

## RESEARCH ARTICLE / ARAŐTIRMA MAKALESİ

**To cite this article:** Çelik, Adil. "Armenian Image in Turkish Folk Narratives", *Review of Armenian Studies*, Issue 50 (2024): 123-140.

**Received:** 13.10.2024

**Accepted:** 10.11.2024

# ARMENIAN IMAGE IN TURKISH FOLK NARRATIVES\*

(TÜRK HALK ANLATILARINDA ERMENİ İMAJI)

Adil ÇELİK\*\*

**Abstract:** *This study examines how the Armenian image is reflected in legends, epics, folk tales and jokes in the Turkish oral narrative tradition. Images are fed by stereotypes. In this respect, this study, which aims to search for images in folklore, primarily clarifies the relationship between stereotypes and folklore. By touching on the importance of the concept of "other" in the construction of social identities, it is aimed to reveal how the Armenian image is stereotyped in folklore and oral narratives. The research focused on the places with which the Armenian image is associated, the physical qualities and behavioral patterns of this image. The data obtained as a result of the scans were subjected to qualitative data analysis. The findings show that the Armenian image in oral memory has become clear both with a function that reminds the Turkish society of the behavioral patterns it should exhibit and with a meaning that resembles common shared values. It has also been revealed how the skills of Armenians in various professions found a place in social memory. In addition, it has been revealed that the image of Armenians as the other is constructed as an alternative of a cluster intertwined with religious and national identity, which has the potential for variability. As a result, it can*

\* This article is based on the author's doctoral thesis titled "Stereotypes in Turkish Narrative Tradition". See: Adil Çelik, *Türk Anlatı Geleneğinde Stereotipler* (Ankara: Gazi Üniversitesi, 2019).

\*\* ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5347-3579>  
Assoc. Prof. Dr., Sivas Cumhuriyet University, Faculty of Letters, Department of Turkish Folklore, E-mail: [acelik@cumhuriyet.edu.tr](mailto:acelik@cumhuriyet.edu.tr)

*be said that the Armenian image, with its positive and negative qualities, holds an important place in Turkish social memory.*

**Keywords:** *Armenian image, oral narrative, folk literature, stereotype.*

**Öz:** *Bu çalışma, Türk sözlü anlatı geleneğindeki efsane, destan, halk hikâyesi ve fıkralara Ermeni imajının nasıl yansımalarını incelemektedir. İmajlar stereotiplerden beslenmektedir. Bu açıdan folklorda imaj aramaya dönük bu çalışma, öncelikle stereotipler ve folklor arasındaki ilişkiyi açıklığa kavuşturmaktadır. Toplumsal kimliklerin inşasında “öteki” kavramının önemine değinerek Ermeni imajının folklor ve sözlü anlatılarda nasıl kalıplaştığının ortaya konulması hedeflenmektedir. Araştırmada, Ermeni imajının bağlantılı olduğu mekânlara, bu imajın bedensel niteliklerine ve davranış kalıplarına odaklanılmıştır. Taramalar sonucunda elde edilen veriler nitel veri analizine tabi tutulmuştur. Ulaşılan bulgular, sözel bellekteki Ermeni imajının, hem Türk toplumuna sergilemesi gereken davranış kalıplarını hatırlatan bir işlevle hem de ortak paylaşılmışlıkları andıran bir anlamla belirginleştiğini göstermektedir. Ermenilerin çeşitli mesleklerdeki becerilerinin toplumsal bellek içinde nasıl yer bulduğu da ortaya konulmuştur. Ayrıca, bir öteki olarak Ermeni imajının din ve ulus kimliği ile iç içe geçmiş bir kümenin değişkenlik potansiyeli barındıran bir alternatifini olarak kurgulandığı ortaya konmuştur. Sonuç olarak, Ermeni imajının, olumlu ve olumsuz nitelikleriyle Türk toplumsal belleğinde önemli bir yer tuttuğu söylenebilir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Ermeni imajı, sözlü anlatı, halk edebiyatı, stereotip.*

### Introduction

This study focuses on the qualities of the Armenian image, specifically the types of legends, epics, folk tales and jokes that are part of the Turkish oral narrative tradition. Regardless of whether it is ethnic, national, class, religious or sectarian, the other has always been needed in the construction and continuity of social identities. The images designed about the other are preserved in social memory by being stereotyped. It is known that societies use productions made in different fields of art, especially media, while preserving the designs of the other in their memories and transferring them to future generations. However, there is a preservation tool that is older than the media, written literary works and many branches of art: folklore in general and oral narratives in particular. Formality, traditionality and anonymity of folklore<sup>1</sup>; it coincides with the nature of stereotypes. In other words, stereotypes, just like a fairy tale or a ritual, are a type of information whose first producer is uncertain and which is transmitted within tradition by becoming stereotypes. This information gives rise to images, and images contribute to the continuity in the identity and belonging consciousness of the society that produces it.

