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“Her Name Was Not Seher, It Was Heranuş...”: Reading Narratives of Forced Turkification in Twenty-First Century Turkey

T. Elal

Abstract: *The process of Turkish state formation coincides with systematic large-scale massacres, persecution and exclusion of certain groups - namely Armenians, Rums, Jews, Assyrians and Kurds. However, accounts of the process of Turkish nation-building which deal with its destructive side often overlook the “Turkification” of many non-Muslim women and children in the wake of the First World War. This study aims to fill this gap by drawing on personal narratives and testimonies of forceful assimilation published in the last decade in Turkey. As any discussion on the Armenian Genocide was one that was silenced until not so long ago in Turkey, and historians working on the topic of the Armenian Genocide or mass persecution of Rums often discover that data is either inaccessible or ‘lost’, it is of even greater importance that the personal narrative of survivors be integrated into history writing.*

Keywords: *Turkification of non-Muslims, narrative as testimony, collective and redemptive memory*

Introduction

In the period that stretches roughly from the 1890s through to the 1960s, the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic espoused nationalist as well as discriminatory discourses that came to provide the very myths and social imaginaries that construct Turkish identity, and organize and guide social and political action in Turkey today. The process of Turkish state formation coincided with the systematic persecution, exclusion and large-scale massacres of certain groups – namely Armenians, Rums (Anatolian Greeks), Jews, Assyrians and Kurds. However, accounts of the process of Turkish nation-building often focus on its constructive side or deal only with certain aspects of its destructive side. Even when such destructive aspects are studied – such as the Armenian and Assyrian massacres of the late nineteenth century, the Armenian Genocide of the World War I, the population exchange following the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, or the 1928 Turkish language campaign –, the impact of the forced “Turkification” of many non-Muslim women and children in the wake of the First World War is often overlooked, constituting a forgotten chapter in the history of Turkish nation-building. This oversight has meant that the slow motion destruction of ‘those left behind’ has not been studied, and the ways in which the identity, autonomy and physical security of Armenian, Rum and Assyrian women and children was undermined during the life-long process that was forceful assimilation has not been fully understood.¹

For example, accounts of how young Armenian and Assyrian girls were given the choice between life and death; i.e. assuming a Turkish identity or facing forced deportations, are numerous. In one such case, Yeghsa Khayadjanian from Harput, 15 years old in 1915, recalls how she and a group of other young Armenians “were given the choice between conversion and death.”² Significantly, they were not asked whether they wanted to become Muslims, but whether they would “become Turks?”³ These women would also be forced to repress other expressions of their connection to a non-Turkish past, including the use of languages other than Turkish and the enactment of specific practices. They also had to discard their given (Christian) names and take up Turkish names. For such women and children, any discussion of their prior lives would be topics prohibited in both the public and private domains. Therefore, the silencing and repression of one’s language, customs, religious identity and memories pertaining to their communities which had previously been part

¹ I borrow the term “slow motion destruction” from Kjell Anderson who coined the term in the context of West Papua. See, Kjell Anderson, “Colonialism and Cold Genocide: The Case of West Papua,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention*: Vol. 9: Issue 2, (2015), 9-25.

² Matthias Bjornlund, “A Fate Worse than Dying: Sexual Violence during the Armenian Genocide,” in *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe’s Twentieth Century*, ed. Dagmar Herzog (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 36. The distinction between ‘Muslim’ and Turkish’ is significant, especially as another dimension of Turkish nation-building entailed the refusal to acknowledge that the Kurds of East and Southeastern Anatolia belonged to a separate ethnic group to Turks. The early Republican period saw the labeling of Kurds as “mountain Turks” as well as the prohibition of Kurdish traditions (such as the celebration of the Zoroastrian New Year, *nowruz*) and use of the Kurdish language. The crucial point was that Kurds were Muslims. Ironically therefore, the Turkification of Armenian and Assyrian women as treated in the present discussion was often carried out by Kurds in East and Southeastern Anatolia.

