self-complexity as a cognitive buffer against stress-related illness and depression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52, 663-676.

¹⁰ Thoits, P. A. (1986). Multiple identities: Examining gender and marital status differences in distress. *American Sociological Review*, 51, 259-272.

The activation of a social identity rather than a personal identity is the process of depersonalization, shifting the perception of the self from being unique toward the perception of the self as a member of a social category¹¹. The “Me” becomes a “We”¹². The person sees herself as the embodiment of the in-group prototype rather than as a unique individual. Depersonalization does not mean a loss of one’s personal identity but rather a change in focus from the personal to the group basis of an identity. Since social identity theorists see the personal and social identity as mutually exclusive bases of self-definition, one cannot be both at the same time.

The plurality of identities, the “Me” who never becomes a “We” in American society, the failure of depersonalisation can be clearly seen in the example of Gorky. For him, “We” remained his sister and Armenian relatives, Khorgom, a family of exiles, but above all his mother.

“We are but a slice of our homeland's soul, tossed afar from it by foul storms”¹³. This is how Arshile Gorky describes Armenians who survived the Armenian Genocide. One of them were 17-year-old Vostanik Adoyan, who died in the United States in February 1920, and his sister, Vardush, who had taken refuge in Watertown, Massachusetts. Vostanik Adoyan comments on that twist of his life like appearing” from Paradise to the United States”¹⁴.

The images of both a paradise-like birthplace and emigration were imprinted in Vostanik's memory. In the letter addressed to his sister, Vostanik writes: “As Armenians of Van you know well how we were forced to experience with greater intensity and in shorter time what others can only read about while sitting in the comfort. We lived and experienced it. The blood of our people at the hands of the Turks, the massacres and genocide. The blood of our people at the hands of the Turks, the massacres and genocide. Our death march, our relatives and dearest friend dying in battle before our eyes. The loss of our homes, the destruction of our country by the Turks. Mother's starvation in my armes. (...) My heart sinks now in even discussing it”¹⁵.

According to the official biography, Vostanik Adoyan was born on April 15, 1904 in the village of Khorgom, Van province. He received his primary education in the Armenian schools of Khorgom and Van. After the Adana massacre in September 1910, he and his sisters, Satenik, Vardush, moved from his native village of Khorgom to Van, where he continued his studies and spent his summer holidays in Shatakh.

¹¹ Hogg, M. A., Terry, D. J., & White, K. M. (1995). A tale of two theories: A critical comparison of identity theory with social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 58, 255-269.

¹² Thoits, P. A., & Virshup, L. K. (1997). Me's and we's: Forms and functions of social identities. In R. D. Ashmore & L. J. Jussim (Eds.), *Self and identity: Fundamental issues* (pp. 106-133). New York: Oxford University Press.

¹³ Gorky Adoian, A. (2005), *Letters*. Edited by Seyranouhi Geghamyan. Graber, Yerevan, p. 10.

¹⁴ He means the Armenian Highland and his birthplace Khorgom village (author). Vostanik's childhood friend Enovk Ter Hakobyan's memoirs about the artist's first years in Watertown. Gorky, A. (2018), *The plow and the song. A life in letters and documents. Early years in New York*, Yenovk Der Hagopian: Gorky in Watertown, October 5, 1965. Edited by Matthew Spender, Hauser and Wirth Publishers, Zurich, p. 30.

¹⁵ Gorky Adoian, A. (2005), *Letters*. November 29, 1940. Edited by Seyranouhi Geghamyan. Graber, Yerevan, p. 63

Khorgom bouquet

In the letter written by his sister, Gorky remembers: "I am at work on a picture deriving from an extremely intense recollection of our home on Lake Van. At times I can smell its salt. The dimensionality of our three houses coalesce with red orchids and blue gardens. The rectangular walls with butter churns and clay baking tools and Armenian rugs pasted on them stretch and twist in seeking contact with wheat fields and cloth trees and Armenian cranes and garden stones, all floating within one another and swept up by the universe's ceaseless momentum"¹⁶. Armenian miniature works were another source of inspiration for the artist. There he saw the prototypes of surrealism: birds with human faces, bird-like crowns, women, strange figures, a man with a club and other figures associated with the Armenian mythology of the Van region, reminiscent of a paradise. "The gods before God. The mind before the gods. Before the before. All gently wrapped in the Armenian bouquet of Khorkom, the entire world in miniature and in cosmic greatness, blood- spurting tragedy and sorrow and joy and creativity, life and lifeless, the having- lived and the never- having lived, the yet- to- live and the never- yet- to- live, full of motion and motionless, all contained within the warm earth and protective mountains of sun- drenched Van, watched with the newly- opened child's eye of your brother"¹⁷.

Maternal inheritance

Vostanik's mother, Shushan, was "the most appreciative of aesthetics, the most insightful master of poetry" that Vostanik had ever met in his life. His life philosophy was based on three principles. Makrutyun (purity), danjank (agony), hasnutuyun (maturity). This powerful trinity of principles shaped Gorky's values and philosophy. I believe that I'm a product of three ideas. The juice of the artist must be brought to the pain of boiling, tension and confusion. Danjank is painful but required. The action of danjank upon makrutyun will produce hasnutyun"¹⁸. In April-June 1915, deportations began in Van, and in August of the same year, Vostanik and his sisters reached Etchmiadzin on foot. He studies in Yerevan and at the same time works in a printing house with a carpenter. Next year, the sisters Satenik and Agapi will leave for the USA. Then, in 1918, his mother died. Fourteen-year-old Vostanik is an orphan. Gorky depicts the pain of loss in the painting "The Painter and His Mother"¹⁹.