Based on these assumptions, in this study, the Armenian image reflected in Turkish folk narratives was discussed, and in addition to the spatial and physical elements that make up the image in question, the behavioral patterns presented as a part of the Armenian image were analyzed through qualitative data analysis and the function of the image in question was tried to be shown.

### Relationship Between Image and Folklore

The concept of “image”, which expresses the mental designs of external groups that are effective in the formation of identity, and the concepts of “stereotype”, which are stereotypes that make these images become clear in mind, are highly related to each other. In order to see this relationship, it is necessary to look at what meanings researchers attribute to the relevant concepts. The concept of image is the basis of the term *imagology*, which was first used by Oliver Brachfeld<sup>2</sup>; It is one of the concepts that has become popular in history, sociology and literature research in the last half century. Derived from the Latin concept of *imago*, which means a mask worn in funeral ceremonies and representing the spirits of ancestors<sup>3</sup>, the word *image*

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1 Franciss Lee Utley, “Folk Literature: An Operational Definition”, *The Study of Folklore* (ed: Alan Dundes), (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 7-24.

2 Oliver Brachfeld, *Inferiority Feelings: In the Individual and the Group* (London: Routledge, 2014).

3 Halime Yücel, *İmgeden Yoruma* (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları,2013), 20.

in the sense of “dream” is defined as a voluntary or involuntary expression of the subconscious with certain associations<sup>4</sup>, and it seems self-explanatory.

Elements such as individual experiences, social perception and acculturation tools are decisive in the formation of the image, which is the dreams created in the mind by certain associations. According to Yücel, images are generally grouped into three categories: Some of these are dreams and mental images. Others are scenes that we look at in a certain way. The third one is the produced images in communication tools<sup>5</sup>. The images that appear in oral narratives and will be discussed on the axis of identity within the scope of this study are included in the first cluster in Yücel’s classification. One of the common acceptance of researchers who analyze images through literary texts is that the authors who produce these texts do not only reflect their own inner worlds, but also present the general acceptances of the society in which they grew up. From this perspective, although social acceptances are tried to be analyzed within the image bracket even in individual literary creations<sup>6</sup>, it is a deficiency that the same concept is not subjected to a comprehensive research in folkloric texts.

Perceiving the image, in a way, is reconstructing the image subjectively. Our culture, emotions, world view, and fears are effective in our perception of images<sup>7</sup>. Based on this judgment, it is possible to say that during the composition of an oral narrative, a social memory based on experiences and a subjectivity resulting from this are active when the listeners around the storyteller perceive the images. In this context, images, which are representations of foreignness in oral narratives, can be considered as elements that the consumer mass makes sense of and creates while consuming collectively. One of the common points pointed out by researchers who focus on the subject of identity is the concept of image. Serhat Ulağlı touches upon the history and method of image studies in his work titled “Imagology: Introduction to the Science of the Other” (en.). According to Ulağlı’s opinion, imageology is a discipline in itself. It is especially emphasized that this field, which was born in the 1960’s, has an interdisciplinary nature. It is stated that imagology studies, which are said to be related to sciences such as literature, history, philosophy, political science and psychology, have long examined the concepts of us and the other. In his work, Ulağlı states that stereotypes, beliefs,

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4 Serhat Ulağlı, *İmgebilim: Ötekinin Bilimine Giriş* (Ankara: Sinemis, 2006).

5 Yücel, *İmgeden Yoruma*, 23.

6 For examples on this topic, see: Vernon K. Robbins, Walter S. Melion and Roy R. Jeal. *The Art of Visual Exegesis: Rhetoric, Texts, Images (Emory Studies in Early Christianity)* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017); John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London:

7 Yücel, *İmgeden Yoruma*, 26.

cultural codes, fears and hatreds are effective in the formation of the image of the other<sup>8</sup> and points to folklore - without actually being aware of it. In the section where image analysis methods are explained, the same researcher says that when conducting author-oriented image studies, choosing works that are especially popular with the public will produce healthier results<sup>9</sup>; it brings to mind that anonymous narratives are farther from individuality and closer to sociality in the context of production and consumption compared to written literature, and makes it important to investigate the images of foreignness in oral narratives.

The fact that the first creators of anonymous folk narratives have been forgotten shows that the ideas suggested in the content of the texts are taken for granted by the society. This result makes the texts produced within the oral narrative tradition more valuable than the examples produced within the written literary tradition, as they contain more social acceptance. H. Millas emphasizes that people's experiences, common perceptions of the society they are a member of, communication tools, education and literature are among the factors that are effective in the formation of the image<sup>10</sup>. Considering these views, the functionality and importance of focusing on folklore products of image studies in order to understand society is better understood.

