REFLECTIONS ON A SILENT NATION THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE SHARED EVERYDAYNESS IN POST-GENOCIDAL TURKEY

Suzan Meryem Rosita

> The carpet sellers at the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul count among the best storytellers of the world.
> Whether they are Armenian or Turkish, each has told the story about the missing colour. Legend has it that – since 1915 – one colour is missing in all of the designs.[1]
>
> The visitor's brochure for Anitkabir, Atatürk's final resting place, tells us that the marble stones leading up to Atatürk's tomb are decorated with the designs of ancient Anatolian carpets. But there is no colour; just grey lines on white marble.[2]

In recent years, it has become increasingly popular to write Armenians back into the national history of Turkey, and to explain why genocidal violence has not been acknowledged at a state level. So far, these studies have been either micro-histories about Armenians[3] or meta-narratives of the Turkish nation state writ large, as if these

---

[1] This was relayed to me in conversations and interviews with several carpet sellers during January and February 2015. Also see the chapter in my grand-aunt's book about the carpet industry where she argues that the carpet industry was motly in the hands of the Christian population of the Ottoman empire: "Lorenz Charlotte, *Die Frauenfrage im Osmanischen Reiche mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der arbeitenden Klasse, Die Welt des Islams*, Bd. 6, H. 3/4 (Dec. 31, 1918), pp. 136-177. On a personal note, parts of my childhood were spent in the covered halls of the Grand Bazaar, where my mother learned how to weave, dye and sell carpets.

[2] Seen during my visit to Anitkabir with the staff members of the Atatürk Archives at the National Library of Turkey. I want to take this opportunity to thank the director of these archives, Kemal Yentürk, for his kind assistance during my six-week research stay at these archives and for accompanying me with his staff to Anitkabir on February 27, 2014. In a book about Atatürk, his death and legacy, we learn that the interior designer Orhan Arda who looked at "over 10000 carpets and kelims" to design the right motives chose the carpet motives. See in: Demirci Vedat, *O'nun Çocuklari (His Children)*, Ankara, 1983, 73-74.

[3] Abakay Ahmet, *Hoşana'nin Son Sözü [Last Words from Hoshana]*, Istanbul, 2013; Altinay Ayşe Gül, "Gendered Silences, Gendered Memories: New Memory Work on Islamized Armenians in Turkey," *Eurozine* (2014), and Altinay & Fethiye Çetin, *The Grandchildren: The Hidden Legacy of 'Lost' Armenians in Turkey*, Piscataway, 2014; Atnur İbrahim Ethem, *Türkiye'de Ermeni Kadinlari ve Çocuklari Meselesi (1915-1923) [The Issue of Armenian Women and Children in Turkey (1915-1923)]*, Ankara, 2005; Helin Anahit, "'He is Armenian but he was born that way; there isn't much he can do about it': Exploring Identity and Cultural Assumptions in Turkey," *Patterns of Prejudice* 48.2 (2014), pp. 201-222; Bağı Yusuf, *Ermeni Kizi Ağçik [The Armenian Girl Agcik]*, Istanbul, 2007; Başyurt Erhan, *Ermeni Evlatliklar: Sakli Kalmiş Hayatlar (Hidden Lives)*, Istanbul, 2006; Bilal Melissa, "The lost lullaby and other stories about being an Armenian in Turkey," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 34 (2006), pp. 67-92, and Bilal "Longing for Home at Home: Armenians in Istanbul," *Thamyris/Intersecting: Place, Sex and Race* 13.1 (2006), pp.

two narratives are incompatible.[4] In my dissertation, I bring these recent debates together and explore the different ways in which Turks and Armenians express and fashion their selfhood within the very restricted and severely muted narrative space of modern Turkish nationhood in their daily lives during 1923-1953. The entry points for such an exploration are two historically entangled and contested questions: (1) What made the Turks so Turkish?; and (2) what happened to the Armenians in Turkey?[5] These questions constitute the core of my thesis and will be explored through a narration of the everyday as found in recorded interviews, memoirs, diaries, biographies, literary works, films (and to a lesser extent photography) and traveller/foreign observer accounts. Schoolbooks, adult educational material and selected newspaper articles from 1930-1950 will provide the necessary background to official narratives. In this way I wish to demonstrate how national identity in Turkey both coheres and fragments in the everyday practices that represent citizenhood, and it is enforced through the mnemonic practices, institutionalized or not, which are both present in (e.g. Atatürk cult) and absent from (genocide un-recognition) official narratives. These mnemonic practices, I argue, stem from a culture of silence that has developed in the climate of post-genocidal Turkey.