¹⁶ Gorky Adoian A. (2005), Letters. February 25, 1941, New York City. Edited by Seyranouhi Geghamyan, Graber, Yerevan, p. 67.

¹⁷ Ibid. February 25, 1941, New York City. Edited by Seyranouhi Geghamyan. Graber, Yerevan, p. 66.

¹⁸ Ibid. October 11, 1946, Edited by Seyranouhi Geghamyan. Graber, Yerevan, p. 141.

¹⁹ Peter Balakian drains the poetry and subtlety out of Gorky's paintings by subjecting them to literal interpretation. In his iconographic reading of the nondepiction of the matriarch's hands in both versions of *The Artist and His Mother*, Balakian insists that the "cut- off let us know that mother and child will never touch again" and continues by recounting the dismemberment in Turkish torture that he believed Gorky may have witnessed. "Both portraits transfigure this photograph and, it seems clear to me, disclose a single psychological process: the experience of a survivor confronting the nightmare of his past". Theriault, Kim S. (2009), *Rethinking Arshile Gorky*, Chapter 2, Construction of gender, self, and other. Penn State Press, p. 44.

Emigration to the USA

In February 1920, Vostanik moved with his sister Vardush to Uncle Aaron, then to Constantinople, and from there to the United States, where his father, uncles, sisters Satenik and Agapi had already settled.

Gorky needed to be recognized in American society. In this society the creator is looked upon strangely, is cast out as abnormal. "No one work of art have I observed in America which does not testify for superfluous trivia. This people cannot feel with naturalness because it has denied itself poetic momentum. This people cannot understand sensitivity's board range of feeling since its culture has never experienced such from the very soul. Feeling therein becomes a recreation, a hobby that is dabbled in by the board. It is not even dabbled in like stock markets since the wealthy enter into commerce with vastly more sobriety than into poetic feeling"²⁰.

This article examines Gorky's life and identity issues in the context of one of the sociological theories - symbolic interactionism. To understand how he perceived himself and how others perceived him, we turn to the content and principles of symbolic interactionism. This theory assumes that people respond to elements of their environment according to the subjective meanings they attach to those elements, such as meanings being created and modified through social interaction involving symbolic communication with other people. People in society understand their social worlds through communication - the exchange of meaning through language and symbols.

The first person to write about the principles underlying symbolic interactionism was George Herbert Mead (1863-1931), an American philosopher, sociologist, and psychologist, argued that people develop their self-image through interactions with other people. He states that a person has a "constant need" to realize who he is. This process is characterized by Mead as the "I" and the "Me". The "Me" is the social self and the "I" is the response to the "Me." In other words, the "I" is the response of an individual to the attitudes of others, while the "me" is the organized set of attitudes of others which an individual assumes²¹.

Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929) used the term looking-glass self to convey the idea that a person's knowledge of their self-concept is largely determined by the reaction of others around them. Other people thus act as a "looking-glass" (mirror) so that we can judge ourselves by looking "in" it. An individual can respond to others' opinions about himself, and internalize the opinions and feelings that others have about him.

Believing that individuals create social reality through collective and individual action²², Herbert George Blumer (1900-1987) was an avid interpreter and proponent of George Herbert Mead's social psychology, which he labelled symbolic interactionism²³.

²⁰ Ibid. January 6, 1947. Edited by Seyranouhi Geghamyan. Graber, Yerevan, p. 137.

²¹ Geniusas, S. (2006), *Is the Self of Social Behaviorism Capable of Auto Affection? Mead and Marion on the "I" and the "Me"*, The Chinese University of Honk Kong, p. 263.

²² Morrione, T. (Spring 1988). "Herbert G. Blumer (1900-1987): A Legacy of Concepts, Criticisms, and Contributions". *Symbolic Interaction*. 11, Special Issue on Herbert Blumer's Legacy (1): 1-12. DOI:10.1525/si.1988.11.1.1.

²³ Shibusani, Tamotsu (Spring 1988). "Blumer's Contributions to Twentieth-Century Sociology". *Symbolic Interaction*. 11 (1, Special Issue on Herbert Blumer's Legacy): 23-31. DOI:10.1525/si.1988.11.1.23

According to Blumer, social interaction thus has four main principles:

- Individuals act in reference to the subjective meaning objects have for them. For example, an individual that sees the “object” of family as being relatively unimportant will make decisions that deemphasize the role of family in their lives;

- Interactions happen in a social and cultural context where objects, people, and situations must be defined and characterized according to individuals’ subjective meanings;

- For individuals, meanings originate from interactions with other individuals and with society;

- These meanings that an individual has are created and recreated through a process of interpretation that happens whenever that individual interacts with others²⁴.

