

Characteristics of Armenian Folk Tales

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Abstract

This study analyzes three Armenian folk tales from Apples of Immortality. These tales are organized by type: myths and legends, animal tales, fairy tales, and stories of everyday life. Yet, these important cultural works remain largely understudied. To address this gap, this study analyzes three popular Armenian folk tales to reveal cultural norms and values. Many of the stories are short and humorous, making them perfect for story time; these stories are supplemented by background information on the Armenian people and their culture, including a brief history and, discussion of folk traditions and food recipes, music, religion, etc. These folk tales are a great resource for educators, students, folklorists, and anyone interested in Armenian culture. This study examines the norms and values addressed in folk tales, which are important factors that give continuity to certain cultures (Stephens, 1992). In this study I considered the following questions:

- 1. How do the chosen tales from Apples of Immortality represent the Armenian culture and the characteristics of Armenian tales specifically those originating in Western Armenia?*
- 2. What is the hidden message within each tale that relate to cultural values?*

My experience as an insider has helped me to represent the culture. In my research I chose three tales: Apples of Immortality, The Woodcutter and Faithful Wife. I searched for the following topics within these tales: Culturally specific symbols, metaphors, the characterization in the Armenian folk tales, the beginning and the ending formulas, setting, music, arts and food, the hidden message, and religion.

Key words: Armenian tales, religion, culture, folk tales.

Introduction

There are several Armenias. Armenia has undergone numerous transformations, from The Kingdom of Armenia, to the Armenia of the Roman, Byzantine, Persian, Turkish, and Russian periods. Leading up to the Treaty of Sevres, a Wilsonian Armenia was created on paper when America considered taking Armenia under her protective wing; however, the treaty was ultimately rejected. There is also the Armenia of the SSR, and the Armenian Diaspora, with colonies all over the world. Armenia can be viewed as a dream, a vision, and her dark beauty is eternal (Surmelian, 1968). In each of these regions, folk tales represent culture. The Armenian folk tales that survive in written form today grew out of an oral tradition taken from the lips of unlettered peasants in the highlands of Armenia, in the villages around Mount Ararat. These Armenian folk tales, or *Hekiatner* (Hai zhoghovertakan Hekiatner), as Armenians call their popular tales, are among the most beautiful and entertaining folk tales (Surmelian, 1968). Yet, these important cultural works remain largely understudied. To address this gap, this study analyzes three popular Armenian folk tales to reveal cultural norms and values.

It is important to experience cultural differences in order to have the knowledge to write about a specific culture and further, to examine cultural differences (Kelly, 2006). According to Mingshui (2003), knowledgeable insiders who want to write about their own ethnic culture hold great advantages over outsiders, but they also need to observe and learn, because this will enhance their cultural knowledge. Since I have lived in an Armenian community and studied in an Armenian school, I am an “insider,” giving me an advantage for analyzing these folktales.

I come from the Western part of Armenia where my grandparents were exposed to extermination and genocide in 1915.¹ Armenian folk tales survived despite this culturalicide (Prakash and Stuchul, 2004). For me as an Armenian, the extermination is still influential. Are we now like we were when we used to live on our ancestral land? No, we have lost much of our culture due to the consequent Diaspora. Hall (1996) describes lost identities as “questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: “who we are” or “where we came from,” so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves.”

Willinsky (2002) supports this by asking “who belongs where” and argues that this is a great source of inequity and miseducation. In short, history, culture, and language affect one's identity, but one should benefit from these for the future. For this reason, literacy must be understood in terms of culture, language, identities, as a way of being and knowing, in addition to other elements that make up the human condition (Harris and Wills, 2003).

In this study I considered the following questions:

3. How do the chosen tales from *Apples of Immortality* represent the Armenian culture and the characteristics of Armenian tales specifically those originating in Western Armenia?
4. What is the hidden message within each tale that relate to cultural values?

