

**MULTICULTURALISM IN THE PRESENT WORLD:
THROUGH THE ANALYSIS OF MGRDITCH MARGOSYAN'S WRITINGS**

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Nowadays the concept of multiculturalism is used worldwide, despite not being new. Mgrditch Margosyan, an Armenian writer who the present paper dwells on, in one of his books writes about this issue. The writer states that it is fundamental to establish a connection among us because it the communication that allows us to understand and other people to be understood. If we think about it, we notice that the world itself is gives many means to connect ourselves with other people.

If we are not able to establish a connection, a dialogue, we will not be able to comprehend. Thus, we drift away from a multicultural society. All these new ways to communicate are great inventions, but they need to be used properly. We can find the right way by reading great writers or thinkers of our times. In what they say, we can find the best advice how to change our vision of the world. Communication underlies multiculturalism, which is not an invention of our times. The idea behind this word is something placed at the birth of the human thought: the Greek already had the idea of a plurality of cultures.

A good way, maybe the best one, to analyze multiculturalism in the world nowadays is to speak to people living in countries, cities, villages, or in one word an environment, where there are people from different cultures.

In this respect, it is worth studying works by Mgrditch Margosyan, a writer of Armenian descent, born in Turkey, more precisely in Diyarbakir in 1938.

I have chosen my analysis to be based on Mgrditch Margosyan's works, as his thought is innovative because he turns his own experience into a worldwide contest, transforming a local feeling into a universal sample. His literary work spins around personal experiences through which the writer is able to analyze the social web belonging to the past and nowadays, with a unique clearness and an irony that only the best artist deserves. All these features make Margosyan's work immune to censorship and extremely clear. The author's style is accurate and bright sparkled with personal opinions that never negatively affect his style and thought.

Gavur Mahallesi, Margosyan's masterpiece comprises all the issues that the writer holds dear, as it is an autobiographical novel, which follows the life of young Margosyan in his hometown Diyarbakir. The writer has the courage to write this novel in Turkish, trying to settle himself as a pacesetter between the Armenians and the Turks. The novel portrays the everyday life of the Armenians living in the city after the World War II, but confined in a quarter called "Gavur Mahallesi" (The Infidels' Quarter). They still suffer segregation, in a city where even the dead are deprived of a cross on their graves. The

Armenians, who live there, cherish their ancestral land, reminding them of their village. Even the Young Margosyan learned to praise Heredan, his father's native village. In fact, the life in the quarter is described by the author in such idyllic colours that the real reasons for the migration of the Armenians to Istanbul are never revealed. The novel follows the lives of Assyrian, Caldean Armenian couples that lived in the native quarter of the writer, Hançepek. They remember how the life once used to be different from the present: people from different cultures lived together, still keeping their own culture intact. We can reasonably say that this novel can be a "treaty of multiculturalism", in which this concept is considered in all its aspects.

The concept of inferiority is crucial to describing multiculturalism. I would like to be very clear: here, I am not prioritising any cultures; I am not saying that the Turks were worse than the Armenians, the Assyrians, the Kurds, or the opposite. It would be a huge mistake even to think that. We are not here to judge, we are here only to try to carry out the best message from the words of this great writer.

Obviously, nobody can forgive people like Hitler, Mussolini, and the Young Turks for what they have done, for all the suffering they have caused and are still causing after decades. We are here to try to understand what caused all that suffering to be sure that it will never happen again.

In *Gavur Mahallesi*, people used to live under the conditions of inferiority, had experienced the pain and for this reason most of times they tried not to let other people suffer what they had suffered.

Indeed, the whole issue revolves around a statement made by Margosyan: "*Those people lived together in peace sharing the most important feature owned by each person: they are all humans! They are humans sharing the same geographical space*". Hence, factors like skin colour or religion are irrelevant. We are all similar, distinguished by our own culture.

Our culture is what makes us unique. It is so important to understand that everyone has their peculiar culture and is just for this reason that nobody has the right to discriminate anyone.