In the process of creating his new "I", Gorky presented to the public his works, which he best described: “My art is growth art where forms, planes, shapes, memories of Armenia germinate, breath, expand and contract, multiply and thereby create new paths for exploration. The past, the mind, the present are aesthetically alive and unified and because they cannot rest, are insoluble and inseparable from the future and exist to infinity”²⁵. “My goal is to enable those who have not experienced certain elements of reality to experience them to come as close to realization of reality as possible simply through my work... Our beautiful Armenia which we lost and which I will repossess in my art. In my art there will always be the soul of Armenia”²⁶. Like the legendary Demiurge, as a creator, he intended to build the homeland lost in his paintings: “I shall resurrect Armenia with my brush for all the world”²⁷. In order to achieve his lofty goal, Gorky used all the wealth of oil paints to accurately express the colorful images of the lost paradise homeland and the rich feelings of the artist. A unique style of painting was developed, which was later renamed “terrifically Gorky”²⁸.

“I am a son of Ararat”. The hard way of search of identity

Vostanik Adoyan immigrated to the United States with a traditional Armenian identity, which was deeply damaged. It was not easy for him to find his place in American society, to build his new identity. It is possible to solve this problem Vostanik Adoyan moved from small Watertown in 1924 to the megalopolis, New York. As Joseph Solman²⁹ points

¹³ Nickerson, C. (2021, Oct 12). Symbolic interactionism theory & examples. Simply Psychology. www.simplypsychology.org/symbolic-interaction-theory.html

²⁵ Gorky Adoian A., (2005), Letters. February 14, 1944, New York City. Edited by Seyranouhi Geghamyan. Graber, Yerevan, p. 109.

²⁶ Ibid, November 24, 1940, New York City. Edited by Seyranouhi Geghamyan. Graber, Yerevan, p. 109-115.

²⁷ Ibid, April 22, 1944, New York City. Edited by Seyranouhi Geghamyan. Graber, Yerevan, p. 115.

²⁸ Gorky, A. (2018), The plow and the song. A life in letters and documents. Early Years in New York. January 6, 1949, New York City. Edited by Matthew Spender, Hauser and Wirth Publishers, Zurich, 2018, p. 49.

²⁹ Solman, J., was an American painter, a founder of The Ten, a group of New York City Expressionist painters in the 1930s. Joseph Solman was, with Mark Rothko, the unofficial co-leader of The Ten, a group of expressionists including Louis Schanker, Adolph Gottlieb and Ilya Bolotowsky (ed.).

out "He was a great actor, a great ham actor, and I think he wanted his own identity..."³⁰. The memories of the images of the Genocide, the deep psychological trauma caused by the Genocide, made it difficult to form Gorky's new self. The problem of identity building was compounded by the overt racism of American society. Armenians settled in the United States in the 1900s were considered a national minority, but did not have an officially established status as white Caucasians³¹. Armenians were often identified with the "Mongoloid Turks" and discriminated against: it was forbidden to lend money to Armenians, to rent land and tools. He said that the Armenians in the "Promised Land"³² had not got rid of the stigma of being labeled. Gorky writes about this in his thoughts: "They have killed the Indians and mocked the blacks and all that is left are shiny cartoons and all the sweet ladies and all the sweet gentlemen, after eating art like a stake from a recipe bulging with fat, announce themselves as serious cooks. The country is a recipe culture. Nothing springs from within. Even feeling is acquired through a series of artificial ingredients in a recorded recipe."³³

In order to avoid racial discrimination and labeling in America during those years, Gorky tried not to show his ethnicity, he tried to separate himself from the Armenian community, which was the subject of discrimination³⁴.

But getting rid of labeling was not easy. This is evidenced by the following episode engraved in Gorky's memoirs. One day at the end of church service, the American pastor stood at the door to shake hands with the congregation.

"And you, young man. Where are you from?"

Manoug replied "Armenia".

"Ohhh! So you are one of "the starving Armenians"³⁵?

³⁰ Gorky, A., *The plow and the song. A life in letters and documents. A celebrated personality, Joseph Solman: Gorky and the American Abstract Artists Group.* Edited by Matthew Spender, Hauser and Wirth Publishers, Zurich, 2018, p. 140.

³¹ There were about 77,980 Armenians living in the United States in 1919, an unprecedented number in 1920, and the Immigration Act of 1924, which restricted immigration from Southeast Europe as well as Asia, barred many other Armenians from immigrating to the United States who were now considered white, but apparently not so white, who were now considered white, but apparently not so white. Papazian, D., (2000) "Armenians in America". *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies.* University of Michigan-Dearborn. 52 (3-4): 311-347).

³² In 1909, four Armenian men filed a lawsuit in Boston court against the federal government 's claim that they were "Easterners" and could not enter the United States. A judge in a US district court has ruled that West Asian countries are so mixed up with Europeans that it is impossible to determine whether they are white or "yellow". This decision allowed men to enter the United States, but did not provide a solid basis for investigating future cases. When immigrant Tatos Kartozyan wanted to enter the United States in 1923, the federal government challenged him as white. According to anthropologist Hans Boaz, Kartozyan "proved" his claim and in 1924, Armenians were judged as "whites" (ed.).

³³ Gorky Adoian A., (2005), *Letters.* January 6, 1947. Edited by Seyranouhi Geghamyan. Graber, Yerevan, p. 151.