¹To Armenians, especially for the senior members of the community, April 24th is a day of mourning and remembrance. To the young generation, it is a day to openly profess their “Armenianness” and demand justice for their ancestral loss to remind the world about the first genocide of the 20th century.

This research will help us better understand cultural diversity and form cultural comparisons. It is very important to have accurate information, and multicultural literature as a bridge to understanding unfamiliar cultures (Kelly, 2006). Armenian folk tales are divided into wondrous and realistic tales of everyday life. The classic tale is the wonder tale, or fairy tale, which may or may not contain fairies (*peris, or houriperis*) which are benevolent fairies, and considered “better than us.” Usually the tale is told to create an air of suspense, describing an event still in progress of which neither the hero nor the listener knows the outcome. The hero, above all, must be brave. The heroine embodies the virtues of Armenian womanhood: modesty, affection, loyalty to her man, and kindness, even toward a snake. The snake, as might be expected, may suddenly shed its skin and become a handsome prince (Surmelian, 1968).

Armenian folk tales were originally told by peasants in their local dialect, and then ultimately transcribed by literary artists, such as Hovhannes Toumanian (1869 – 1923), the father of Armenian folk tales. Born in Lori, and the son of a village priest, Toumanian specialized in tales of everyday life, many of which he first heard from his own mother. Toumanian studied 50 variants of various Caucasian languages before writing his famous story – *Brave Nazar* (Surmelian, 1968). Aside from the work of Toumanian, many stories were collected by dervishes such as Tigran Navasardiaz (1861-1927), born in Echmiadzin. Too poor to hire a carriage or own a horse, he walked from village to village, acquiring the precious tales as he went. Indeed, in those days, all of the Armenian story collectors lived in holy poverty, as school teachers or monks (Surmelian, 1968). Ervand Lalayan (1864 – 1931), a skilful Armenian folk tale writer who was also a storyteller born in Alexandropol, elevated the Armenian folk tale to scholarly study. He founded and edited the important *Ethnographic Review*, and as leader of the Armenian Ethnographic Society, organized folklore expeditions in various parts of Armenia (Surmelian, 1968).

Armenians take great pride in their ancient history and epic tales of heroic struggles against oppression or adversity. They consider themselves to be lovers of freedom and fairness. Despite centuries of domination, war, and even genocide, Armenians have maintained their culture, language, and traditions. Moreover, during the reign of Tigranes the Great, about 195 -55 B.C., Armenian culture reached a height that had not been previously attained and spread to all the people. Tigranes gathered musicians and artists at his court at Ashtishat, and according to Moses of Khorene, a fifth-century historian, minstrels composed and performed a great deal of music, and were allowed access throughout the kingdom. Huge pagan festivals were celebrated, and it was during this period that Armenian theatre evolved (Bocherdt, 1959).

After the pagan period, and specifically in 301 A.D., Armenia embraced Christianity as the state religion. This was due largely to the efforts of St. Gregory the Illuminator who built the Mother Church, Holy Echmiadsin, in 303. Armenians all over the world look to the Holy Echmiadsin near Erevan – the capital of Armenia—as the center of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Through many centuries, the Church acted as protector of national culture and values. Although Armenian society is mostly secular, The Church retains its role as the national faith, as more than 90 percent of the population belongs to the Armenian Apostolic Church. In the second century A.D., Gregory the Illuminator converted king Tiridates, and established Christianity in Armenia (Cherdt, 1959). Pagan music, customs, and holidays, were adapted for use in the infant church, which was destined to be a strong unifying force in Armenia (Bocherdt, 1959). Later, the fifth century saw the invention of the Armenian alphabet by St. Mesrob Mashdotz, the development of musical notation, the translation of the Bible into Armenian, and the appearance of the first Armenian historians (Bocherdt, 1959).