We understand the existence of a semantic link between the concept of "image" and the concept of "other" from the following explanations: According to Daniel Henri Pagaeu, one of the pioneers of image research, every image contains an "I" or "here" and an "other" somewhere. It also arises from the "there" relationship. In this way, societies or groups of people share the culture, politics, ideologies etc. to which they are affiliated. They also detect the environment. The designed environment strongly exhibits a "duality": "Us" and "other". Societies determine and perceive themselves in this way. A "national" identity only exists according to the other side. This opposite side has a roughly "general" appearance<sup>11</sup>. The image is the packaged form of this general view, and folklore genres contain many reflections of the images in question.

### Analysis of Findings

An image is, first of all, a dream, and every dream is mostly shaped by visual elements. It is known that in today's Turkish social memory, Yeşilçam cinema

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8 Serhat Ulađlı, *İmgebilim: Ötekinin Bilimine Giriş* (Ankara: Sinemis Yayınları, 2006), 19.

9 Ulađlı, *İmgebilim*, 60.

10 Herkül Millas, *Türk Romanı ve Öteki: Ulusal Kimlikte Yunan İmajı* (İstanbul: Sabancı Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2000), 4.

11 Millas, *Türk Romanı ve Öteki*, 5.

is often used as a reference to clarify Armenian, Jewish or Greek images in minds<sup>12</sup>. When we go back a little further, we see that this source is based on novels and theater plays. Almost all of them contain physical signs such as clothing and accessories that support these images. The other usually has a bodily design that evokes negative meanings and separations. In cases where Armenians are remembered with positive physical qualities, social memory places such situations on an epistemological basis. In the narrative called Koroğlu's Kidnapping of Ayvaz, which includes one of these situations, Koroğlu begins to search for Ayvaz, who is famous for her beauty. Ayvaz is the 14-year-old boy of an Armenian named Antik, whose father works as a butcher in Üsküdar. The fact that this boy is more beautiful than all the girls is the reason why Koroğlu is looking for him. In a section where Ayvaz's beauty is mentioned, it is stated that if he does not become a Muslim, his beauty will disappear at the age of forty and he will become ugly<sup>13</sup>. These expressions are seen as the epistemological basis in question, which shows that, although Koroğlu pursues it, the beauty of an Armenian does not mean anything if it is not complemented spiritually with the values that are precious in the memory of the Turks. Ayvaz, who is stated to be more beautiful than many of the girls mentioned in the narrative, is shown to accept Islam as a condition for him to maintain this impressiveness.

One of the qualities of the Armenian image is his skill in various professions. In the narrative of Koroğlu and Demircioğlu, Demircioğlu, who is the journeyman of the Armenian master named Armanik, becomes one of his mentors after meeting Koroğlu<sup>14</sup>. Ayvaz and Demircioğlu can be considered as reflections of positive stereotypes about Armenians in the verbal memory of Turkish society. Ayvaz, who was the closest figure to Koroğlu and to whom he entrusted everything, was Armenian, and a hero like Demircioğlu, who stood out with his bravery, was the journeyman of an Armenian master. Especially during the Ottoman period, the term "millet-i sadıka", means loyal nation, was formed in Turkish regarding the Armenian community. The statement points to the same point.

It is also possible to see the judgments of the two communities about each other in the narratives formed around joke types. It is very common to use stereotypes existing in folklore to create the conflict environment required for comedy to emerge. One of the images shaped by these stereotypes is the Armenian, and in this respect it is included in Nasreddin Hodja's jokes. In a section of Saltıknâme where Nasrettin Hodja is mentioned, it is stated that the

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12 Dilara Balcı, *Yeşilçam'da Öteki Olmak: Başlangıçtan Günümüze Türkiye Sinemasında Gayrimüslim Temsilleri* (İstanbul: Kolektif Kitap, 2013).

13 Mehmet Kaplan, Mehmet Akalın, Muhan Bali. *Koroğlu Destanı (Anlatan Behçet Mahir)*, Ankara: Sevinç Matbaası, 1973), 52.

14 Kaplan at al., *Koroğlu Destanı*, 17.

Armenians living in Karahisar said that Nasrettin Hodja was a “stupid Turk” and that they said, “Let’s laugh at his beard if he comes here.”<sup>15</sup> Even though the text ends here, it can be said based on the general characteristics of the jokes around Nasreddin Hodja; it is clear that Hodja will go and defeat his enemies based on this provocative discourse.