³⁴ Matossian, N. (1998), *Black angel. A life of Arshile Gorky, Part II, Rehearsing for genius,* Ellis Island, Chatti & Windus, London, 1998, p. 183.

³⁵ In the United States, aid unions have been urging people to donate to Armenians since 1915. Everyone knew that the Armenian embodied the exhortation of American mothers to their children: "Finish your dinner. Remember the hungry Armenians. " Even very thin American teenagers were identified with hungry Armenians. "You are as thin as an Armenian." The first generation of post-genocide immigrants was portrayed in American media headlines as victims. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

Vostanik's rebellious spirit did not tolerate the fact that in the United States he was labeled as a talented painter, not a hungry Armenian. Gorky knew the racist nature³⁶ of the American social mirror, he did not agree with that mirror, he tried to change his mirror image by presenting himself to the public in different ways. The Caucasian-looking artist was inventing different stories about himself. This is evidenced by Gorky's differing autobiographies, which have been presented on various occasions in various US institutions. In his first autobiography, written in 1927 for admission to the Boston Grand Central School of Art, Gorky wrote: "Born in Nizhni Novgorod, Russia. Studied in the School of Nizhni Novgorod: Julien Academy, Paris, under Albert Paul Laurens: and also in New York and Boston. Member of Allied Artists of America. Represented in many exhibitions³⁷". Another biography mentions that he studied for three months in Kandinsky's studio (Paris)³⁸. Next, in response to a proposal to create motifs for the carpet design of the Museum of Modern Art, the artist notes: "I was born in Caucasus, South Russia, October 25, 1904 and after the usual studies I came to America in 1920, at Brown University I studied engineering. In 1925 I came to New York and taught at the Grand Central Art School for seven years. I have been living and working ever since in New York"³⁹.

If Gorky's first two autobiographies were mentioned the homeland, Nizhny Novgorod, the period of study, membership in the American Artists' Union, and studying with Kandinsky, in the third case, he immediately presents himself as a mature, accomplished artist. "He did not think it had much of an effect on him. In both cases, Gorky introduces himself as a Russian. This fact may be due to childhood memories that with the help of the Russians, Armenians, including the Adoyan family, were able to escape by migrating to Eastern Armenia. It is possible that Gorky took into account the fact that Americans have a positive attitude towards Russian artists. As a result, Gorky's new self-portrait was formed, which contemporaries described as "Spirit of Europe in the body of the Caucasian"⁴⁰. Anyway. Gorky's nickname had a deep meaning for Vostanik Adoyan. He himself created the new person who called himself Arshile Gorky. Why Gorky? Vostanik not only liked, but also loved the writer-revolutionary Maxim

³⁶ In the "Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity", Goffman identifies three types of stigma: stigma of character traits, physical stigma, and stigma of group identity. He looks at the variety of strategies that stigmatized individuals use to deal with the rejection of others and the complex images of themselves that they project to others. Physical stigma refers to physical deformities of the body, while stigma of group identity is a stigma that comes from being of a particular race, nation, religion, etc. These stigmas are transmitted through lineages and contaminate all members of a family. Crossman, A., "Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity." ThoughtCo, Aug. 28, 2020, [thoughtco.com/stigma-notes-on-the-management-of-spoiled-identity-3026757](https://www.thoughtco.com/stigma-notes-on-the-management-of-spoiled-identity-3026757).

³⁷ Gorky, A. (2018), *The plow and the song. A life in letters and documents. Arshile Gorky: Resume from a Prospectus of the Grand Central School of Art (ca. 1927)*, edited by Matthew Spender, Hauser and Wirth Publishers, Zurich, p. 40.

³⁸ Matossian, N. (1998), *Black angel. A life of Arshile Gorky, Part II, Rehearsing for genius*, Ellis Island, Chatti & Windus, London, p. 183.

³⁹ Gorky, A. (2018), *The plow and the song. A life in letters and documents. Arshile Gorky: New York. Letter to Dorothy Miller, June 26, 1942*. Edited by Matthew Spender, Hauser and Wirth Publishers, Zurich, p. 254.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Back in Crooked Run Farm. Edited by Matthew Spender, Hauser and Wirth Publishers, Zurich, p. 72.

Gorky⁴¹, but he was trying to identify his past life with the life of Maxim Gorky. From the place of birth, mentioning in the autobiographies not the village of Khorgom but Nizhny Novgorod, where Maxim Gorky was born. Arshile Gorky biographer Nuritza Matossian mentions. "Maxim Gorky also grew up without a father and Vostanik imitates him and writes that his father has died"⁴². Gorky was revolutionary by nature. Gorky's works were revolutionary as well, with their colors, content and infinity. "The stuff of thought is the seed of the artist. Dreams form the bristles of the artist's brush. And as the eye functions as the brain's sentry, I communicate my most private perceptions through art, my view of the world"⁴³. Adoyan changed his name: The name "Arshile" was not chosen by chance. It starts with the prefix "Ar". Armenia, the "Creator" of AR, is the ancient land of worship and civilization. Worship of God's Worship left deep traces on the formation and development of the caring and material values of the emerging Armenians, as well as the ancestors of the Indo-European peoples, the Aryan tribes. Many cultural values, including traces of the worship of the God of AR and AR, bring people back to the land of light, AR and AR of God, Armenia⁴⁴. "AR" referred to Gorky being Armenian and connected him with Mount Ararat.