Armenians, in common with other peoples from the Near East, excel in story telling (Hoogasian and Gardner, 1944). Often not satisfied with quietly relating the adventures of a poor lad, a rich king or some other character in a tale, an Armenian story teller may walk about and dramatically pantomime the action suggested (Bocherdt, 1959).

Data Analysis

In this study, I chose a sample of Armenian tales that are very popular, including *Apples of Immortality*, the text of which is from a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) collection of representative literary works of Armenia. These folk tales represent the Armenian culture. Many Armenian folk tales close with the words, “three apples fell from heaven” equivalent to the well known saying, “they lived happily ever after” (Avakian, 1987). The use of the apple in the terminal formula of the folk tale is a distinctly Armenian literary motif. Avakian (1987) provides a thorough analysis of this terminal formula and discovers that in some tales, God, not heaven, is the source of the apples.

Let us look at the apple. According to Avakian (1987), the native home of the apple extends from the Balkans and southern U.S.S.R. eastward through the Trans—caucasus, Iran, Turkestan, and northward to the Altai Mountains. Therefore, it was a well-known fruit to many people in antiquity, including the Armenians who not only lived in part of this area, but were also recognized as traders in Europe and Asia. Avakian (1987) discussed the symbolism of the apple, pointing out that the power of the apple is associated with love, life, and immortality. Avakian added that Armenians also look upon the apple as a simple gift of friendship (Avakian, 1987). Thus, Just as the apple as a symbol is important to Armenians, so is music. To save themselves from culturilicide (Prakash and Stuchul, 2004), many Armenians taught themselves how to play music and memorized folk music. To rescue Armenians from the brink of the grave of indifference, it is necessary to call to them in the dialect of their ancestors. It is necessary to play upon the flutes of Mount Masis (Ararat) in their ears; it is time to wipe the dust from our harps; to reset and stretch their loose and broken strings; to set the press at work, and by its means to broadcast the national songs and tales, and study the literature and the archaeology and the writings and sayings of these people (Downing, 1972; Wingate, 1910).

Methodology

Apples of Immortality is a collection of forty Armenian tales; by analyzing three tales I will illustrate some of the common characteristics of Armenian tales. To represent the characteristics that describe Armenian customs and beliefs I chose the following stories: *Apples of Immortality*, *The Woodcutter*, and *Faithful Wife*. I searched for eight topics within these tales in order to illustrate how culture is embedded in literature. The eight topics are culturally specific symbols, metaphors, the characterization in the Armenian folk tales, the beginning and ending formulas, setting, music, art and food, the hidden message, and religion.

Being an insider helped me in selecting these topics, since I am familiar with the Armenian culture and know how it is embedded in the literature. This helped reduce bias in the study.

First tale: *Apples of Immortality*

The first tale is *Apples of Immortality*, a story about a king who has three sons. An apple tree of immortality grows in his garden and it is the wonder of the whole world. The king is never able to eat the apples, for every year, somebody steals them. So the king asks his sons to catch the thief, and only the third son succeeds. The success of the third son illustrates how the Armenians believe that a child born late in the married life of his parents is more gifted than his siblings; the hero is always the third son of a king. This is clear in the tale where the king tells his third and youngest son “O my son, how can you expect to catch the thief when your older brothers tried and failed? The youth insisted, and the king gave his consent” (Surmelian, 1968, pp.42).

1. Culturally specific symbols: The apples, water, and mountains are cultural symbols in this tale. “An Apple-Tree of Immortality grew in the garden! it was the wonder of the whole world” (Surmelian, 1968, pp.41). The apples in this, and other Armenian, tales symbolize life and immortality. We can notice the importance of apples from the tales, as well as songs such as the song “knsori zarin dague” under the apple tree. Also, we can notice the ending of this and other stories, “Three apples fell from heaven: one for the teller of this tale, one for the listener, and one for him who heeds the teller’s words” again celebrates the fruit, in fact, for Armenians apples and pomegranates are favoured as symbols of life, maternity, prosperity, or love (Avakian, 1987, Surmelian, 1968).