³ *Ibid.*, 36.

of the Anatolian landscape became one of the ways in which forced assimilations corresponded with the more direct violence of the massacres. Muslim families that adopted Armenian and Rum children, or took non-Muslim brides for their sons, became crucial agents in what amounted to a “centrally organized program of forced assimilation.”⁴ This silencing is compounded by the fact that whenever the assimilation of such Armenian and Rum women and children is acknowledged, the official position of the Turkish state and its organs is that these “Armenian [as well as Assyrian or Rum] women and children consciously and voluntarily became Muslims and broke off from other Armenians, Assyrians and Rums.”⁵

However, the 2000s saw the survivors of these crimes – i.e. the very victims of forced assimilation – contest the official representation of the state by “bearing witness” to what had been previously silenced: The appearance of a new body of literature of private history and personal testimony of forced Turkification published in Turkish and in the form of biography,⁶ monological interview,⁷ and historical novel⁸ constituted a watershed in writing about the traumatic legacy of the atrocities committed across the Anatolian landscape at the very inception of the Turkish Republic. The present study argues that these recent narratives published by the victims of forceful assimilation, their daughters and grandchildren must be treated as essential in gaining an understanding of the dimensions, functions and role of literary production in confronting official history.⁹ To this extent, this paper will examine primary sources written in Turkish and published in the last decade that explore these hidden histories and subsequent discoveries. These are, for the most part, stories of how an increasing number of Turkish citizens of the third generation have recently discovered that their grandparents were ethnically Armenian or Rum, and were forcibly converted to Islam and made to embrace “Turkishness” in order to avoid persecution. This issue was one that was silenced until not so long ago in Turkey, and historians working on the topic of the Armenian Genocide or mass persecution of Rums often discovered (and in fact, still do) that data is either inaccessible or lost. This is why, to quote from Fethiye Çetin, who published one of the first accounts relating the story of her own (Armenian) grandmother, “it is essential to tell these stories [...] we need to hear the stories of our grandparents and families.”¹⁰ By drawing on first-hand accounts, I herewith argue that the impact of the Turkification of non-Muslim Anatolian women and children has had significant repercussions across generations, and that the recent trend of publishing memoirs which tell the stories of that process highlights a decision to act in public, whereby a profoundly personal act takes up its place within a distinctly social framework, the framework of collective action.

Moreover, this significant gap in the literature which overlooks the impact of Turkification also downplays the fundamentally gendered aspect of the massacres of the Armenian, Assyrian and Pontic Rum populations of the Ottoman Empire.¹¹ Historians such as Roger Smith, Claudia Card

⁴ Ibid., 41.

⁵ Erhan Başyurt, *Ermeni Evlatlıklar. Saklı Kalmış Hayatlar [Armenian Foster Children: Hidden Lives]* (Istanbul: Karakulu, 2006). Such claims pertaining to the so-called voluntary conversion of Armenian and Rum women and children – as well as other minorities groups – fail to understand that voluntary conversion was in fact forced assimilation; and constituted one dimension of the genocidal design directed at non-Muslim minority groups across Anatolia.

⁶ Fethiye Çetin, *Anneannem* (Istanbul: Metis, 2004); Yorgos Andreadis, *Pontos'taki Evim* (Istanbul: Belge Yayınları, 2007).

⁷ İrfan Palalı, *Tehcir Çocukları: Nenem bir Ermeniymiş* (Istanbul: Su, 2005); Kemal Yalçın, *Hayatta Kalanlar* (Istanbul: Bir Zamanlar, 2008); Fethiye Çetin, *Torunlar*, (Istanbul: Metis, 2009); Erhan Başyurt, *Ermeni Evlatlar: Saklı Kalmış Hayatlar* (Istanbul: Karakulu, 2006).

⁸ Yorgos Andreadis, *Tamama: Pontos'un Yitik Kızı* (Istanbul: Belge, Marenostrom, 1993); Filiz Özdem, *Korku Benim Sahibim* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi, 2007).

⁹ Yvonne S. Unnold, *Representing the Unpresentable: Literature and Trauma under Pinochet in Chile* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002).

¹⁰ Fethiye Çetin, *Anneannem*.