"I am a son of Ararat"⁴⁵, - writes Arshile Gorky, - "in Ararat's presence, one hears thunder when there is none, feels quaking earth when it does not, sees the eagle soar when it is perched. Not for nothing did olden Armenians call it Castle of the Gods. Ararat is the brain of nature ordaining its movements. We Armenians have fought and suffered more and longer than any people on this earth's face and we have returned with a while face and pranced tall with the dashing mane of the mountain stallion. These are sources of the Armenian tradition"⁴⁶. "Can ocean horizons and vastness of Russia and China approach Ararat's might atop his huge court? Not likely. We Armenians are the big people, our thoughts the big thoughts and nature's very awesomeness in mountain-muscled Armenia has forged this bigness. And so, big Armenia of old conceived in bigness"⁴⁷. Gorky created his new identity, relying on his own talent, presenting himself to the public as an artist⁴⁸, a poet-philosopher, whose art was not an imitation or an invention, but first of all a struggle for existence, self-affirmation, the main impetus for creating and living in such an environment. Navsem is a means to an end. In a letter written by her sister, Arshile Gorky mentions that painting is a torturously tiring job:

⁴¹ Peshkov Maximovich, A. (1868-1936), popularly known as Maxim Gorky, was a Russian writer and political activist. He was nominated five times for the Nobel Prize in Literature. Before his success as an author, he travelled widely across the Russian Empire changing jobs frequently, experiences which would later influence his writing (ed.).

⁴² Matossian, N. (1998), *Black angel. A life of Arshile Gorky, Part II, Rehearsing for genius*, The Watertown years. Chatti & Windus, London, p. 136-137.

⁴³ Gorky Adoian A. (2005), *Letters*. February 9, 1942, Edited by Seyranouhi Geghamyan. Graber, Yerevan, p. 79.

⁴⁴ Teryan, A. (2002), *Armenia: the cradle of creation and civilization*, Preface. Yerevan.

⁴⁵ Gorky Adoian A. (2005), *Letters*. January 26, 1944, New York City. Edited by Seyranouhi Geghamyan. Graber, Yerevan, p. 105.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, January 6, 1939, New York City, 6, 1939, Edited by Seyranouhi Geghamyan. Graber, Yerevan, p. 47.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Matossian, N. (1998) *Black angel. A life of Arshile Gorky, Part I, Father*, Hayrig, Chatti & Windus, London, p. 19

“Painting is an excruciatingly tedious career. Had I only known that I would not have entered it. Yet the agonies and torments in my mind impel me to realize that I must have been born to suffer for art”⁴⁹. It was difficult for American society to understand the depth of Gorky's art, which had its roots in historical Armenia.

“I'm Gorky and to this I owe my debt to pure Armenian art. Its hybrids, its many opposites. The inventions of our folk imagination. These I attempt to capture directly, I mean the folklore and physical beauty of our homeland, in my works”⁵⁰.

According to the memories of one of the contemporaries⁵¹ he was a poet besides being a profound student of art. He has been compared to Debussy but to me his imagination is more powerful. The lyric quality is there, his nature could sing and dance, dream and it could condemn and terrify. If there is such a one as an aristocrat in art, Arshile Gorky was he. To be rudely catapulted into sophisticated Boston and New York with their confining horizons, when one longed for open spaces and the stars, is it not natural that strangeness took possession and pushed itself into his works? Beautiful strangeness with nostalgic feelings, sophisticated thoughts and death⁵².

One of the contemporaries writes that Gorky's problem was particular, but also personal. “Because of his spectacular appearance, he easily became a celebrity. He was better known than his paintings were. He has separated himself from the unknown artists, lost the feeling of belonging with his artistic equals. In this situation he was sought out by admirers who had the prosperous notion that they might become like him. The Gorky who spent weekends with us in the country can better be considered the Lyrical Man, the bronzed swimmer, exuberant with the country air, or sweating in the heat as he swung an axe. In the daytime he fitted in, adjusted to the routines and the work as well as anyone. After dinner he could discuss for hours, omitting all the frills and all the clever knots of ideas. Still later on a clear night, high up on hill by a fire, he sang the songs which proved he was Georgian, the lonely, haunting elements in a high voice- Georgian, Andalusian, Syrian, perhaps Armenian”⁵³. Another one describes Gorky he was almost naive. He was like an artist- it was like folklore, an artist of the people. Because he- well, he was like the image in the portrait of himself with his mother. He was very gentle, very courteous. And he sings these lovely songs. He sang the folk songs he'd learned as a child. He was very serene person. His heel of Achilles was that he was a very religious man, shall we say. Mystical. And he found himself in the confusion of New York. And he was very fragile”⁵⁴. Contrary to the above opinion, artist Saul Schary shares the memories of his meeting with Gorky. “Although Gorky was born in Russia, he is what he likes to call “an early American”. He dislike being called a foreigner and says he is

⁴⁹ Gorky Adoian, A. (2005), Letters., April 19, 1939, New York City. Edited by Seyranouhi Geghamyan. Graber, Yerevan, p. 43.