Moreover, other cultures use trees as a symbol, for example, indigenous people in Mexico and Central America have recently turned to ancient sayings about trees from the Popol Vuh, the sacred book of the Mayas, to express the disastrous threats faced by their cultures (Parakash and Stuchul, 2004). The tree has a vigorous mythical content, and this is written in The Popol Vuh “They wrenched off our fruits. They ripped off our branches. They burned our trunks. But they could not kill our roots” (Parakash and Stuchul, 2004, pp.64).

It appears the oldest traditions of not only the Mayas and the Aztecs, but of almost all cultures—including the Armenians, have, for centuries, worshipped trees. Ancient symbolisms surrounding trees and roots are now being recovered as contemporary symbols for cultural regeneration. One such elaboration discusses how the tree’s foliage represents the most visible aspects of a culture, its language, art, food, housing, common behaviors, the morphological dimension. The trunk represents aspects that are partially invisible as well as partially visible, the composition of the family; the structure of medical, political, legal, or religious practices; or the other structural dimensions of culture. The roots symbolize the deepest aspects of the culture, the invisible, the mythical dimension that distinguishes and defines worldviews; the horizon of intelligibility, the imaginary, the source of meaning, and the root of knowledge and of spirituality (Parakash and Stuchul, 2004). Moreover, the tree of life and its mythology and imagery have been centred in the fundamental speculations, beliefs, customs and values, and in their ritual representation (James, 1968).

According to early Armenian belief, the mountains, animals, plants, and many phenomena of nature were initially people transformed by a supernatural force. Armenian mountains have been personified as brothers, sisters, giants, bulls, and dragons often at conflict with each other. The sun was represented as a bird shaped like a fiery girl holding a ring in its beak, the moon as a nascent and dying infant, and the stars and the constellations as tracks left by various people or animals. Elements of nature were objects of worship. Fire was regarded as sacred, a persecutor of evil. The worship of water was observed in tales about miraculous fish and in the fish-shaped stone monuments (dragons) erected near springs and irrigation ditches (Middle East, pp.357).

2. Metaphors: In this tale we notice the typical Armenian folk tale style using metaphors such as “No snake on its belly dare crawl into this place, no bird on the wing dares fly over it” means that it is a safe place (Surmelian, 1968, pp. 43). The saying “a beautiful maiden says to the sun: stand back, and let me come out and shine in your stead” (Surmelian, 1968, pp. 44), and “a man can gaze at her for seven days and seven nights without eating and drinking and just feasting his eyes upon her,” use metaphors to show someone’s extreme beauty (Sumerian, 1968, pp. 44).

3. The characterization in the Armenian folk tales: In this tale, we notice the contrasting of characters, such as a king versus a shepherd or beggar. Also, we see grateful or faithful animals help the hero attain his wish; the most popular animal characters in this tale are the horse and the fabulous emerald (a gigantic vulture that flies from the lower world to the upper world and carries the hero on its back). Supernatural creatures are also mentioned in this tale including destructive creatures such as the *devs* (popular giants), and snakes, called *veshabs*, or dragons (Sumerlian, 1968). In this tale the *devs* (seven headed dev, twelve headed monster, forty headed dev) are obvious.

Table 1: Devs

Devs of old (Surmelian, 1968).	Modern use of dev (Surmelian, 1968).
The mischievous spirit with super- human strength. These spirits take the form of beasts that frighten men.	The dev as a great strength. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He has the strength of dev. (Devi ooj ounie). • He eats like a dev. (Devi bes goudeh). • He has the height of dev. (Devi hasug ounie).