55-65; Çetin Fethiye, *Anneannem [My Grandmother]*, Istanbul, 2004; Baskin Oran, *MK Adli Çocuğun Tehcir Anilar: 1915 ve Sonrasi [The Story of the Kid called MK: 1915 and After]*, Istanbul, 2005 and Baskin "The Reconstruction of Armenian Identity in Turkey and the Weekly Agos," *Nouvelles d'Armenie Magazine* 17 (2006), pp. 12; Peroomian Rubina, *And those Who Continued Living in Turkey after 1915: the Metamorphosis of the Post-Genocide Armenian Identity as Reflected in Artistic Literature*, Yerevan, 2008; Tachjian Vahe, "Gender, Nationalism, Exclusion: the Reintegration Process of Female Survivors of the Armenian Genocide," *Nations and Nationalism*, 15 (1), pp. 60-80; Tekin Gülçiçek Günel, "Une Reconstruction Nationale: Réinsertion des Filles et des Femmes Arméniennes Apres 1918" in *Trames d'Arménie. Tapis et Broderies sur les Chemins de l'Exile 1900-1940* (Marseille, 2007), pp. 107-115; Kemal Yalcin, *Sari Gelin – Sari Gyalin[Yellow Bride – Yellow Bride]*, Istanbul, 2005 and Yalcin, *Seninle Güler Yüreğim [My Heart is with you,]*, Istanbul 2006.

4 Akçam Taner, *The Genocide of the Armenians and the Silence of the Turks* (New York, 1999), and Akçam, *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide* (London, 2004), and Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility*, London, 2006; Dadrian Vahakn N., *The Key Elements in the Turkish Denial of the Armenian Genocide: a Case Study of Distortion and Falsification*, Toronto, 1999; Der Matossian Bedross, "Venturing into the Minefield: Turkish Liberal Historiography and the Armenian Genocide" in *The Armenian Genocide: Cultural and Ethical Legacies*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian, New Brunswick, 2011, pp. 369–88; Gellman Mneesha, "Remembering Violence: the Role of Apology and Dialogue in Turkey's Democratization Process," *Democratization* 20.4 (2013), pp. 771-794; Göçek Fatma Müge, "Turkish Historiography and the Unbearable Weight of 1915," in *The Armenian Genocide: Cultural and Ethical Legacies*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian, New Brunswick: 2011, pp. 337–68, and Göçek, *Denial of Violence: Ottoman Past, Turkish Present, and Collective Violence Against the Armenians, 1789-2009*, Oxford, 2014; Hovannisian Richard G., *Remembrance and Denial: the Case of the Armenian Genocide*, Detroit, 1998.

5 These are questions that the Western Armenian writer Hagop Oshagan (1883-1948) raises in his novel *Remnants/Mnatsortats* (unfinished; written between 1928 – 1934). I will discuss the novel and its relevance to the present study in depth in Chapter Four. I have used the English translation by Michael Goshgarian of *Remnants/Mnatsortats* (London, 2013). Also see March Nichanian, *Le Roman de la Catastrophe* (Geneva/Yerevan, 2008). I would like to thank Michael Goshgarian for introducing me to Oshagan's novels and many vibrant discussions about Armenian literature in the past three years.

A break with the past during Turkey's post-ottoman republican era, I claim, did not happen in terms of state policies or political strategies but in the realms of identity formation and remembrance. This 'affective' – we could even call it 'emotional' – break with the past brought about feelings of orphanhood and abandonment that characterized the atmosphere of post-genocidal Turkey. While in the Turkish case the absence of the Ottoman ancestry was immediately filled with a rampant version of Turkishness and the new father/ancestor figure of Atatürk, the Armenians' survival bears witness to a different type of self-fashioning that lacks even the slightest attempt to bestow an autochthonous presence to their territorial self-identity or to develop a politicized agency in their everyday interaction with the Turkish state or fellow Turkish citizens. Theirs was an existence that was at once censored but, as their literary and artistic output shows, resisted "by continuing to live", not unlike their fellow Armenians in Soviet Armenia. In my study of everyday life and identity formation in post-genocidal Turkey, I try to recover their narration of a multi-faceted, yet precarious, selfhood within what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls a "reterritorialized" and "recoded" experiential space that is at once thoroughly Turkish yet also a place of a common and shared everydayness, issuing a sharing of material practices and social structures in everyday life.

Turkey is what I call a 'silent nation'. In the following section, I will provide the reader with a glimpse at how a reflection on silence cannot only empower stories of history that are were unheard, or unwanted, but also unravel these other stories that have fanfared so loudly that most of the time they were hard to understand.[6] At the core of my reflection stand the earlier stated questions of 'what made the Turks so Turkish?' and 'what happened to the Armenians' in post-genocidal Turkey.

What Made the Turks so Turkish?