¹¹ For a treatment of Armenian Genocide, and the persecution of other non-Muslim ethnic groups in the late nineteenth Ottoman Empire and under Turkish Republic see, Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); Claudia Card, “Genocide and Social Death,” in *Genocide's Aftermath: Responsibility and Repair*, ed. Claudia Card and Armen T. Marsoobian (Cambridge: Malden, 2007); Stephen H Astourian, “Modern Turkish Identity and the Armenian Genocide” in *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide*, ed. Richard G Hovannisian, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999); Selim Deringil,

and Armen Marsoobian have convincingly argued that males and females have often been affected by genocide in quite different ways, and that focusing on aspects such as gender is important if one seeks to fully understand the modes, motives, dynamics, and consequences of genocide and other mass crimes.¹²

Due to the traumatic nature of the experience they relate, the present discussion also treats the works under study here as literatures of trauma.¹³ Therefore, the question of whether traumatic memory is inherited – and if it is, how it is framed – is a particularly pertinent one. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, trauma (in the non-physical sense) is a “psychic injury, especially one caused by emotional shock the memory of which is repressed and remains unhealed.”¹⁴ As Kathryn Robson points out, “trauma defies our attempts to comprehend and to assimilate it,” and makes “truth-telling” particularly challenging, if not impossible; for how is it possible to give voice to something that breaks through the mind’s coping strategies?¹⁵ It is in this context that scholars such as Cathy Caruth have argued that trauma is almost invariably “spoken in a language that is somehow literary.”¹⁶ However, in cases where witnesses and victims of forceful assimilation have been silenced, the family becomes an important site for memory, where women take on a particularly pivotal role (although not an exclusive one) in determining the nature of communicative memory. As the present paper argues, it is not a coincidence that it is close family-members who have recorded and published the accounts of witnesses and victims of forced Turkification. In a country like Turkey, acts of collective commemoration are usually directed at remembering the War of Independence (1919-1922), or sites such as Gallipoli as loci for collective mourning. Expressions of atrocities committed against Armenians, Rums and other minorities groups are certainly not suitable material for state-building mythologies. However, the recent upsurge of testimonies that address these atrocities, and the very fact that these works have generally elicited positive responses from readers across the country (and for the most part have not been subjected to direct censorship), suggest that there are important changes taking place in how certain members of society wish to readdress the atrocities of 1913-1916 and possibly, modify how the inception of the Republic is remembered collectively as a nation.

Narrating “The Tragedy of Hidden Identities”:¹⁷ A New Genre in Turkish Literature

In 2004, Fethiye Çetin, a Turkish lawyer and human rights activist, published *Anneannem* (*My Grandmother*). This is the story of how, at the age of twenty-five, Fethiye Çetin discovers that her grandmother is Armenian; that her name is not Seher but Heranuş, and that she was not born in the Turkish village of Çermikli, but in the Armenian village Havav near the city of Elazığ in Eastern Anatolia. After an entire lifetime of silence and repression of the memories that pertain to her Armenian childhood, Çetin’s grandmother reveals to her granddaughter in 1979 the details of her Armenian identity, the family she lost during the forced deportations of 1915-1916, and how the social and cultural bulwarks which had sustained her community were destroyed by the policies

Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Taner Akçam, *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide*, (London: Zed Books, 2004); Ayhan Aktar, “Debating the Armenian Massacres in the Last Ottoman Parliament, November – December 1918,” *History Workshop Journal*, 64, Autumn (2007), 240-70; Uğur Ümit Üngör and Mehmet Polatel, *Confiscation and Destruction: The Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Property*, (London: Continuum, 2011).

¹² See, Roger W Smith, “Women and Genocide: Notes on an Unwritten History,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* VIII, no. 3 (Winter 1994), 315–334; Claudia Card, “Genocide and Social Death,” in *Genocide’s Aftermath: Responsibility and Repair*, ed. Claudia Card and Armen T. Marsoobian (Cambridge: Malden, 2007), 10–11.

¹³ Unnold, *Representing the Unrepresentable*, 6-7. I borrow this term for Yvonne Unnold who studies Chilean literary works that speak of the experience of living under Pinochet in the years 1973 to 1988.

¹⁴ “Trauma,” *OED Online*. September 2016, Oxford University Press, accessed 27 November 27, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/205242?redirectedFrom=trauma>.

¹⁵ Kathryn Robson, *Writing Wounds: The Inscription of Trauma in post-1968 French Women’s Life-Writing* (New York: Rodopi, 2004), 13.

¹⁶ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 5.