4. The beginning and the ending formulas: Armenian folk tales always begin with “There was and there was not” and the story that follows is told as something that did and did not happen. In the same way, Armenia itself exists and does not exist. The beginning of this tale is “There was and there was not a king who had three sons” (Surmelian, 1968, pp. 41). Further, the concluding words of this tale, “They attained their wish, and may you likewise attain your wish” as well as “Three apples fell from heaven: one for the teller of this tale, one for the listener, and one for him who heeds the teller’s words” are examples of the formulaic conclusions in these tales (Surmelian, 1968, pp. 52).

These beginning and ending sentences are found in almost every Armenian tale; they are meant to encourage the retelling of the tale, and to encourage the listener to ponder the understanding of the hidden message. These sentences also encourage the listener to pass on the story, as a means of preserving the oral tradition of the Armenian culture. Table 2 depicts the formulas found in most Armenian folktales.

Table 2: Formulas

The formulas for the introduction	The most popular concluding formulas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was and there was not, God was there. • There was and there was not, there was a boy. • There was someone, there was no one. • There lived, there was. • There was, there was not, and there was. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There lived happily ever after. • They reached their purpose, and may we reach ours. • The boy married the girl, and there was a wedding for seven days and seven nights or forty days and forty nights. • From the sky fell three apples: one to me, one to the story teller and one to the person who has entertained you. • They were tied to the tails of wild animals that were whipped and driven over mountainous trails: the largest piece they found later was only an ear. • The story is ended: there is no more.

5. Setting: the time element is quickly disposed of by saying, “A year passed, two years, three years passed, and still no sign of the boy” (Surmelian, 1968, pp. 50). Armenian folktales, generally, make regular use of ellipsis.

6. Music, arts and food: In this tale the author mentions: “he saw a beautiful houri-like maiden seated in a golden seat, doing her needle work” (Surmelian, 1968, pp. 43). The art of embroidery is widespread in all the Armenian provinces; this leads to preserving a national style. Every ethnographic region has developed its particular forms and kinds of embroidery. Thus, several places in Western Armenia are known for their arts of embroidery. For example, the needle work of Van, Marash, Ayntap, Karin, and Tarsus are distinctive. Embroidery is considered a constituent part of the national costume, which is the image of the people and the expressive feature of their life style, mode of life, and aesthetic perceptions. The traditional costume which is decorated by embroidery has fallen out of use today, has lost its former practical significance and has become instead a symbol of national culture, performing the role of an ethnic marker during national dances (Middle East, pp. 365).

7. The hidden message: In the Armenian tales there are morals in narrative, techniques. This is obvious when “the king’s youngest son fell on his knees and implored the king to spare their lives. O Father, I wish my brothers no harm, May God be their judge” (Surmelian, 1968, pp. 52). Here, the message is to be honest and forgive one another. It is clear that in almost all tales, the good always triumphs with kindness, justice, gratitude and modesty.

8. Religion: Armenia first became a Christian nation in 301, when the king Tiridates established Christianity as a sole religion of Armenia (Cherdt, 1959). In this tale we notice religious statements such as “O Father, I wish my brothers no harm, May God be their judge” (Surmelian, 1968, pp. 52).

Second tale: *The Woodcutter*

The second tale is *The Woodcutter*, about a poor woodcutter who became rich. A snake helped him by cutting his own body and burying it and a pomegranate tree grew in the chapel loaded with fruits packed full of pearls and diamonds. This tale shows how people envy each other, which becomes obvious when a rich merchant takes the woodcutter’s wealth. Eventually, the poor man was returned all his wealth and forgave the merchant (Surmelian, 1968).

1. Culturally specific symbols: trees and snakes. The trees and woods are important, exemplified by the pomegranate tree which is loaded with fruits packed full of pearls and diamonds. Time was personified in tales as an old man sitting on a top of a mountain while dawn was the disperser of night and a persecutor of evil spirits in the form of an immaculate virgin (Middle East, 367; Avakian, 1987).
2. Metaphors: In this tale we can notice metaphors such as; “two beautiful maidens, just like two beams of sunlight” (Surmelian, 1968, pp. 152). The author also mentions [He] “And at last met an old man with a white beard sitting by the roadside, and bowed before him” (Surmelian, 1968, pp. 153).