The fact that minorities appear in the narratives as figures who mostly live in cities should be related to the fact that the possibility of encountering these groups takes place in cities, rather than showing that these groups live in cities in general. The blacksmith shop of the Armenian blacksmith Armanik in the story of Koroğlu and Demircioğlu is in the city of Erzurum<sup>16</sup>. Ayvaz’s father, Antik, lives in Üsküdar<sup>17</sup>. Aslı’s father lives in Ahlat in the story of “Kerem and Aslı”<sup>18</sup>.

It is worth noting that, unlike the Jews, Armenians were seen not only as an urban minority but also as a group living in villages. One of the spatial backdrops that complete the Armenian image is the Armenian church. In one joke, Bekri Mustafa gets drunk and wants to enter an Armenian church and visit it. Bekri entered the church in the middle of the night and examined the pictures on the walls under the guidance of the priest and the sexton; when he sees that there is a lamp in front of the pictures of Mary, Jesus and Many Saints, but there is no oil lamp in front of only one picture, he asks why. When the officers say that the person in the picture is Satan, Bekri tells them to put a lamp in front of this picture. The priest and the sexton agree to avoid any trouble and light a lamp in front of the picture of Satan, and Bekri leaves the church. Bekri, who had all kinds of nightmares while sleeping at night, immediately went to the church in the morning and said, “Quickly, extinguish the lamp in front of this monster!”. He realizes his mistake by saying “It is better for such a sinful thing to remain in the dark.”<sup>19</sup>. It can be said that in this text, the Armenian church is included as a place that is not in conflict with Islamic teaching and even overlaps with it.

Compared to the Jew, an other minority who appears only in cities in the Turkish narrative tradition, the number of examples in which the Armenian image is presented in the village is higher. It is known that Armenians, one of Turkey’s autochthonous ethnicities, have villages in Anatolia. On the other hand, the underlying reason why Armenians appear in cities in Turkish folk

15 Pertev Naili Boratav, *Nasreddin Hoca* (İstanbul: Kırmızı Yayınları, 2006), 109.

16 Kaplan at al., *Koroğlu Destanı*, 15.

17 Kaplan at al., *Koroğlu Destanı*, 48.

18 Ali Duymaz, *Kerem ile Aslı Hikâyesi Üzerinde Mukayeseli Bir Araştırma* (Ankara: KB Yayınları, 2001), 255.

19 Abdülkadir Emeksiz, *Bir İstanbul Kahramanı Bekri Mustafa (İnceleme – Metin)*, İstanbul: Mühür Kitaplığı, 2010



narratives is; this is due to the fact that the city has more chances of encountering the different than the village. Bekri Mustafa's type also has a consciousness that is incompatible with Islamic teachings. The same consciousness is also contrary to the teachings of the Armenian church. Bekri Mustafa's realization that what he did was wrong at the end of the narrative can be indirectly accepted as a reflection of the respect felt for the teachings of the Armenian church in the social memory that produced this anecdote.

In a legend compiled from Tokat, Keçeci Baba, a saint coming from Khorasan, goes to an Armenian village and knocks on the door of a house, saying that he is looking for water to perform ablution. Thereupon, the Armenian woman points to the river in a scolding manner. Upon this situation, Keçeci Baba first sticks the staff in his hand into the ground and performs ablution from the resulting water, then stands on a high stone and recites the adhan, cursing that Armenian village to be destroyed. In the continuation of the narrative, the village disappears and that area becomes a complete cemetery. According to the source, the stone on which the adhan was recited is still standing. This stone is called the "Footstep Stone" and it is believed that children who have not yet started walking are taken to that stone to help them walk quickly<sup>20</sup>. In this narrative, although respect and help are expected from the opposing group, there is a response to the disrespect shown. With saints prayer, not only the person who shows disrespect but also the entire community that that person belongs to disappears. Punishing the society instead of the individual is the product of mythological thought in which sociality comes to the fore instead of individuality. The stories of Admetos in Greek mythology and Deli Dumrul in Turkish mythology were also shaped by the same mythological thought in which socialism predominates. According to this primitive idea, it is possible for an individual to pay the penalty for the damage caused by not complying with social norms by sacrificing other individuals from the society in which that individual belongs. The transformation of the Armenian village in the narrative into a cemetery is an emphasis made to strengthen the organization of the community that produced the text. Accordingly, people who perform acts that the culture does not approve of are victimized and society is purified with these sacrifices. Kearney explains that the price of creating a happy community is the exclusion of foreigners. Most cultures produce sacrifice myths to turn foreigners into scapegoats. Scapegoating enthusiasts isolate or eliminate these strangers whom they hold responsible for social ills. Such a sacrificial strategy endows communities with a binding identity; that is, it provides basic awareness of who is included in the community (we) and who is excluded from the community (them)<sup>21</sup>.