The Turkish experience of identity formation was fashioned from a discontinuous past and it is an experience that is anything but silent. It is loud, outrageous, modern and extreme. And it is Atatürk's.[7] Erich Auerbach, a Jewish émigré living in Istanbul in the 1930s, described Atatürk's Turkey in a letter to Walter Benjamin with the words "Atatürk

---

[6] In my artistic work, I compare these distinctly different yet affectively similar silences with two rooms or spaces. I invite the reader to close her eyes and imagine two situations and 'feel' the two different silences: In one situation you find yourself sitting in a very loud café or restaurant with a group of people. Everyone talks, you look around and you realize that you don't understand anything anyone is saying; you just see their mouths moving. In the second situation, you have just listened to a fascinating talk at a conference. The speaker invites the audience to ask questions or comment on the talk. You have many questions and comments but you don't want to be the first one to ask. For one minute, or two, is is completely silent until someone breaks the silence.

[7] There are countless studies placing Atatürk at the center of Turkey's 'westernization project', see for example: Landau Jacob M. (ed.) *Atatürk and the Modernization of Turkey* (Leiden, 1984); Kili Suna, *Atatürk Devrimi: bir Çağdaşlaşma Modeli [The Atatürk Revolution: a Model for Westernization]* (Ankara, 1981); Weiker Walter F., *The Modernization of Turkey: From Ataturk to the Present Day* (Teaneck, 1981). And even more biographies of him, here selected historical biographies in English: Hanioğlu M. Şükrü, *Ataturk: An Intellectual Biography*, Princeton, 2011; Kinross Patrick Balfour, *Ataturk: A Biography of*

had to force through everything (…) the result is a fanatically anti-traditional nationalism: [with] rejection of all existing Mohammedan cultural heritage" and a "fantastic relation to a primal Turkish identity" that is "accompanied by the simultaneous destruction of [any] historical character."[8] Underneath a surface of monochrome and hyper-modern subjectivities, Turkish people longed for recognition, ancestry and a sense of belonging. They were lost, confused and overwhelmed in the process.

The contemporary Turkish novelist Hamdi Tanpinar writes: "Similar to the new, modernist buildings [in Ankara], Atatürk's legacy is like a newspaper, that nobody knew where it was published, you never once saw, but everyone else had read and recited to you in chorus."[9] What Tanpinar describes here so pointedly, is a certain uncanniness of the reforms (with no explainable origins to hold on to), a subsequent/synchronous alienation of the citizens from them (making them into mere mouthpieces), and a standardization or serialization of dominant narratives and discourses that people knew about but did not understand. All of these, according to Tanpinar, were lived out in a new experiential spatiality, or lifescape, that was provided for by the modernist architecture/buildings that were rising above and beyond people's imagination. It is impossible to ignore the parallel with Lefevbre's description of French towns in the 1930s and 1940s in his *Critique of the Everyday Life*. Lefevbre writes:

> Our towns may be read like a book (the comparison is not completely exact: a book signifies, whereas towns and rural areas 'are' what they signify). Towns show us the history of power and of human possibilities which, while becoming increasingly broad, have at the same time been increasingly taken over and controlled, until that point of total control, set up entirely above life and community, which is bourgeois control.[10]

Like Lefevbre, Tanpinar refers to a new age of social realities, cultural consciousness and political control. This standardization of external life, whether in France or Turkey, stood in stark contrast to the mentalities of people living in these new orders. While Tanpinar described a total disparity between what people say ("recite in chorus") and know or understand, Lefevbre worries about decadence, or a total withdrawal from life

---

Mustafa Kemal, Father of Modern Turkey, Fort Mill, 1964; Mango Andrew, *Atatürk: The Biography of the Founder of Modern Turkey*, London, 2000; Vamik D. Volkan
and Itzkowitz Norman, *The Immortal Atatürk: A Psychobiography*, Chicago, 1984.

8 Barck Karlheinz, "Walter Benjamin and Erich Auerbach: Fragments of a Correspondence", *Diacritics* 22, No. 3 (1992).

9 Cited from Hamdi Tanpinar, "Beş sehir [Five Cities]" in *Ülkü* (September 1942), pp. 10-15.

10 Lefebvre Henri, *Critique of Everyday Life*, Vol. 1. (London, 2002 [1947]), p. 233.

starting to characterize daily life in France.[11] In both situations, the life that was "lived" and the life that was 'imagined' were very different from each other.[12]

Recent studies in political and urban geography have theorized how exterior or spatial forms of modernity often narrated a utopian vision of Turkish nationhood that despite visually communicating the ideal and values of the new Republic ("aesthetic modernism") did not necessarily match the mentalities of its people at the time ("societal modernism").[13] These studies have thus placed Turkey's modernization paradigm outside of what older, and more orientalist, scholarly works on modern Turkey have – inspired by the image of the 'sick man of Europe' – often celebrated as a successful attempt at westernization[14] and called into question the singularity and revolutionary character of these modernizing reforms.[15] While this scholarship has shown that the modernist Turkish spatiality, ideologically and publicly overwrote the Ottoman past and concurrently became a contested site of standardization and alienation, the nature of the topoi in these studies also limits their analysis to external and state-level aspects of the Turkish experience in the early Republican years.