Before considering the articles selected by me, I would like to talk a little bit about the book where these articles are collected. The book has a very particular name *Çengelliğne*, which means "Safety pin". It was published in 1999 and is a collection of a number of articles, written by Margosyan and first published in *Evrensel* newspaper. All these articles consider social, cultural, and political issues: they tell the truth, sometimes very uncomfortable and difficult to deal with. Most people turn a blind eye to these issues and this is just what the writer blames his readers for, not explicitly, but ironically, letting the message through the written words and in particular in some of his "short stories", written as letters to a dead friend. The subjects considered here are racism, freedom of thought and speech, and differences among cultures.

Margosyan is able to approach these topics with great feeling and emotion, because he himself suffered from them. Since his youth, he had had to fight

racism and segregation; when he started his writing career he had to fight censorship, watching a lot of colleagues succumb to it and others having a much worse fate. The writer is also disappointed with some of his colleagues; many journalists do not fight censorship and prefer to stay neutral. This is not surely the case of Margosyan who expresses his opinions in his writings. The first article under consideration is *"The issue of the Armenians"*. In this case, we find the topic of the racism brought to a local dimension, as he took the Armenian nation as an example. In this article, the writer tries to explain to the audience attending the conference to which he has been invited "what kind of people Armenians are". This is the same question Margosyan poses to himself trying to find an answer. The article also considers the difficulties facing the Armenians living in Turkey.

Margosyan tells us how difficult it is to be an Armenian in Turkey, even if these lands have been inhabited by the Armenians for ages. The writer asks himself how it could have happened; could it have been the Armenians' fault? Might they have kept themselves confined to living in a box after the evil committed towards them? Still, until the Turkish side maintained this attitude of denial, there would be no possibility for conciliation. At the same time, conciliation would not be possible, if some Armenian circles kept on regarding the Turks as a nation merely able to commit infamous acts.

What Armenians need is changing their opinion of the people who committed the genocide; maybe it would be impossible to forgive them (and this is very understandable), but at least they need to understand that most Turks nowadays are not guilty of what happened and for sure they do not share the ideas that incited the Young Turks.

During an interview, Margosyan states that reconciliation is possible if there is a dialogue between the two populations. The writer speaks about a dialogue to be established between the inhabitants of the two countries so that they do not consider themselves as enemies any more, but as people living on the opposite sides of Mount Ararat and sharing the same traditions. They do not share resentment, but just the same practices in their everyday life and for this reason they deserve to share peace and understanding. The second article, entitled *"The issue of the freedom of thought"*, considers the freedom of thought and speech, and is related to censorship. This is really an actual issue in Turkey and in many other countries, unfortunately. The reason that pushed the writer to write about this subject is the closedown of a Turkish newspaper.

"Whatever it would be the reason, the closedown of a newspaper was a mistake. No! More than just a mistake, a shame. Against who? Surely against each person living in that Country. Yes! Against each of them!"

Margosyan tells us that the indicator that lets us find out the civilization level of a country is really the one measuring the individual liberties of the citizens of those countries. *"Why did the government violate the right of the citizens to have a freedom of speech, the right that the same government has to protect? From the point of view of the citizens, the government was destroying itself and*

its own constitution. Is this not just the clearest evidence that the State does not treat its citizens as “humans”? Because “Thought” is the element that distinguishes the humans from the animals. Is just this the reason, that some philosopher, in defining the human being, described it as “an animal capable of thinking”?

Often the ones who recognize this kind of issue are those who have ideas that hardly find a place to be expressed. As an example, we can use Turkey, since it is the country, which Margosyan talks about. Turkey is a country that for many years wished to enter the European Union, without accepting the conditions required by the EU (one is the recognition of the Armenian genocide), and where the freedom of thought and speech is still a pipe dream especially for the ethnic minorities. Many journalists and reporters, especially the Kurds were arrested and put in jail; the one and only newspaper in Kurdish was closed down and another magazine was forced to close for a week.