20 Saim Sakaoğlu. *101 Anadolu Efsanesi*, (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 1989), 41.

21 Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters Interpreting Otherness* (London: Routledge, 2002).



One of the ways the Armenians in the narratives protect the place they live in is to sanctify this place with a motivation that derives its origin from the ideas of Muslims. One of the examples that can be given to this appears in a legend compiled from Erzurum. In the legend in question, based on Turks' deep respect for tombs, Armenians portray the places where they keep their valuable goods as tombs<sup>22</sup>. In this text, Armenians' practices regarding space are actually shaped by the sacredness of Muslims. Therefore, although the indicator (mausoleum) at the top indicates that the place belongs to the Turks and its sanctity, the treasure found deep inside lives on as a remnant of the existing conflict.

Another spatial element associated with non-Muslims in general, and Greeks and Armenians in particular, is the tavern. Stereotypes about associating tavern management with Armenians are found in folklore, especially in Bekri Mustafa anecdotes. The image of the Armenian tavern owner named Agop is found in eleven jokes<sup>23</sup>. Apart from these examples, another anecdote mentions another Armenian tavern owner named Onnik, apart from Agop<sup>24</sup>. It should not be forgotten that the stereotypical thought dynamic that associates tavern keepers with Armenians or Greeks also has a relationship with social reality. In these anecdotes, Agop's tavern is a place where people looking for Bekri Mustafa can definitely find him<sup>25</sup>. The friendship between Bekri and Agop is so strong that Bekri Mustafa, whose wife is about to give birth, first rushes to ask Agop for help in finding a midwife<sup>26</sup>. Bekri Mustafa even shares his secrets with Agop, not his wife<sup>27</sup>. In another anecdote, tavern keepers who suffer from the alcohol ban imposed by the state gather and go to Bekri Mustafa, and Bekri starts looking for a solution together with Agop<sup>28</sup>. In short, Agop is Bekri's true friend. Reconciling the identity of Bekri Mustafa with the tavern run by Agop is actually a natural result of placing Bekri Mustafa and the Armenian image in the same place. On the other hand, in the anecdotes, Bekri Mustafa's ability to neutralize and outsmart the dynamics with which he came into conflict can be considered as an expression of the positive thoughts and tolerant approach of the Turkish society towards the Armenians. In other words, it can be said that the superiority Bekri gained directly is indirectly associated with the Armenian image. Such constructive thoughts can be read as evidence that the Turkish society, which has ruled empires throughout history, maintains tolerance within tradition.

22 Bilge Seyidođlu, *Erzurum Efsaneleri* (İstanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 2005), 55.

23 Emeksiz, *Bekri Mustafa*, 157, 165, 180, 184, 188, 212, 217, 242, 243, 264, 272.

24 Emeksiz, *Bekri Mustafa*, 211.

25 Emeksiz, *Bekri Mustafa*, 165.

26 Emeksiz, *Bekri Mustafa*, 184.

27 Emeksiz, *Bekri Mustafa*, 220.

28 Emeksiz, *Bekri Mustafa*, 188.

Stereotypes and narratives about Armenians being a craftsman society, just like the Jews, appear in the narratives. In the narrative of Koroğlu and Demircioğlu, Koroğlu, who disguises himself during the day and uses the name Ali, goes to a blacksmith from time to time to get Kırat a horseshoe. In this narrative, the person who practices the blacksmith profession is an Armenian named Armanik. It is emphasized in the narrative that he was a good iron master, and Demircioğlu, a hero like Koroğlu, is the journeyman of this Armenian master. In the narrative, Muslims' work alongside Armenian craftsmen is emphasized by the storyteller, appreciating the Armenians' skills in this regard<sup>29</sup>. This statement of the narrator is a contemporary parenthesis of tolerance that opens to the epic world.

Although they appear to be distinguished masters in the professions they practice, stereotypes about Armenians being deprived of some rights because they are not Muslims are evident in the narratives. In the narrative called Koroğlu - Niğdeli Geyik Ahmet, Koroğlu kidnaps Ayvaz, a fourteen-year-old boy, and the Sultan, who is aware of this situation, calls him to his side. When the Sultan asked why he kidnapped the child, Koroğlu stated that the child was Armenian and that he kidnapped this child in order to teach him Islam and raise him with good morals<sup>30</sup>. In fact, Koroğlu is lying, and the only reason behind his kidnapping of Ayvaz is his irresistible beauty, as explained in the rest of the story. With Koroğlu's statements to the Sultan, Ayvaz's Armenian identity, which is seen as a potential source of his "lack of good morals", turns into a reason to legitimize Koroğlu's crime. The salvation from this situation is through Ayvaz's conversion to Islam, but the fact that this issue of conversion is not mentioned anywhere in the narrative clarifies Koroğlu's trickery.