However, as the editors of the recently published book *Everyday Life in Russia, Past and Present* (2015) remind us, "[i]deologues and politicians may project a mythologized or utopian future, but human beings inhabit the world in the units of quotidian time that

---

11 LeFevbre, *Critique of Everyday Life,* 251.

12 Tanpinar's metaphor of the newspaper thus also imbricates other layers of meaning: that of print capitalism, modernity and mass production of culture, which were defined by Benedict Anderson in his seminal work *Imagined Communities* as key components/ingredients for forming a national identity See in Anderson Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* London, 2006 [1983].

13 Bozdoğan, *Modernism and Nation building: Turkish Architectural Culture,* 297. "Aesthetic modernism" – a term originally argued for by Habermas in similar contexts – often overshadows an abstract appropriation of the past by the elites when"[h]istorical memory is replaced by the heroic affinity of the present" and lingers like Ernst Bloch would argue as an "utopian category" in the "darkness of the lived moment" and "immediate nearness". Habermas and Seyla Ben-Habib, "Modernity versus Postmodernity", *New German Critique*, no. 22, Special Issue on Modernism (Winter, 1981), pp. 3-14 and Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* (Boston, 1986), 288. For the original contribution of "narrating the nation", refer to Homi K. Bhabha, "Introduction, Narrating the Nation" in Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London, 2013).

14 See for example: Lewis Bernhard, *The Emergence of modern Turkey* (Oxford, 1961); a book that has inspired generations of scholars arguing along the same narrative lines: Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, London, 1993; Eren Nuri, *Turkey Today and Tomorrow: An Experiment in Westernization,* London, 1963; Shaw Stanford J. and Shaw Ezel Kural, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey: Volume 2, Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey 1808-1975*, Vol. 11, Cambridge, 1977.

15 Batuman Bulent, "'Early Republican Ankara': Struggle over Historical Representation and the Politics of Urban Historiography," *Journal of Urban Studies* 37, (2011), pp. 661-679; Kasaba Reşat and Bozdoğan Sibel, eds., *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (Seattle, 1997) and Bozdoğan, *Modernism and Nation building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic*, Seattle, 2001; Kezer Zeynep, "An Imaginable Community: the Material Culture of Nation-building in Early Republican Turkey," *EPD, Society and Space*, 27. 3 (2009), pp. 508- 530.

serve as commentary of historical change."[16] And it is in "the principle of the quotidian – in the constant repetition of the same act though it is a different day," the early 20th century Japanese theorist Tosaka Jun argues, that lies "the secret of history".[17] Turkey in the 1920s and 1930s, not unlike the Japan that Tosaka Jun wrote about in another brilliant essay entitled "The Fate of Japanism: From Fascism to Emperorism" (1935) followed an "agenda of having to attribute meaning to the incorporation of Western culture into their personal lives."[18] Western culture, in modern Turkey, became the bedrock of everyday life. It invaded all material and social spheres, space and time included. Submerged in a – as Auerbach remarks so accurately – "fantastic relation to a primal Turkish identity", identity formation was negotiated on shaky grounds. Having performed a complete break with the Ottoman past and moved into a future too utopian to understand, the Turkish citizens of Turkey were finding their voices and selves in a climate that did not allow for much questioning but was all about the questions.

Surprisingly little research has been done on the everyday life in the 1920s and 1930s of Turkey, although historical material is plentiful. For example, we know practically every single detail about Atatürk's life: what time he woke up after 1933 (usually after 2pm), what he drank and ate (very much and very little), when he slept (usually between 3 and 5am what did he do till 2pm?), who he met (and did not want to meet), with whom he corresponded (he was a prolific letter writer), what clothes he wore (some even from Chanel), and which restaurants he went to (*Karpiç* in Ankara and *Eden* in Istanbul). Fashioning himself as the father, or true ancestor, of the Turks, Atatürk created an image, and a quickly developing cult around him, which was instrumental to identity formation in Turkey. Within the modernist, superimposed spatiality, Turkish citizens were looking for someone, something tangible to identify with. Mustafa Kemal became what they wanted: a paternal figure that could lead them through what Ernst Bloch would have described as "the darkness of the moment".[19] He became a model for Turkishness.