¹⁷ This is the title of a newspaper article published in *Evrensel* in reference to the Turkification of women and children of Armenian, Rum and Assyrian backgrounds. See, Ragıp Zarakolu, “Gizli Kimliklerin Trajedisi”, *Evrensel*, 29 September 2015.

of the Committee of Union Progress (CUP) in power at the time. Over the course of the months and years, Çetin's grandmother gradually and increasingly opens up to her about her childhood, talking about her real parents, her Christian upbringing and Armenian schooling, as well as how she was forcibly taken from her family and "rescued" from death by a Turkish-speaking Muslim military officer and taken in by a Muslim couple who had no children of their own. As a consequence, at the age of nine Heranuş becomes Seher; learns to speak Turkish, becomes a Muslim and eventually assumes a Turkish identity. What initially motivates Heranuş to share the details of the past with her granddaughter is her wish that Fethiye Çetin track down her lost relatives who survived the deportations and massacres in 1915-1916 and moved to America.

However, for Çetin, the discovery of her grandmother's Armenian identity and the violent nature of her break from that past is not an easy one to come to grips with. Her grandmother's account of the events leading up to her separation from her family and subsequent conversion to Islam include vivid descriptions of the violence and cruelty that Armenians had to endure during the deportation. Çetin describes how, once her grandmother started recounting her memories of childhood, she faced a crisis in her own perceptions of who she was, and experienced a sudden break in her conceptualization of Turkish society: In her own words, "most of what I thought I knew until that day was in fact wrong [...] all my values were being shattered by what I was hearing."¹⁸ She also expresses the overwhelming sense of shame she suddenly felt when she thought back on of how she had spent her entire school years reading nationalistic poems during school assemblies: "Next to the images that I played vividly in my mind – i.e. a crowd waiting to be deported in the courtyard of a church, children torn apart from their parents, the eyes of dead children staring at me – I remembered the nationalistic poems I read during every state festival. Next to the unblinking eyes of the dead, there I stood, reading poems of the nation's glorious past."¹⁹ My Grandmother is therefore not only the story of Heranuş and her reconnection with a past which had been denied to her for the most of her life, but also an account of how her act of remembrance and coming out leads to the reconstruction of Fethiye Çetin's identity and a fundamental questioning of the official rhetoric of the Turkish state and its inception.

Almost immediately after the publication of *Anneannem* in 2004, a wave of other similar works appeared in the Turkish press: To name just a few, *Tehcir Çocukları: Nenem Ermeniymiş (The Children of the Deportations: My Grandmother was an Armenian)* was published by İrfan Palalı in 2005; *Hayatta Kalanlar (Those who Survived)* by Kemal Yalçın in 2006; *Korku Benim Sahibim (Fear is my Master)* by Filiz Özdem in 2007; and *Kara Kefen: Müslümanlaştırılmış Ermeni Kadınların Dramı (Black Shroud: The Stories of Islamified Armenian Women)* by Gülçiçek Günel Tekin in 2008. Fethiye Çetin then published a second account, *Torunlar (Grandchildren)* in 2008 for which she interviewed other women of the third generation: Çetin relates how these other women experienced and came to terms with their discovery that their grandmothers were Armenian or Rum. All these works approach the subject of how Armenian and Rum women recount their experiences of the forced deportations, mass persecutions and subsequent marriage to Turkish-speaking Muslim men, or their adoption by Muslim families. They also address how their children and grandchildren deal with the confession that their grandmothers are in fact not who/what they always claimed to be. These works also have in common that almost all these acts of remembrance are being carried out by women, and that these testimonies are almost exclusively passed on to daughters and granddaughters. Such accounts highlight how women's experiences of genocide differed from those of men in terms of forms of victimization and their consequences.²⁰ They also illustrate how women consequently took on the role of passing on their stories, whereby the cultural performances of testimonies of the

¹⁸ Çetin, *Anneannem*, 52.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁰ Roger W Smith, "Women and Genocide: Notes on an Unwritten History", *Holocaust Genocide Studies* 8 no.3 (1994), 443-456. For other works which deal with the question of how women and men are affected differently by experiences of genocide and victimization see, R Emerson Dobash and Russell Dobash, eds., *Rethinking Violence Against Women* (London: Sage Publications, 1998); Roger W Smith, "Visual responses: Women's experience of sexual violence as represented in Israeli Holocaust-related cinema", *European Journal of Women's Studies* 22 no. 4 (2015), 443-456; V Nikolić-Ristanović, "War and post-War Victimization of Women", *European Journal of Crime, Criminal Law and Criminal Justice* 10, no. 2 (2002), 138-145.

past transcended the boundaries of the family unit and took up their place amongst the archives of memory that fill the vacuum of chapters in history that have not been written or have no platform.