In Armenian tales, usually an old man with a white beard refers to time (Surmelian, 1968).

3. The characterization in the Armenian folk tales: In this tale we notice contrasting characters, such as: the rich (merchant, king's chamberlain, king's councillor) and the poor (the woodcutter). Supernatural creatures are also mentioned as helpers, like the snake who helped the poor woodcutter attain his wish. We can notice the personification of Armenian animals in everyday language where Armenians refer to the animals as brothers. For example "Good morning, brother snake! Said the woodcutter" (Surmelian, 1968, pp.148). Anthropomorphic animals are extremely popular in the Armenian folk tales. They are highly animistic, they talk, marry, have young, possess wisdom and magical ability such as: the magic *hureghen* (fiery), heavenly, or even flying horse. In the *Woodcutter*, there is a dialogue between the woodcutter and the snake. "My goodness, man, what is this? Said the snake. All the wild birds and beasts in the woods have been complaining about you. You don't leave them a stick! You pick up everything and go" (Surmelian, 1968, pp. 148). The environmental message is noticed within this tale.
4. The beginning and ending formulas: In the *Woodcutter*, the beginning formula is "Once upon a time there was a woodcutter" (Surmelian, 1968, pp. 148). And the ending formula is "Three apples fell from heaven: one for the teller of this tale, one for the listener, and one for him who heeds the teller's words" (Surmelian, 1968, pp. 155).
5. Setting: The time element is obvious here. "A month, two months, three months passed, until one day..." (Surmelian, 1968, pp. 149).
6. Music, arts and food: Duduk (the Armenian national musical pine) the clarinet and *davool* (drum) and *zurna* (pipe) (Middle East, pp. 369). These instruments are mentioned in the *Woodcutter* "The double wedding was celebrated with drums and bagpipes and amid great rejoicing for seven days and seven nights." The duduk is a traditional woodwind instrument of Armenian origins. It is an ethnic instrument, previously called *dziranapogh* (apricot horn) in Armenia, the duduk or *mey* in Turkey, the *duduki* in Georgia, the *balaban* in Azerbaijan, the *narmehney* in Iran, the *duduka* or *dudka* in Russia and Ukraine, duduk in Serbia, and the *daduk* in Bulgaria. The English word has been asserted as derived from the Russian word "dudka", or from the Turkish word "duduk" (Duduk, 2008). Armenian duduks are mainly made from aged apricot wood "Armenian plum." Unlike other double-reed instruments, the reed is quite wide, helping to give the duduk both its unique, mournful sound, as well as its remarkable breath requirements. The duduk player is called *dudukahar* in Armenia (Duduk, 2008).
7. The hidden message: Morals such as forgiveness when the woodcutter returned back everything to the merchant. There is also an environmental message and this is clear in the following dialogue "My goodness, man, what is this? Said the Snake. All the wild birds and beasts in the woods have been complaining about you. You don't leave them a stick. You pick up everything and go" (Surmelian, 1968, pp. 148).
8. Religion: In the *Woodcutter*, these statements are mentioned; "Glory be to God" "Every God's day", "He walked, to the ends of the earth looking for God.", "I created those mules as beasts of burden for man, and when they work their sores will heal. God said" (Surmelian, 1968).

Third tale: *Faithful Wife*

The third tale is *Faithful Wife*. This tale is about a very pretty wife who remained faithful to her poor husband after his travel to work. She paid no attention to the advances of other men. This tale shows how men tried to take advantage of her but she remained faithful.