---

[16] See "Introduction" in Choi Chatterjee, et al., eds., *Everyday Life in Russia Past and Present* (Indianapolis, 2015), p. 4.

[17] Jun Tosaka, "The Principle of Everydayness and Historical Time [1930]," in *Tosaka Jun: A Critical Reader* (Ithaca, 2013), p. 12.

[18] Esenbel Selçuk, "The Anguish of Civilized Behavior: The Use of Western Cultural Forms in the Everyday Lives of the Meiji Japanese and the Ottoman Turks During the 19th century," *Japan Review*, no. 5 (1994), 174. Note: while this article describes an earlier time period than discussed here, it gives an outlook on the mentalities of the Kemalist era as well. We also know that there was frequent contact between the Japanese emperor and Atatürk, either through the Japanese ambassador to Ankara, Yoshida and later Kintona Mushkoji, or the crown prince Takamatsu and his wife. Takamatsu and his wife, for example, came to Atatürk's Cankaya residence in Ankara, on 13 January 1931, and were given a ball on 14.01.1931, or through congratulatory letters as for example the letter on the occasion of Turkey 10th anniversary by Emperor Hirohito shows ("new wind for Turkey"). Cited in Kocatürk Utkan, *Kaynakçali Atatürk Günlük* (*Atatürk's Diary with Sources)*, available online for download at: www.ataturk.de (last accessed 01.08.2015).

[19] Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 288

Despite expectations, many of his reforms were outcomes from experiments at home or from ideas conceived at his famous dinners, which often lasted until the early morning hours. They were erratic and put into place almost immediately. Sometimes an evening party would board a special train the very next morning to set about reforms in the countryside. Life with Atatürk was unpredictable, exhausting and mandatory for all members of his government. Women were his passion and the true *force majeure* of his reforms. They became the poster children for his reforms and his way of invading everyone's private affairs.

After a failed marriage with Latife Uşak, the adoption and education of young women as role models for the young Republic became his obsession. It is through their memoirs, letter exchanges with Atatürk and numerous TV interviews that we get the most intimate glimpse into the private quarters of Kemal Mustafa Atatürk. From Afet Inan, Sabiha Gokcen and Ülkü Adatepe, we hear how it was to grow up so close to Atatürk.[20] Dressed and educated by Atatürk himself, we see the lives of these three adopted daughters – from babyhood until early womanhood – being not only constantly monitored but also exploited for positive publicity for the regime. Especially Ülkü – who was already appropriated for Atatürk's purposes when still in her mother's womb, and who moved in with Atatürk at the age of six months – was instrumental for the propaganda machinery of an ailing and heavily alcoholic Atatürk in presenting him as a caring father figure and role model to the Turkish nation. Here, in the Cankaya palace and Florya *Köshk*, we are able trace the origins of Atatürk's new modern state but also observe Turkey's difficult road to nationhood. And a difficult road it was, as a look in the sources reveal. Turkish people – whether from the cities or from the countryside – were walking unsteadily on the uneven terrain of modern-day Turkey. Even so, it was all about them.

The narrative of the Turkish nation was "loud, outrageous, modern and extreme". In fact, it was so loud that people often could not hear or understand each other. Indeed, it seems possible to compare it with a very loud room in which everyone is trying to speak, but no one can hear what the others are saying yet sees their mouths opening and closing in speech. Hamdi Tanpinar's previously cited description of Atatürk's legacy ("nobody knew where it was published, you never once saw it, but everyone else had read and recited it to you in chorus") is very expressive in this context. Nevertheless, in my understanding there is no meaning in speech if there is no one to listen – if there is no one to hear or understand what has been spoken. My specific interest in the contemporary presence of silence and 'noise' in modern-day Turkey is rooted in a reflection on what lies at the very foundation of her nation-building project. At the base of this reflection must stand the irrevocable acceptance that Turkey is a post-genocidal society. Previously, I have charted my understanding of silence through a discussion of the very absence of certain mnemonic narratives and the exuberant noise of others. Silence in the

[20] Afet Uzmay was 17 years old when she met Atatürk, and 30 years old when he died. Sabiha (Gökçen) was 12 years old when she met Atatürk, and 25 years old when he died. Ülkü was not born yet when Atatürk decided to adopt her, and 6 years old when he died.