In the story of Kerem and Aslı, Aslı's father is a money changer of Armenian origin who works for Kerem's father, a shah<sup>31</sup>. It is noteworthy that in this narrative, as in many other places, the Armenian character initially becomes clear with the profession he pursues. Among the legends, the Armenian image draws attention with its fondness for work and production. In a legend, it is stated that an Armenian landlord even employed Sultan Murat, who went on a campaign to Yerevan<sup>32</sup>. These examples prove that craftsmanship and diligence, two intertwined concepts, were used in the design of the Armenian image.

The identification of Armenians with the profession of architecture can be seen in a Bektashi anecdote. In the narrative, when Bektashi, who poured

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29 Kaplan at al., *Koroğlu Destanı*, 16.

30 Kaplan at al., *Koroğlu Destanı*, 65.

31 Duymaz, *Kerem ile Aslı*, 255.

32 Seyidoğlu, *Erzurum Efsaneleri*, 196.

water on the wall of the mosque, was told that what he did was very wrong, Bektashi stated that Kirkor Bodus built that wall and that God Almighty created his own body<sup>33</sup>. In this narrative, it is seen that Bektashi is trying to pull himself into a rightful position by making use of stereotypes. When Bektashi's use of negative stereotypes about Armenians in the anecdote is supported by the Bektashi type's general tendency to perform actions that the tradition does not find appropriate, a social idea that negative discourses towards Armenians are wrong emerges.

Agop in the Bekri Mustafa jokes appears as a dishonest shopkeeper who secretly adds water to drinks. In this paragraph, he is punished by Bekri and decides not to commit such a fraud again<sup>34</sup>. In some examples, after the self-interest of the Armenian image is clearly shown, the criminal is punished with divine help. In a legend told in Bayburt, an Armenian who is engaged in agriculture sells grass to the Muslim livestock communities around him. Muslims, who could not find grass for their animals due to excessive snowfall, went to ask for grass from the Armenian merchant. The Armenian merchant asks for the daughter of one of the Muslims in exchange for the herbs he will give. With the girl's prayer, all the Armenian grass turns into stones in heaps<sup>35</sup>. In another legend compiled from Bayburt, the reason why a river with no more water left in its bed dried up is related to the disrespect towards bread, which is believed to be sacred in folk culture, and the origin of this disrespect is associated with the Armenians. According to legend, an Armenian bride uses a piece of bread while cleaning her child's diaper and then throws this bread into the water. From that day on, the water in the river gradually decreases and after a while the stream retreats underground, its sound can be heard but the water cannot be seen<sup>36</sup>. In this narrative, the fact that the figure who angers nature by not complying with social norms is Armenian can be read as the emergence of two different stereotyping dynamics at a single point.

The legendary hero, who is pushed outside of us with the potential of being Armenian, violates a prohibition that is considered a taboo in folk culture, disrespects bread and is punished as a result. According to the contextual memory that created this text, the violation of the taboo and the identity involved coincide with each other. It should not be forgotten that the figure that appears as Armenian in the context of Bayburt may also appear with a completely different label in another context.

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33 Dursun Yıldırım, *Türk Edebiyatında Bektaşi Fıkraları* (Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları, 1999), 152.

34 Emeksiz, *Bekri Mustafa*, 180.

35 Sakaoğlu, *101 Anadolu Efşanesi*, 18.

36 Sakaoğlu, *101 Anadolu Efşanesi*, 29.

The issue of not being able to control sexual urges, such as disrespecting bread, is also associated with being Armenian. In a legend compiled from Erzurum, while a bride is in front of the door, an Armenian young man passing by the door wants to kiss her. He gives the name of Allah and says his wish, and the bride allows him to kiss her because of giving the name of Allah. In the evening, the bride tells the situation to her husband, the husband lights a fire and asks his wife to enter the fire by giving the name of Allah. The bride enters the fire, the fire becomes a lake and the bride becomes a fish<sup>37</sup>. Choosing a figure who molests a married woman from among minorities is to remind the members of the society that produced the text of their moral obligations. On the other hand, this narrative also shows that the sacred concepts of the Islamic belief system are decisive in the basis of the relationship established with minorities. At the end of the story, the fire turns into a lake and the woman turns into a fish; in fact, she shows that it is not wrong for a married woman to have an Armenian kiss her, relying on God. In other words, in fiction, the Armenian figure is made up by using the concept of “Allah” and is freed from the limitations of negative stereotypes clinging to it. This nuance means that the narrative carries a completely different aesthetic value deep down.