Hrant Dink's death, unfortunately, did not move so many hearts and minds, except for his near ones. The trial regarding it ended with a sentence of 22 years of jail for the seventeen-year-old murderer of the writer. This curse is still so difficult to eradicate, but it is also true that this process will take several years to end. The path the two countries have started is leading to something. Ten or twenty years ago, the situation was much worse: now Turkey has started communicating with Armenia. There must be a dialogue. People must have the contact to be able to know each other and not just judge each other along political or ideological lines. If the contact increases, Margosyan says, a solution will come. The next article considered is “The issue of the mother tongue.” This is another theme very close to the Armenian author, because he mentions it in his books and in some interviews. The article reads: “*Animals understand each other smelling, human beings understand each other speaking*”

What does this mean? Here we take the language as a unit of measurement, property owned by humans only. Margosyan considers the issue of the mother tongue in his interview as well when he is asked to speak a little bit about Kurdish and especially the issue of letting the Kurds receive their education in Kurdish. Addressing this question, the writer states: “*The mother tongue issue is really important to me. I feel it in my bones*». We can understand how much he cares about this issue just by this statement.

In one of his books, *Biletimiz İstanbul'a kesildi* (*Our ticket was for Istanbul*), Margosyan tells the reader why he moved from Diyarbakır to Istanbul. In his hometown, there where no Armenian schools where he could learn his mother tongue; the only chance he had was the local priest, but he could not teach the language properly. Hence, he decided to move to Istanbul, where he faced a lot of difficulties, but where he could also learn and speak Armenian. His Diyarbakır accent was so strong, that people would call him a Kurd. “*Kurds, in order to underline the importance of the mother tongue and going maybe beyond this matter, use the expression “zımane zıkmaki”, which means “the language that is in the mother's belly”*. With this statement we see that in Kurds' opinion, the

boy begins to learn his mother tongue before the birth already, in his mother's belly, in the uterus, in a few words, when he's still an embryo".

I believe that just these written lines are enough to understand how the Kurds feel about this issue. However, more in general, I also think that these words could be just perfect for any ethnic group that does not have the chance to speak their own mother tongue. The language is what identifies the person and the ethnic group he belongs to and an ethnic group, which is banned to retain its own mother tongue, is an ethnic group doomed to suffer.

I would like to conclude this paper by studying the last two articles selected from *Çengelliğne*. Both of them are in the format of letters addressed to a dead friend named Metin. The titles are "*The issue of Metin and the shame*" and "*The issue of Me and You*". In these articles, he tells us what kinds of crime were committed in Turkey and all over the world, writing to his friend Metin, whom he asks about the afterlife. This letter gives us a lot of food for thought.

He starts telling us about the Alevi's massacre of Sivas in the Madımak Hotel, in July 1993, where the victims, who had gathered for a cultural festival, were killed when a mob of radical Islamists, set fire to the hotel where the group had assembled. He tells us about the Maraş Massacre of December 1978 when over one hundred civilians, mostly Alevi Kurdish slum dwellers, were killed by the Grey wolves. Here Margosyan does not criticise anyone, but just recalls the events of the past hoping they will not be repeated.

Margosyan asks his friend to tell him about the afterlife and asks him to help him in his attempts to improve this world. In this respect, he expresses his readiness to be "*The servant of Metin's hands seizing the pen.*"

The second letter, "*The issue of Me and You*", is like a treaty on the lack of connection we have with other people, which very often leads to episodes of racism. He asks himself still addressing the questions to Metin, why often we are not able to befriend other human beings. Margosyan made a very interesting and curious comment telling "*A Turk has no friend except for the Turks*", asking himself "*We are able to obtain 'fur' from 'bears', but we aren't able to obtain 'friendship' from 'people'.*"

Reading these first words, we can understand how Margosyan feels about the dire need to be in contact with other people. Margosyan then shifts his focus of the discussion addressing Metin the following question: "*May there exist in the world a race or a colour of skin higher than another one? Do we have the right to discriminate people on the basis of their skin colour?*". Margosyan starts plotting his letter forming his thoughts into a series of questions that are crowding his mind. "*For example, I ask myself, how important religion is. Or maybe it's not important? In front of God, I ask to myself, which Home does He prefer most? The church? The synagogue? The mosque? The Alevi's Temple? Or maybe all of them but the Buddhist Temple? Does God love more the shade of the minaret or that of the belfry?*".