Turkish context is characterized – I have suggested above – by memory practices that are both very present in and very absent from official narratives. Atatürk's legacy is the most enduring; Genocide denial the most blatant. Both provide windows into the psyche of the Turkish nation. In his book *Writing in the Dark*, David Grossmann describes the inability of Israelis to talk about their current affairs with a metaphor from Kafka. He writes:

> The constant – and very real – fear of being hurt, the fear of death, of intolerable loss, or even of mere humiliation, leads each of us, the citizens and prisoners of the conflict, to dampen our own vitality, our emotional and intellectual range, and to cloak ourselves in more and more protective layers until we suffocate. Kafka's mouse was right: when your predator closes in on you, your world does get smaller. So does the language that describes it.[21]

In this passage, Grossmann implies that the Israeli identity is characterized by fear and paranoia of the other. Onstructing the Other as a mechanism of identity formation has long been described by scholars following Edward Said and others. In the Turkish context, as we will see below, it is the Armenians who are the ultimate other. Turkey's inability to speak about the Genocide, among many other human tragedies that have flecked the pages of its history with blood, is not just a matter of denial or political calculation, it is – as I aim to contend – a matter of its very identity. A proper understanding of identity, or identity formation, in Turkey therefore requires not only an analysis of dominant narratives prior to the foundation of the nation, and a closer look at the 1915 genocide and its aftermath but also an inquiry into the question of "what made the Turks so Turkish".

What Happened to the Armenians?

"What was it that made the Turks so Turkish?" an Armenian revolutionary, asks in the novel *Remnants/Mnatsortats.* Written by the Western-Armenian writer Hakob Oshagan (1883-1948), *Remnants/Mnatsortats* was originally envisioned in three parts *(Part I: The Way of the Womb; Part II: The Way of Blood; Part III: Hell), but was left unfinished. Set in an unnamed Armenian village in Ottoman Turkey and* is a masterful reflection on Armenian-Turkish relations through the lens of racism. Oshagan – like the narrator in his novel – could be considered a "major racist" himself. For him, the concept of 'Turkishness is not only a racist category but also constitute the core problem in the relationship between Turks and Armenians. At the middle of his novel stands a hundred-page-long conversation between an Armenian revolutionary and the Turkish chief of the prison in

[21] Grossman David, *Writing in the Dark: Essays on Literature and Politics*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008, p. 61.

which he is incarcerated. Here, the author tries to answer his own questions regarding the identity of the Turks from Anatolia. His quest, in a time 'before the nation', was justified, as not many of the Anatolian Muslims identified themselves ethnically as Turkish.[22]

Oshagan barely escaped the massacres in 1915, and fled to Bulgaria disguised as a German officer. After the end of the war, like so many Armenian survivors, he returned to Ottoman Turkey and settled in Constantinople, where he started writing his novel. His return was short-lived, and in 1922 Oshagan again had to escape (this time to Cairo and then Palestine) when the Kemalist forces entered the imperial city. In the post-war climate of the independence struggle led by Mustafa Kemal Pasha, as Atatürk was still called at the time, Oshagan's questions regarding Turkishness were duly answered. Mustafa Kemal Pasha had positioned his struggle against the occupying forces of the Allies in Anatolia as an ethnic liberation war and the birth hour of a new nation that was to be called Turkey.

Oshagan did not finish his novel; he could not bear writing about the unspeakable. Nor did he come back to his homelands – he would not have recognized or be able to live in it anyhow. And *Remnants* did not become the novel of the *Meds Yeghern* (the Big Catastrophe) as planned, and instead metamorphosed/transformed itself into a callously intrusive yet stunningly beautiful homage to a *temps perdu* of Armenian life in Anatolia. It became, as Oshagan says during an interview in 1934, the same year Auerbach writes his letter to Benjamin, an inheritance to the future generations of Armenians in its narration of "a people's collective sensibility" and in its attempt "to salvage the remnants of our people (…)."[23]

Where *Remnants* describes and questions the social and political realities of Ottoman-Armenian subjecthood, thereby exposing a 600-year-long master-slave narrative, and an often (in scholarship) neglected asymmetry between ruler and ruled during Ottoman times, novels by those Armenians who survived and continued to live in their ancestral homelands in post-genocidal Turkey bear witness to a different type of self-fashioning that lack even the slightest attempt to bequest an autochthonous presence to their own territorial self-identity or develop a politicized agency in their quotidian interactions with the Turkish state or fellow citizens.

Migirdiç Margosyan's novels *Gavur Mahellesi* ('*Infidel Neighbourhood*') and *Bizim Oralari* ('*Where we live*') present us with an account of what it was like to live as an "infidel" in a Turkish village in the 1940s and 1950s. His novels simply describe the daily life of an Armenian in a Turkish village; yet they are profoundly political in doing so. *Where we live* is not a question but a claim on the very existence of Armenians within the new Turkish spatiality. Muted towards their own silenced presence in Turkish lands, his characters neither mention their traumatic past nor have overt demands for their futures, but instead describe the social and political realities of Turkish-Armenian sub-

[22] See, for example, Doumanis Nicholas, *Before the Nation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 9 ff.