In a legend about the formation of the name Zara, when the Sultan went on a campaign with his army, he stopped in the Zara region, hosted an Armenian named Zara, and sent him wine and raki on camels to measure the sheikhship of a Sheikh living in that region with the Armenian’s filling. However, the Sheikh turns the wine and raki into honey and oil and sends it back to the Sultan, whereupon the Sultan appreciates him and says that he will fulfill his request. The Sheikh demands the death of the Armenian, the Sultan kills the Armenian, and that region is named after the murdered Armenian<sup>38</sup>. The desire of the Sheikh, who gained the Sultan’s approval by transforming alcohol, which was criminalized in this narrative, into foods such as oil and honey, which are culturally approved foods, was to kill the Armenians. Of course, it is not a situation that can only be explained by the difference of ethnicity. The Armenian is not killed just because he is an Armenian, he is punished for the crime he committed against the religious leaders. However, such outbursts are made in association with minorities as a result of stereotypical thinking. In addition, there is no maturity expected from a mystic here, which is another result of the legend being formed through a simple stereotyping dynamic. This dynamic combines slander with being an Armenian, but basically the text contains warnings to consumers that if they exhibit negative behavior such as slander, those who do so will be excommunicated. The Armenian image is an

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37 Sakaoğlu, *101 Anadolu Efsanesi*, 109.

38 Metin Ergun, *Türk Dünyası Efsanelerinde Değişme Motifi* (Ankara: TDK Yayınları, 1997), 380.

element used in shaping this warning and may vary depending on different contexts.

In a legend compiled from Diyarbakır, a saint named Cebrail Hoca wishes that Armenian women would come to his grave and distribute buttered bread there after his death<sup>39</sup>. This desire is the expression of the consciousness based on common history and shared experiences, which manifests itself in the term of “millet-i sadıka” that means loyal nation pattern mentioned above. On the other hand, Armenian figures who are not shaped by stereotypical thoughts can also appear in the narratives. In one legend, two farmers, Armenian and Muslim, are partners. At harvest time, they divide the produce and the Armenian children steal the property of their Muslim partners. Their father is very upset about this situation, and angels come from the sky at night and return the stolen goods, and their father is relieved<sup>40</sup>. In this last example, where the criminals were not punished, although the most important characteristic of those who behaved immorally was their Armenian identity, the sadness felt by their fathers can be considered a reflection of their common past and shared experiences.

Aslı’s parents, who caused Kerem to pursue Aslı for seven years, finally see that they cannot prevent the marriage of these two young people and decide to hold the wedding. However, Aslı’s father, called Keşiş, goes to the magicians and has a magic shirt sewn for Aslı. and dresses his daughter<sup>41</sup>. This situation causes Kerem’s tragic end, which is highly reflected in popular culture. As a result of the buttons not being released until the morning, Kerem burns with a sigh of relief, and Aslı, who waited crying over Kerem’s ashes for forty days, finally starts to fly and sweeps these ashes with her hair, her hair catches fire and she burns to death. The source of this sad ending is Aslı’s mother and father. Some lines spoken by Kerem in the story show an awareness that the source of this evil is based on ethnicity. For example, Kerem talks about Aslı’s mother by saying, “Aslı is Armenian, her mother is an infidel.” (Duymaz, 2001:278), and elsewhere he calls out to Aslı by saying, “Come and be a Muslim, don’t stay Armenian.”<sup>42</sup>. He tries to remove it from the “negative” context it is in. This last statement shows that, at the time when the text was formed, religious identity awareness was intertwined with national identity awareness, which was not yet very strong. Keşiş’s treacherous plan to kill his own daughter and son-in-law supports the stereotype of Kerem (and therefore Turkish society), who associates this situation with his Armenianness as one of the obstacles to being a good person.

39 Muhsine Helimoğlu Yavuz, *Diyarbakır Efsaneleri* (Ankara: Eğiten Kitap, 2013), 187.

40 Helimoğlu Yavuz, *Diyarbakır Efsaneleri*, 223.

41 Duymaz, *Kerem ile Aslı*, 292.

42 Duymaz, *Kerem ile Aslı*, 281.

In the narrative of Koroğlu and Demircioğlu, Koroğlu goes to Armanik the Blacksmith's shop to get his horse shod, and there he meets a journeyman named Demircioğlu and makes a show of power by taking the horseshoes he wants to shove on his horse and bending them. After this incident, Armanik saves Koroğlu from Demircioğlu, who tried to kill him at night to take revenge on Koroğlu, who introduced himself as Ali. The master predicts what his journeyman will do and hides Koroğlu in his mansion in the evening, allowing him to leave the city and preventing him from being killed by Demircioğlu<sup>43</sup>. This attitude of Armanik is proof that Armenians are not considered merely bad in the verbal memory of the Turkish society.