⁵⁰ Ibid., February 9, 1942, New York City. Edited by Seyranouhi Geghamyan. Graber, Yerevan, p. 79.

⁵¹ Gorky, A. (2018), The plow and the song. A life in letters and documents. Two disasters. Celemn Greenberg: Review of Gorky's Second show. The Nation, vol. CLXII, May 4, 1946, New York City. Edited by Matthew Spender, Hauser and Wirth Publishers, Zurich, p. 383.

⁵² Ibid., After Gorky's Death. Mina Metzger: Remembering Gorky, January 6, 1949, New York City. Edited by Matthew Spender, Hauser and Wirth Publishers, Zurich, p. 521-522.

⁵³ Ibid., A celebrated personality, Edited by Matthew Spender, Hauser and Wirth Publishers, Zurich, p. 135.

⁵⁴ Ibid., New York, Roberti Matta Echaurren: A conversation Regarding Gorky, May 29, 1997, Edited by Matthew Spender, Hauser and Wirth Publishers, Zurich, p. 258.

more like one of the first settlers because he can appreciate the advantages of being American to a far greater extent than those who were born here "by lucky accident"⁵⁵. Commenting on Gorky's second exhibition, art critic Clement Grimberg recalls that Gorky has finally succeeded in discovering himself for what he is- not an artist of epochal stature, no epic poet, but a lyrical, personal painter with an elegant, felicitous, and genuine delivery⁵⁶. Mathematician-physicist-engineer Louise Balamat expresses her opinion about his works in the article "I met Gorky", "To characterize Gorky's feeling for abstract art, it was far away from the mechanical limitations of simple geometrical forms, but rather it seemed to reflect a turbulent spirit moved perhaps by the wilderness of his native mountains. This turbulence however I felt also came from within, as though he were torn by some intense inner conflict which he was ever striving to express"⁵⁷. Greek artist Nicholas Callas, who immigrated to the United States, writes that "to appreciate Gorky's painting one must sense the tragic grandeur of the pursuit. No communication with his world is possible unless one is ready to discard some of the most tenacious prejudices of our time, for what this artist asks for others is to comprehend the fearful limitations of man's emotional and intellectual resources"⁵⁸. The above-mentioned views are the evidences of the multi-perception of "me" created by the great artist. He kept out of the American Abstract Artists group. He thought he was above it, right? And he was, in a way. He was older than us, and he had more experience... He justifiably felt a little above our gang. I think he liked to separate himself as an individual, an individualist, rather than be along with a group⁵⁹. The search for Gorky's identity is of particular interest to the researcher Gorky's wife Agnes's letters to their mutual friends. "They are not able to react emotionally as his paintings demand," Agnes wrote.

Gorky separated himself from his running mates. He didn't want to show them his paintings. He didn't encourage them to come round. ... there was a limit to Gorky's friendship. Nobody in this group took the slightest interest in where he came from, so the most intimate part of Gorky's soul was always kept apart. All he had to talk about were ideas about art, but whenever he heard these discussed later by other people, he'd say impatiently, "They're trying to sell me back my own arguments"⁶⁰.

At the same time, Agnes in her letters attributed the artist's quest to the east-west conflict, referring to the artist's immigration, who can not be proud of his difference - to

⁵⁵ Ibid., The public works of art project: Saul Shary: On meeting Gorky. October 5, 1965. Edited by Matthew Spender, Hauser and Wirth Publishers, Zurich, 2018, p. 75.

⁵⁶ Ibid., Two disasters. Clement Greenberg: Review of Gorky's Second Show. The Nation, vol. CLXII, May 4, 1946. Edited by Matthew Spender, Hauser and Wirth Publishers, Zurich, p. 383.

⁵⁷ Ibid., Lewis Balamat: «I met A. Gorky». Color and Rhyme, April 29, 1949. Edited by Matthew Spender, Hauser and Wirth Publishers, Zurich, p. 134.

⁵⁸ Ibid., Back in Crooked Run Farm, Nico Calas: «Arshile Gorky». From the catalogue of Bloodflamesm a group show with Matta, Wilfredo Lam, Isamu Noguchi, Gerome Kamrowski, Jeanne Reynal, and David Hare at the Hugo Gallery, 26 East Fifty- Fifth Street, New York, in 1947. Edited by Matthew Spender, Hauser and Wirth Publishers, Zurich, p. 408.

⁵⁹ Ibid., A celebrated personality, Joseph Solman: Gorky and the American Abstract Artists Group. Edited by Matthew Spender, Hauser and Wirth Publishers, Zurich, p. 140.

⁶⁰ Ibid., Mogouch Gorky: Regarding de Kooning, Noguchi, and Gorky, June 12, 2005. Edited by Matthew Spender, Hauser and Wirth Publishers, Zurich, p. 347.

be free⁶¹. Gorky, on the other hand, viewed East-West relations primarily as an artist. "In truth, there is no such thing as Western art or Eastern art. These are political and religious terms which under scrutiny become absurd. How can ancient Greece art be Western and Byzantine art be Eastern? We artists must seek authentic roots... There are as I view it, several distinct artist flavors. There is the art of the Kendron, the art of its relative, the Lydian, and the art of North Europe. The latter is not so delicious for me perhaps because my familiarity is with the Kendron. It is ours. Armenia, Byzantium, Greece, Mesopotamia, Persia, Syria and Egypt. Now the Lydian is our child. Italy, France and Spain. As for the North, England as such areas, their art is for lesser interest, and in truth the sun would still rise without it"⁶².