I approach the questions I raise in the introduction through the consideration of the works I mention above. In addition, I refer to one other work, Yorgos Andreadis' *Tamama: Pontos'un Yitik Kızı* (*Tamama: Pontos' Lost Daughter*) which was published earlier than Çetin's *Anneannem*, in 1993. This work initially appeared in Greek, and was then translated into Turkish in the same year. Here, Andreadis tells the story of a Pontic Greek girl who took shelter in the home of a Turkish family after being deported from her home in 1914, at the age of seven. In November 1914 Tamama's entire village is evacuated from Espiye (near Trabzon) and made to march westwards as the Russians invade the Eastern parts of the Black Sea Region. Both of Tamama's parents, her brother and her uncle die of typhus and harsh winter conditions on the road. By the time they reach Sivas, some two hundred kilometers from Espiye, the majority of the population of the village has perished because of the harsh conditions of the deportation.²¹ In Sivas, Tamama is taken in by Mustafa Oktay, a Turkish military officer, who lives with his sixteen year old daughter Ayşe. Tamama 'becomes' Raife, learns Turkish and converts to Islam; the Pontic Greek orphan is erased from history to be replaced by Raife, a Turkish speaking, Muslim Turk. Like Çetin's grandmother, the fictional Tamama wishes to reconnect with her surviving family members in her old age (following a stroke) which is what makes her speak to her nieces and nephews about her past, and thus the quest to locate distant relatives begins.

Significant is that, for Andreadis, the fictional story of Tamama is grounded in memories of a distant landscape he calls his ancestral homeland. Elsewhere, in a semi-biographical work, *Pontos'taki Evim* [*My House in Pontos*] published in 2005, Andreadis has stated that although he was born and raised in Greece, and does not set eyes on Anatolia until he is in his mid-twenties, he identifies more as an Anatolian refugee than as Greek. Andreadis' family was moved from Anatolia to Greece during the Population Exchange between Turkey and Greece in 1923.²² Andreadis spends the first eighteen years of his life labeled a refugee from a place he is now a stranger to, but in the meanwhile grows up with the vivid descriptions narrated to him by his grandmother Afroditi of the life his parents and grandparents led and the grand houses they once owned in that distant land, Pontos.²³ The stories his grandmother tells him of Pontos are so deeply engraved in his mind that upon his return to his family's homeland (near the present-day city of Trabzon) he recognizes that a casino now stands on the spot the Aya Grigoriu Church once occupied. He knows that the square opposite the school his grandmother Afroditi has described countless times was once called "Gavur Meydanı" (The Square of the Infidels).²⁴ What Yorgos labels a return is in fact his first visit to Trabzon. However, he is familiar with his homeland in very tangible ways, and this is a familiarity that comes solely from communicative memory, i.e. personal interaction with his grandmother by means of verbal communication. Interestingly, the house and the land from which this family was "forcefully made to leave" before he is born is what he most identifies with; much more so than his home in Greece, where his family are treated as second class citizens, living in barracks on an unnamed street with other Anatolian refugees.²⁵ Like Tamama, Yorgos too is a lost child of that landscape.

Tamama was published in 1993, and awarded the prestigious Abdi İpekçi Prize in Literature in the same year. Although it speaks openly about the harsh conditions of the deportations, how people were abandoned by Turkish soldiers to die, and how the old and weak were murdered on the side of the roads, Yorgos Andreadis' work elicited mostly positive responses, and its readers demanded that other such works which engaged with the tragedy of the deportations be produced. However, it was only some ten years after the publication of *Tamama*, when Çetin's *Anneannem*

²¹ Yorgos Andreadis, *Tamama: Pontos'un Yitik Kızı* [*Pontos' Lost Girl*]. (Istanbul: Belge, 1993), 68-77.

²² Yorgos Andreadis, *Pontos'taki Evim* [*My House in Pontos*] (Istanbul: Belge, 2007).

²³ Pontos is the historical Greek designation for the region on the southern coast of the Black Sea, located in modern-day northeastern Turkey.

²⁴ Andreadis, *Pontos'taki Evim*, 61. This work deals with Andreadis' own journey back to Pontos after his grandmother's death in search of the house she always described to him in her stories.