[23] Oshagan, *Remnants/Mnatsortats,* Gomidas Institute, 2013.

jecthood within the newly-formed Turkish nation. I argue that Margosyan's inability to write out the differences of his characters within the narrational space of his novels does not imply an insistence on his part on portraying the Armenian people through mechanisms of self-denial and self-censorship, but rather constitutes an attempt to challenge the "generative space" of Turkish nationalism with their very own existence within this space.[24] Margosyan was writing from within a socially constructed space in which certain subjects and words, as Jay Winter puts it in his seminal essay "Thinking about Silence", have been deemed taboo.[25] These subjects – and here I want to intervene and add subjectivities to Winter's theory of silence – are not politically accepted (or socially demanded) ingredients in the narrative of the Turkish nation, yet they are essential components of Armenian identity (of the time).[26] Adding subjectivities to Winter's theory of silence, in my opinion, is useful in order to enable his otherwise ground-breaking theory to function as a methodological tool to give voice, and agency, to those who live muted existences. For there is no silence in silence.[27]

Margosyan was well-aware of the precariousness of his societal location, like other Armenian writers of his time.[28] His narrative space unavoidably overlaps with the narration of the Turkish nation as he experienced it as an Armenian. Through his novels he thus not only describes the life of Armenians in modern Turkey in the 1930s and 1940s but he also defines and ultimately adds his voice to the narrative layer(s) of the nation. Margosyan is writing in the late 1950s about his childhood in Anatolia in the 1930s. His is also the perspective of a grandchild mourning the tragedy lived by his grandparents, salvaging and writing about the remains of a *temps perdu* of Armenian life in Anatolia which he – in the end – also leaves for greater protection in Istanbul. Often, according to Alexander Etkind in his book *Warped Mourning*, the grandchildren of victims "produce the work of mourning for their grandparents" – this could not have been truer for the (third-generation) Armenian writers of the time.[29]

---

[24] For a discussion of this term in the context of the unwritten, yet textual quality of nationalism within the context of post-colonialism please refer to Young Robert J.C., "The Overwritten Unwritten: Nationalism and its Doubles in Post-Colonial Theory" in *The Silent Word: Textual Meaning and the Unwritten*, ed. Robert J.C. Young, Ban Kah Choon and Robbie B.H. Goh (Singapore, 1998), 1-16. Note to myself: this part could maybe be expanded with references to Derrida and Voloshinov.

[25] Winter Jay, "Reflection on Silence," (2009, unpublished), 4. I extend my gratitude to Jay Winter for introducing me to his concept of silence during my time at Yale University in 2009.

[26] Ibid., 4.

[27] Georg Steiner writes in this context: " Silence is *an* alternative. When the city is full of savagery and lies, nothing speaks louder than the unwritten poem. 'Now the Sirens have a still more fatal weapon,' wrote Kafka in his *Parables*, 'namely their silence. And though admittedly such a thing has never happened, still it is conceivable that someone might possibly have escaped from their singing; but from their silence certainly never.'" All from: Steiner Georg, *Language and Silence* (New Haven, 1998 [1958], 54.

[28] Peroomian R., *Those Who Continued*, pp. 55-71.

[29] Alexander Etkind, *Warped Morning*, (Stanford, 2013), 3. Jay Winter argues in a similar context that it is often over the heads of the parents (the middle generation) that grandparents confide to their grandchildren and break their silence about traumatic experiences. See: Ibid., 36ff.

From within, what Jay Winter has defined as a 'circle of silence', the Armenian experience speaks to us from a place of resistance and acute understanding of self-identity inside this circle but not from a place of defeat. Silence, I hold, hints at the hidden sublime contestation that is still present. In other words, if there is no one to speak, there is no one to silence either.

Concluding Words

For me, silence can be full of words and words full of silence. The nation-building process in post-Ottoman Turkey, as we have seen above, exhibits it all. Up-rooted in a complete break with the its Ottoman past, the nation is performed in a culture of silence. Here, "Turkey for the Turks" – an expression coined by the mastermind of the Armenian Genocide Talaat Pasha - becomes a modernist experiment that is lived out and performed on rather shaky grounds. The narrative of the Turkish nation was "loud, outrageous, modern and extreme". In fact, so I claimed above, it was so loud that people often could not hear or understand each other. In the process, Atatürk, the Father of the Turks, became a much-needed paternal figure that lead the Turks through what Ernst Bloch would have described as "the darkness of the moment".