Back to the sources

After a long period of self-assertion, Gorky realized that he was a close-knit group of Armenians, represented by his sister and relatives. Perhaps as a confession of his return to his roots, Gorky mentions in one of his letters to Vardush: "Of course, I know that our luck is not so good, but we must take the effort to make friends with others. Sometimes I sing the song you sang in order to console myself"⁶³. "Dearest ones, perhaps it is because I recall so well the silver songs of the storyteller and the evening recitations of our Adoians that I need Armenian song and poetry for inspiration when I paint. They are nature's tastiest addictions. A farm- how I love the land, the soil. I long for the environment of our beloved homeland and am constantly seized by the beauty of Khorkom and Van. Our immortal Armenian world, the purple mountains and Lake Van's white salt shores and the sweet valleys and animals"⁶⁴. Gorky thought, as a possible contribution, "what has the Armenian experience to add to modern life? Sensitivity. Sensitivity to beauty, sensitivity to sadness, and melancholy, sensitivity to the frailty as well as the nobility of life. Sensitivity in the day of dehumanization. Therein lies our contribution to all art. Our Armenia should not belong to Armenians alone. Our Armenia, the sensitivity of Armenia, its understanding and immense experience of bad and good, of the beautiful and ugly, the dead and living is needed by all the world. The humanity of Armenia is our homeland's book. It is an art that should be offered so that others may share in it and learn from it"⁶⁵. During his creative pursuits, Gorky never ceased to admire the native culture, one of the peaks of which is considered by Toros "Roslin is the Renaissance. What electricity the man contains. For me, he is the greatest artist the world produced before the modern age and his use of dimension is exceeded solely by

⁶¹ Ibid., After Gorky's death. Mougouch Gorky: Extracts from Letters to Etherl Schwabacher, 19447- 53, Edited by Matthew Spender, Hauser and Wirth Publishers, Zurich, p. 527.

⁶² Gorky Adoian A. (2005), Letters. June 25, 1945. Edited by Seyranouhi Geghamyan. Graber, Yerevan, p. 125-126.

⁶³ Gorky, A. (2018), The plow and the song. A life in letters and documents. The late thirties, Arshile Gorky: Letter to Vardush Mooradian, May 29 (1937). Edited by Matthew Spender, Hauser and Wirth Publishers, Zurich, p. 152.

⁶⁴ Gorky Adoian, A. (2005), Letters. April 22, 1944. Edited by Seyranouhi Geghamyan. Graber, Yerevan, p. 114.

⁶⁵ Ibid., June 25, 1945, p. 128.

cubism. Masterful dimensionality, unsurpassed. I bow before our Toros. I love that man. Uccello⁶⁶ was hindered by not having the opportunity to view Roslin's paintings⁶⁷.

An artist based on the Roslin space is the child of the utilitarian, rectilinear life⁶⁸. “But I am an Armenian and man must be himself. For that reason, urban cubism hinders my self-expression. Its lines are straight, but I am a curved line⁶⁹”.

Instead of a conclusion

Thus, Gorky remained faithful to his noble goal: in his paintings he created the lost Homeland, “he resurrected Armenia with his brush for all the world⁷⁰”. Gorky took place in art with his revolutionary spirit. “I know where I stand. I know how I came to stand where I stand. Where will I go next? I do not know. The unknown is unknown. The life of the artist produces his art. Concepts come after all of the contortions of the experiences of the artist's life and mind. The search is too painful. It is too deep. It requires zeal and intensity. There is also a need for heartless self-criticism. The artist must always be a hunter. Always looking, taking some things, discarding other things. Art knows no rest. In truth when the great collision of makrutyun and danjank have produced hasnutyun, the artist is mature. He is himself at last⁷¹”. And he said about painting: “An artist paints because it is a challenge to him- it is like trying to twist the devil. If you overcome it, there is no sport left. A painting is never finished. I don't like that word 'finish'. When something is finished, that means it's dead, doesn't it? I believe in everlastingness. I never finish painting- I just stop working on it for a while. I like painting because it's something I can never come to the end of. Sometimes I'm working on 15 or 20 pictures at the same time. I do that because I want to- because I like to change my mind so often. The thing is to do is always to keep starting to paint, never finish a painting. That's the way to keep painting- to create something inside that makes you want to recreate it⁷²”. Gorky was able to open a new page in abstract expressionism, but not just as an innovator, but as an artist with a bright ethnic identity who was convinced that “when we return to clay as we all must, then perchance that might say, “as a son of the Armenian mountains he offered his modest share to the accumulation of our world's great culture⁷³”. Gorky searched and found only his own unique manuscript: “I have discovered my signal and

⁶⁶ Paolo Uccello 1397-1475, was a Florentine painter and mathematician who was notable for his pioneering work on visual perspective in art. While his contemporaries used perspective to narrate different or succeeding stories, Uccello used perspective to create a feeling of depth in his paintings. Paolo worked in the Late Gothic tradition, emphasizing colour and pantry rather than the classical realism that other artists were pioneering. His style is best described as idiosyncratic, and he left no school of followers (ed.).