At the beginning of the story of Kerem and Aslı as in many other Turkish narratives there is an idea of childlessness. While a shah and one of his assistants were walking around the streets in disguise, a dervish came. Thinking that the Shah has no children, she gives him two apples. The Shah's Armenian assistant named Keşiş asks for one of the apples and promises to give the girl to the boy if the Shah has a son and he has a daughter. However, after the children became adults, Keşiş could not control his wife and left the city to avoid giving his daughter to the Shah's son Kerem<sup>44</sup>. In this part of the narrative, it is seen that the Armenian figure is designed to be open to criticism from two aspects. The first of these is that he does not keep his promise, and the second is that he cannot convey his promise to his wife. Especially in a cultural context where such texts are produced, a man's inability to control his wife is seen as a very "degrading" behavior, and this behavior is associated with the Armenian figure. The main issue that needs to be emphasized here is that her family does not want to give Aslı to a non-Armenian son-in-law. As a matter of fact, in different variants, it is seen that Aslı's family is trying to marry an Armenian young man<sup>45</sup>. This choice and search of the family constitutes the source of the tragedy at the end of the narrative.

The way to make the Armenian a part of our group is for him to become a Muslim. This can be seen as evidence that religion and national consciousness are intertwined within tradition. While the superiority of Muslims, especially in legends, is a motivation that derives from the talismanic holiness of Islam, the same situation can emerge as a coincidence in anecdotes. In one anecdote, a Muslim student who has no knowledge of religion passes by an Armenian's shop. At that moment, the Armenian trying to open the door of his shop could not do it and the Muslim young man said, "Oh sir, I can't open the door, they say everything is in your book." When asked, "What is the solution to open this door?", the student makes up an Arabic word. When the Armenian said

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43 Kaplan et al., *Koroğlu Destanı*, 19.

44 Duymaz, *Kerem ile Aslı*, 256.

45 Duymaz, *Kerem ile Aslı*, 69.



this and tried to open the door again with the key, by chance the door opened and the Armenian became a Muslim. Bektashi, who saw all this happening, said, “O Lord, you were going to convert this Armenian to Islam, but what was the point in turning this student into an infidel? He criticizes the student who is unaware of Islam, even though he is accepted as the representative of Muslims<sup>46</sup>. This criticism is important in terms of showing the society’s self-stereotypes because, within the binary opposition created through the Armenian tradesmen and the Muslim student, the fact that the student representing us is far from fulfilling his obligations is shown in a humorously critical attitude.

### Conclusion

As a result, it is understood that the Armenian image becomes evident in some examples of legends, epics, folk tales and anecdotes in the Turkish oral narrative tradition. The stereotypes about the Armenian image in the narratives and the individuals who make up the Turkish society; the ideas of avoiding behavior such as self-interest, breaking taboos, and slander are advised, and it is reminded that people who exhibit such behavior, which will negatively affect social life, will lose the chance of being a part of society.

It cannot be said that the Armenian image has distinct bodily qualities. The most extraordinary of the examples encountered is Ayvaz in the Koroğlu narratives, who is depicted as an extremely beautiful hero. However, the legitimacy of the Armenian’s beauty is always open to debate because he is not a Muslim. The Armenian image can often be presented within the village borders, in addition to urban living spaces such as taverns. On the other hand, one of the qualities that nourish the Armenian image is craftsmanship. Especially professions such as blacksmithing and masonry are associated with this image. The Armenian image is also associated with hard work. It is understood from the oral narratives that Armenian heroes did not have the option of making mistakes. As long as it remains within the boundaries of the group of “us”, the Armenian is an acceptable other. However, it is also seen that he is punished excessively in cases where he exceeds the limit.

Especially in the Bekri Mustafa and Bektashi anecdotes, the Armenian is positioned in more or less the same area as the main hero. Behavioral qualities associated with the Armenian image are often pointed out as the source of social problems. However, in these narratives, Islam, which is the essential element of our identity, is often pointed out as a safe space where the Armenian image, which occupies a “dirty” space, although controversial, can

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46 Yıldırım, *Bektaşî Fıkraları*, 105.



always take shelter with submission. Behaviors that have the potential to negate the Armenian image can be legitimized when adorned with Islamic elements.

Situations in which negative behavioral patterns are associated with the Armenian image contain messages about how individuals within the borders of the we group should behave. In such uses, “Armenian” is used as an other label that has the potential to vary depending on its context. On the other hand, the Armenian image can also become evident as a tool used to express common past and shared values through its relations with Turks and Muslims who represent the group of “us”.

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