People who did not identify with Atatürk were left in the dark. It is from this darkness, however, that we inherited some of the most powerful literary testimonies of 20th century. Migirdiç Margosyan's novels are exemplary for a long forgotten Western Armenian literary tradition that revenges and commemorates their ancestors simply by continuing to live. Often forgotten and left in the dark, it is from their darkness, so I hold, that we can truly grasp the nation-building process of Turkey in the 20th century and the power of silence.

ՈՐՈՇ ԴԻՏԱՐԿՈՒՄՆԵՐ ԼՈՒՌ ԱԶԳԻ ՄԱՍԻՆ՝ ՀԵՏՑԵՂԱՍՊԱՆԱԿԱՆ ԹՈՒՐՔԻԱՅՈՒՄ ԸՆԴՀԱՆՈՒՐ ԱՌՕՐԵԱԿԱՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՏԵՍԱՆԿՅՈՒՆԻՑ

Սյուզան Մերիեմ Ռոզիտա

ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ

Թուրքիայում քաղաքացիության վերաբերյալ առօրյա պատկերացումներում ազգային ինքնությունը ինչպես միավորող, այնպես էլ պառակտող գործոն է: Այն մտնում է առօրյա կյանք համակարգված կամ անկանոն մնեմոնիկ պրակտիկաների միջոցով, պաշտոնական պատմումներում ներկայություն (օրինակ՝ Աթաթուրքի պաշտամունք) կամ բացակայություն (ցեղասպանության չճանաչում) ձևով: Այս մնեմոնիկ պրակտիկան բխում է լռության մշակույթից, որ տիրում է հետցեղասպանական Թուրքիայում:

Եթե թուրքերի դեպքում օսմանական անցյալի բացակայությունն անմիջապես լցվեց ծավալապաշտական թուրքականության տեսությամբ և Աթաթուրքի՝ որպես նորաթուխ հոր և նահապետի կերպարով, ապա հայերի վերապրումը վկայում է մի այլ տեսակի ինքնակերտման մասին, որտեղ բացակայում է սեփական տարած-

քային ինքնանույնացմանը բնիկ ներկայություն հաղորդելը կամ թուրքական կառավարության ու թուրք քաղաքացիների հետ առօրյա փոխհարաբերությունների քաղաքական օրակարգ մշակելը:

Բանալի բառեր՝ լռություն, հետցեղասպանություն, Հայոց ցեղասպանություն, Թուրքիա, առօրեականություն, ազգայնականություն(ներ), մշակութային ժառանգություն:

REFLECTIONS ON A SILENT NATION THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE SHARED EVERYDAYNESS IN POST-GENOCIAL TURKEY

Suzan Meryem Rosita

ABSTRACT

National identity in Turkey both coheres and fragments in the everyday practices that represent citizenhood, and it is enforced through the mnemonic practices, institutionalized or not, which are both present in (e.g. Atatürk cult) and absent from (genocide un-recognition) official narratives. These mnemonic practices stem from a culture of silence that has developed in the climate of post-genocidal Turkey. While in the Turkish case the absence of the Ottoman ancestry was immediately filled with a rampant version of Turkishness and the new father/ancestor figure of Atatürk, the Armenians' survival bears witness to a different type of self-fashioning that lacks even the slightest attempt to bestow an autochthonous presence to their territorial self-identity or to develop a politicized agency in their everyday interaction with the Turkish state or fellow Turkish citizens.

Keywords: Silence, Post-Genocide, Armenian Genocide, Turkey, Everyday, Nationalism(s), Cultural Heritage.

РАЗМЫШЛЕНИЯ О МОЛЧАЩЕЙ НАЦИИ ЧЕРЕЗ ПЕРСПЕКТИВУ ОБЩЕЙ ОБЫДЕННОСТИ В ПОСТГЕНОЦИДАЛЬНОЙ ТУРЦИИ

Сюзан Мерием Розита

РЕЗЮМЕ

Национальная идентичность в Турции является как объединяющим, так и фрагментирующим фактором в повседневных представлениях о гражданственности. Она вводится в повседневную жизнь через институциализированные или самопроизвольные мнемонические практики, в форме присутствия (например – культ Ататюрка) или отсутствия (непризнание геноцида) в официальном нарративе. Эти мнемонические практики проистекают из культуры молчания, которая сложилась в климате постгеноцидальный Турции. В то время, как в турецком случае

отсутствие османского прошлого было немедленно заполнено экспансивной версией турецкости и фигурой Ататюрка как нового отца/родоначальника, выживание армян свидетельствует о другом типе самосотворения, в котором отсутствует даже малейшей намек на придание автохтонности своей территориальной самоидентификации или на разработку политической повестки в повседневном взаимодействии с турецким государством и с гражданами Турции.

Ключевые слова: молчание, постгеноцид, геноцид армян, Турция, каждодневность, национализм(ы), культурное наследие.