1. Culturally specific symbols: In this tale, miraculous water and fishes are observed as a spring of immortality. "A spring of immortality gushed out of her mouth by God's order."
2. Metaphors: The author mentions the phrase spring of immortality to reveal the importance of water for life. We also notice the following phrase: "Now you are mine and I am thine!" (Surmelian, 1968, pp.207).
3. The characterization in the Armenian folk tales: The contrasting characters such as the rich versus the poor, for example, the poor husband versus the rich merchants. Therefore, it is important to understand what the author means in the story as how class, gender, and race are vital to the reading of children's literature (Hade, 1997).

4. The beginning and the ending formulas: The beginning formula in this tale is “There was once a man in Erevan who had a very pretty wife” (Surmelian, 1968, pp. 205). Erevan is the capital of Armenia. The ending formula is “Three apples fell from heaven. One for him who ordered this tale, one for the teller, and one for the listener” (Surmelian, 1968, pp. 210).
5. Setting: The narrator is least concerned with the settings. If a place of action is suggested, it is always Armenia, or using the narrator’s or the audience’s own village. In this tale the author mentions Erevan, the capital of Armenia.
6. Music, arts and food: Foods are mentioned in this tale and here I can mention the traditional Armenian food from the Western Armenia such as *soujoukh* (sausage), *choereg* (round bread), *somen hatz* (round bread), *tarkana* (yogurt soup), *manti* (meat dumplings), *basterma* (dried meat), *lablabie* (dried chick-peas), etc. As for the Armenian diet, it includes a world of different tastes from Eastern cuisine. Staple foods include greens (parsley, spinach, tarragon,...etc), fish, beef, cabbage, and *lavash* (lightly browned thin bread), rolled out in large circles and baked in a *tonir* (special oven dug in the ground). Common dishes in Armenia include *harisa* (wheat and chicken or beef cooked in large pots for several days), *kyabab* and *khorovats* (marinated meat placed on sticks and cooked by men on coal), *dolma* (stuffed grape or cabbage leaves with meat, cracked wheat, greens, and spices). Many people enjoy *basturma* (salted beef with a spicy coating), *sujukh* (minced beef with greens, and spices), and *kuftal* (pounded, boiled meat). Also, from early spring to late fall, Armenia is awash in fruit: grapes (table and wine varieties), peaches, apples, pears, cherries, mulberries, figs, walnuts, strawberries, and many others. Apricots native to Armenia are among the best in the world. Apples and pomegranates are very special to Armenians. Armenians preserve fruits, vegetables, pickles, fruit drinks, and cured meats for winter consumption. Further, Armenians drink all types of coffee, but a thick brew served in small cups is most customary (Surmelian, 1968; Avakian, 1987).
7. The hidden message: Morals. “She paid no attention to his advances and remained a faithful wife.” It is clear that in almost all Armenian tales, good always triumphs, with kindness, justice, gratitude and modesty. The author also points out gender, noting how Armenian women were treated: “She slaved for his brother like a servant” (Surmelian, 1968, pp.205). The heroine here embodies the virtues of Armenian womanhood: modesty, affection, loyalty to her man, kindness, and forgiveness.
8. Religion: The author uses some phrases such as: “I sinned against you, forgive me!” also “God saved me for this day, she said. My dear husband, I am still your lawfully wedded wife” (Surmelian, 1968, pp. 210).

What I find interesting is migration and how it affects culture specifically, when groups or individuals find themselves living in the middle of the Diaspora as exiled people (Conor, 1986). Although Armenians have a historical homeland and origin, they have been exposed to some form of attempted genocide, and many still live outside their home country. But what has saved most Armenians’ identity is their religion.

Findings

This research points out some of the characteristics of Armenian folk tales. These characteristics show how culture is embedded within the literature. Readers can examine Armenian culture, values and beliefs, enabling them to better understand cultural differences.

My experience as an insider has helped me to represent the culture. In my research I chose three tales: *Apples of Immortality*, *The Woodcutter* and *Faithful Wife*. I searched for the following topics within these tales: Culturally specific symbols, metaphors, the characterization in the Armenian folk tales, the beginning and the ending formulas, setting, music, arts and food, the hidden message, and religion.

