

Cultural Daily

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Armenian & Greek: How to Balance a Mixed Identity

Andrea Tatevossian-Caloumenos · Wednesday, April 15th, 2020

Having a mixed identity is way more complex than just the races that compile one's family. In my opinion, being of mixed identity encompasses how one was raised, how they see themselves as an individual and how the world perceives them to be as well. As for myself, I am half Greek and half Armenian. Coming from two Middle Eastern cultures is truly so similar yet so different. A good portion of my life has been about trying to figure out how to perfectly balance the two seamlessly in order to fully feel as if I am the truest version of myself.

When asked about my Armenian side, I often tell people that it was my first language and is a big influence of who I am today. Ever since I was a young kid, I have been taught to speak the language as well as learn about my country's heritage. I think that this concept is very important for every culture because if one does not learn how to speak their country's language and cook their country's food, how is tradition going to be carried on?

Being a part of the Armenian Student's Association at my university has really allowed me to fully connect with my Armenian heritage. It has allowed me to connect to my Armenian side by participating in events and fundraisers that help better society as a whole as well as become more aware of what is happening in my community. When a part of an organization or group that has the same common goal: to connect and learn about their heritage, there is a high sense of motivation that an individual feels in achieving the goal due to the moral support provided by the rest of the group.

Something I very much admire about my Armenian heritage is how we showed the world how much we can come together. Back in 2015, for the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, hundreds of thousands of Armenians started a march from Little Armenia in Hollywood, California all the way to the Turkish Embassy on Wilshire Blvd in Los Angeles, California. The Armenian Genocide was the systematic killing and deportation of Armenians by the Turks of the Ottoman Empire. In 1915, during World War I, the Turkish government set in motion a plan to expel and massacre Armenians.

By the early 1920s, when the massacres and deportations finally ended, between 600,000 and 1.5 million Armenians were dead, with many more forcibly removed from the country. To this day, the Turks will not acknowledge this event taking place. This horrible event made Armenians as a people and a nation closer and stronger than ever. For this reason, I am so proud to be a part of such a strong line of people. We took a tragic event and made it an empowering movement, to become something bigger and better than before.

As for my Greek side, this has been something that I have always been interested in, yet never really been able to explore. Recently, I have had the opportunity to find a Greek community and become more involved in learning about the culture as well as figuring out how to connect it to my Armenian heritage. The more I learned about my Greek side, I saw how similar it is to my Armenian side—both value family at the core. I think that coming from two Middle Eastern backgrounds allows for a well-rounded individual when one is in-tune with the culture.

It is also important to note that one's surroundings can highly influence their way of thinking and shape their identity. For me, I grew up in Pasadena, California as well as Glendale, California for a majority of my life.

Without a doubt, having grown up in these cities that have a large Armenian population has truly had an impact on who I am as a person. In regards to Glendale specifically, I have had the luxury of being blocks away from traditional Armenian restaurants and markets for all my life.

When going to these restaurants and markets, there is a sense of home that one feels. When walking into the Armenian markets, specifically bakeries, you have the Armenian grandmother welcoming you and immediately making you feel at home by asking you how you are preceded by what you would like to get from the bakery. Although Armenia is 7,201 miles from Los Angeles, these Armenian grandmothers that work in the bakery make it feel as if you are truly home in the motherland.

I think that staying aware is important when trying to balance many cultural identities. When one is aware, they are mindful just because the thought is in their head that they want to stay aware. The first step in balancing a mixed cultural identity is to want to learn how to balance. When someone wants to do something, they make a greater effort to find every way to achieve a successful outcome.

As for myself, I wanted to learn how to balance. So, I became a member of my school's Armenian Association and researched about Greek communities in Los Angeles and made the effort to become more involved to immerse myself in the culture fully. When putting a 100% of yourself into wanting to learn or do something, the higher the rate of success is.

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