⁶⁷ Gorky Adoian, A. (2005), Letters. December, 1944, New York City. Edited by Seyranouhi Geghamyan. Graber, Yerevan, p. 119.

⁶⁸ Ibid., January 26, 1944, New York City, p. 105.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 103.

⁷⁰ Ibid., April 22, 1944, New York City, p. 115.

⁷¹ Ibid., October 11, 1946, p. 139-141.

⁷² Gorky, A. (2018), The plow and the song. A life in letters and documents, Talcott B. Clapp: Interview with Gorky. The waterbury Sunday Republican Magazine, February 9, 1948. Edited by Matthew Spender, Hauser and Wirth Publishers, Zurich, p. 481.

⁷³ Gorky Adoian, A. (2005), Letters. April 22, 1944, New York City. Edited by Seyranouhi Geghamyan. Graber, Yerevan., p. 115.

it is mine. So I respond to modern life as an Armenian from Van”⁷⁴. Gorky disobeyed the rules of the American press, he remained Armenian, and America accepted the artist as he was “Ferocious as a giant, tender as a child”⁷⁵.

ԼՅՈՒՂՄԻԼԱ ՀԱՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՅԱՆ, ՀՈՒՓՄԻՄԵ ԴԱՅԱՆ - Արշիլ Գորկու կյանքը Միացյալ Նահանգներում. ինքնության որոնման դժվարին ճանապարհը. - Հոդվածում հայազգի մեծ նկարիչ Արշիլ Գորկու ու իր ժամանակակիցների թողած փաստագրական հարուստ նյութի վերլուծության հիման վրա, *սիմվոլիկ ինտերակցիոնիզմի* սոցիոլոգիական տեսության շրջանակներում դիտարկվում են արվեստագետի կյանքն ու կայացումը ԱՄՆ-ում, նրա ինքնության որոնումը: Արվեստագետի ինքնության ելության իմաստավորման բանալին իր իսկ խոստովանությունն է՝ որպես «Արարատի զավակի», կորցրած հայրենիքի պատկերների ու գույների արժեքները կրող արվեստագետի (Վան, Խորզոմ): Ինքնության որոնման դժվարին ճանապարհի վերլուծությունից պարզ է դառնում, որ Արշիլ Գորկին, չնայած 20-րդ դարի սկզբին Ամերիկայում արմատացած ռասիստական քաղաքականությանն ու այդ իրականության հետևանք սոցիալ-մշակութային խնդիրներին, հավատարիմ մնաց ինքն իրեն և իր նպատակին. իր ստեղծագործություններում կարողացավ պահպանել կորցրած հայրենիքի պատկերը: Նա վերստեղծեց Արևմտյան Հայաստանի պատկերը, չղավաճանեց իր ազգային ինքնությանը, այլ հավատարիմ մնալով ժառանգականության սկզբունքներին՝ կարողացավ դառնալ «Հգոր՝ ինչպես հսկա, քնքուշ՝ ինչպես մանուկ»: Արշիլ Գորկին իր արվեստով կարողացավ հասնել այն ազատությանը, որին ձգտում էր:

Բանալի բառեր՝ *սիմվոլիկ ինտերակցիոնիզմ, ազգային ինքնություն, պատկերներ, արժեքներ, վարքի մոդելներ, Ոստանիկ Ադոյան, Արշիլ Գորկի, Արարատ, Արևմտյան Հայաստան, Վան, Խորզոմ, ԱՄՆ, ռասիզմ*

ЛЮДМИЛА АРУТЮНЯН, РИПСИМЕ ДАЯН- *Жизнь Аршила Горки в США: трудный поиск идентичности* - Жизнь и становление великого армянского художника Аршила Горки в США, поиск им собственной идентичности рассматривается в традициях социологической теории символического интеракционизма, на основе анализа богатого документального материала, оставленного самим художником и его современниками. Ключом к осмыслению сути идентичности художника служат его высказывания о себе как о «дите Арарата», о художнике, несущем в себе ценности, образы и краски утерянной Родины (Вана, Хоргома). Анализ перипетий поиска идентичности свидетельствует, что несмотря на социокультурные проблемы расистской политики в американском обществе начала XX-го века, Аршил Горки остался верен своей цели и предназначению: в своих картинах он смог сохранить и передать образ утерянной Родины - Западной Армении. Он не изменил своей национальной идентичности и унаследованным принципам, став «могучим, как великан, оставаясь в душе нежным, как ребенок». Своим искусством Аршил Горки смог достичь той свободы, к которой стремился.

Ключевые слова. *Символический интеракционизм, национальная идентичность, образы, ценности, модель поведения, Востаник Адоян, Аршил Горки, Арарат, Западная Армения, Ван, Хоргом, США, расизм.*

⁷⁴ Ibid., January 26, 1944, January 26, 1944, New York City, p. 105.

⁷⁵ Gorky, A. (2018), *The plow and the song. A life in letters and documents*, Marney George: Letter to James Thrall Soby, March 15, 1951., Edited by Matthew Spender, Hauser and Wirth Publishers, Zurich, p. 77.

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