Data

Data are illustrated in the following tables.

Table (3): The three tales / the (8) topics.

Table (4): The common findings from the three tales.

Table 3: Three tales / Eight topics

Topics	Tales		
	Apples of Immortality	The Woodcutter	Faithful Wife
Culturally specific symbols	Apple tree, Water spring	Trees, Snakes (Vishabe, dragon)	Water (spring of immortality)
Metaphors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No snake on its belly dare crawl into this place, no bird on the wing dares fly over it. A beautiful maiden says to the sun: stand back, and let me come out and shine in your stead. A man can graze at her for seven days and seven nights without eating and drinking and just feasting his eyes upon her wondrous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two beautiful maidens just like two beams of sunlight. 	You are mine and I am thane.
The characterization in the Armenian folk tales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contrasting characters King versus beggar or shepherd Emerald bird and horse Supernatural creatures (devs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contrasting characters Rich versus poor Supernatural creatures: snakes (veshabs) Anthropomorphic animals Old man representing time 	Contrasting Characters Rich versus poor
The beginning and the ending formulas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was and there was not They attained their wish, and may you like wise attain your wish Three apples fell from heaven: one for the teller of this tale, one for the listener, and one for him who heeds the teller's words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once upon a time there was a woodcutter Three apples fell from heaven: one for the teller of this tale, one for the listener, and one for him who heeds the teller's words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was once a man in Erevan Three apples fell from heaven: one for him who ordered this tale, one for the teller, and one for the listener
Setting	Time: "A year passed; two years, three years passed, and still no sign of the boy"	Time: "A month, two months, three months passed until one day..."	Place of action: Erevan (capital of Armenia)
Music, arts and food	Arts: embroidery	Music: duduk (the Armenian national musical pine, apricot horn)	Food: traditional Armenian food
The hidden message	Morals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forgiveness Kindness Gratitude and modesty 	Morals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forgiveness Environmental message (not to cut the trees)	Morals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faithfulness Loyalty Modesty Forgiveness Kindness Justice Gratitude Gender message: (how to treat the females)
Religion	Christianity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "O father, I wish my brothers no harm, may God be their judge." 	Christianity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Glory be to God" "Every God's day" "He walked, to the ends of the earth looking for God" "I created those mules and beasts of burden for man, and when they work their sores will heal. God said." 	Christianity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I sinned against you, forgive me!" "God saved me for this day, she said. My dear husband, I am still your lawfully wedded wife."

Table 4: The common topics between the tales

Topics	The three tales
Culturally specific symbols	The same within the three tales (immortality), apples or water
The characterization in the Armenian folk tales	The same within the three tales Contrasting characters. Rich versus poor
The hidden message	The same within the three tales. Morals
Religion	Obvious within the three tales

There are different metaphors within the three tales. And the setting (time) is the same within the two tales *Apples of Immortality* and *The Woodcutter*. Whereas the place is clear in the *Faithful Wife*. The art of embroidery is mentioned in *Apples of Immortality*, music is mentioned in *The Woodcutter*, food is mentioned in *Faithful Wife*.

Conclusion

Armenia is a land which has been ravaged by war on far too many occasions. The Armenian tales have survived for many generations in the only way possible, through word of mouth. They were told and retold during the hard winters, and survived just as the Armenian people and culture have survived (Downing, 1972). Therefore, multi-cultural literature and diverse life experience, traditions, histories, values, world views, and perspectives of diverse cultural groups make up a society (Mendoza and Reese, 2001). The Armenian Church fostered literature, and the principal early works are religious. The first major Armenian literary work is a 5th century translation of the Bible; its language became the standard of classical Armenian. Still, the Armenian literature is popular with the adults as well as the children today. Folk tales are part of the popular culture even in the computer age. They are still read and told by people from other cultures.

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