"*Good, there are no words for the children who already in their mother belly, before their birth, fight bayonet's strokes, or for the ones hit by atomic*

bombs; in front of God, which is the place for the children already dead before their birth? Are they sinners? Which is the border that divides the sin from the charitable act?”.

“Everything starts when we consider one's cheese tastier than the one belonging to another person?[...]The Turkish sheep cheese or the Greek white one, the Circadian cheese, the Bulgarian Caciocavallo, the French Roquefort, the Kurd curds of the pathetic Anatolian peasant, or the 'low-fat cheese'?”

This question comprises a claim very difficult to be heard from the mouth of a human being nowadays, because, unfortunately too often, these words could be considered as an admission of inferiority. On the contrary, in my opinion, they show totally the opposite: the acceptance of neighbours, of people different from us, both in their habits and opinions.

Here come Margosyan's words as a proof: “So people will disagree with each other, most of time, pointing to their own cheese as the tastiest one among all? But it's so difficult to say. Is it yours (the tastier one)? Furthermore, is it absolutely necessary that your cheese must be tastier than another's?”.

Thanks to an example so banal, we are able to understand the mistake underlying our society, the mistake that often leads us to behave in a wrong manner. Thus, what we have read by Mgrditch Margosyan, are lessons, which are beneficial to us. However, there is a long way to go. We really have to try to cover the distance that separates us from a better world; we need to create a better world with a boost that needs to start from each citizen.

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**ԲԱԶՄԱՄՇԱԿՈՒԹԱՅՆՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆ ԱՐԴԻ ԱՇԽԱՐՀՈՒՄ
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ՄԱՐԿՈ ՏԻԲԵՐԻՈ (Իտալիա, ք. Ռավեննա)

Ամփոփում

Բազմամշակութայնության գաղափարը սկիզբ է առել հայ գրող Մկրտիչ Մարկոսյանի ստեղծագործություններում: Մ. Մարկոսյանը ծնվել է Դիարբեքի քաղաքում (Թուրքիա), 1938 թ., ներկայումս ապրում է Ստամբուլում: Ստեղծագործում է երկու լեզվով՝ հայերեն և թուրքերեն: Գրողը իրեն հատուկ նուրբ հեզնանքով կերտում է մարդկային փոխհարաբերությունների և կյանքի իրադարձությունների ողջ բարդ ելևէջը: Ընդ որում, նա իրականությունը պատկերում է՝ հենվելով անձնական փորձառության վրա: Անդրադառնալով ռասիզմի, մարդու իրավունքների, մտքի ազատության, մշակութային բազմազանության թեմաներին՝ Մ. Մարկոսյանն արտահայտում է սեփական վերաբերմունքը նշված հիմնախնդիրների նկատմամբ:

**МУЛЬТИКУЛЬТУРАЛИЗМ В СОВРЕМЕННОМ МИРЕ
(НА ОСНОВЕ ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЙ МКРТЫЧА МАРКОСЯНА)**

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Резюме

Мультикультурализм зародился в творчестве современного армянского писателя Мкртыча Маркосяна, родившегося в Диярбекире (1938 г.) и ныне живущего в Стамбуле. Мкртыч Маркосян творит на двух языках – армянском и турецком. С присущей ему тонкой иронией М. Маркосян воссоздает в своих произведениях всю сложную гамму человеческих взаимоотношений и жизненных перипетий, при этом в отображении реальности важную роль играет его личный жизненный опыт. Обращаясь к теме расизма, прав человека, свободы мысли, культурного разнообразия, писатель выражает свое личностное отношение к названным проблемам.