²⁵ Andreadis, *Pontos'taki Evim*, 63.

appeared in 2004 that a plethora of similar works would follow, engaging the human tragedy of the 1913-1916 deportations and murders through personal narratives like never before in Turkey. Significantly, these works were no longer fiction grounded in reality, but the voices of men and women relating stories “as it once was.”

Individual Narrative as Collective Politics and Collective Trauma

The question of whether personal narrative can work as collective (and redemptive) politics is a critical and contentious issue within literary, testimonial and wider cross-cultural examinations of genocide and mass persecution.²⁶ For example, certain scholars and critics of Holocaust fiction “express distrust of literary devices in narratives” and have argued that literary narrative can only serve to distract from the “harsh realities of the ghettos, the concentration camps, and death.”²⁷ These scholars have argued that the use of literary devices in narratives, such as the use of metaphor in personal narratives, can only serve to distract from the horror of the events witnessed.²⁸ In this context, Alvin Rosenfeld has insisted on the central problem of language in narrating the brutality and inhumanity of the Holocaust, which forever surpassed the ability of language to represent it: “There are no metaphors for Auschwitz, just as Auschwitz is not a metaphor for anything else. Why is that the case? Because the flames were real flames, the ashes only ashes, the smoke always and only smoke.”²⁹ However, testimonial writings and the personal narrative have increasingly entered the realm of mainstream literary and historical discussion, and have found a platform in many contexts of mass persecution and genocide. For example, Yvonne Unnold who writes on the Latin American *testimonio* has argued that given that “truth and reality forms a central element [in the personal narrative] and since this genre aims at [...] serving as a sociopolitical tool,” it is able to attach authenticity value to its representations of history.³⁰

In this backdrop, I believe that the nature and timing of the publication of the works under scrutiny is significant in understanding their purpose and how these were conditioned by states of minds outside their own. These works are much more than the private stories of individual women; in each context the act of publishing these personal narratives represents a decision to act in public, where, due to the lack of any official recognition of these tragedies, they assume a similar role public memorials would have taken on under normal circumstances. War memorials are “places where people grieved, both individually and collectively.”³¹ But what happens if there are no memorials to visit to mourn, no public spaces that emphasize the losses endured and if the framing of memory relevant to these events through language is denied to the witnesses of the crimes? Although the voice that speaks in personal narratives asserts the individuality of a certain experience, and imposes personal feelings and responses to the events in question,³² narratives collectively produce a new genre altogether: They confirm what one another say and create space where dialogue can take place between different agents. The different agents in question in this case would be the victims, their family members, civil society, and the Turkish state. Personal memory becomes testimony, whereby communicative memory ultimately redefines cultural memory.

Why was it that it was only in the mid-2000s that these works finally found a platform? Debates on the Turkish state’s responsibility of the Armenian Genocide and its refusal to recognize that these crimes took place have been on the political agenda for a long time, both on the national and international level. Writers, journalists and priests in Turkey have been arrested for recognizing the Armenian, Rum and Assyrian Genocides for over three decades and continue to be penalized for writing on these topics. However, it is certainly possible to refer to a “memory boom” that has

²⁶ I would like to thank one of the reviewers of this article who drew my attention to this very central issue, and for making very useful suggestions where this question was concerned.

²⁷ Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 45.

²⁸ Elizabeth Scheiber, “Figurative Language in Delbo’s *Auschwitz et Après*,” *Comparative Literature and Culture* 11, no. 1 (2009), 3.

²⁹ Alvin H Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying: Reflections of Holocaust Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 11.

³⁰ Unnold, *Representing the Unrepresentable*, 45.

³¹ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 79.

³² Hynes, *Personal Narratives*, 206.

taken place in the last decade, almost a century on from the atrocities of 1913-1916. One possible answer to “why now” is that there is finally enough distance between then and the present for the audience to treat these as belonging to an era that does not affect any of their living relatives or acquaintances. These issues can be discussed for the first time without holding responsible anyone in living memory. By the 2000s, those directly responsible for these crimes as well as their immediate family were no longer alive.

Second, communicative memory is after all, temporal memory that disappears after the person carrying out the act of remembrance dies.³³ Those witnesses who are involved in memory work do not necessarily rehearse past events in order to provide interpretations of these atrocities and the historical process they happened in; they do so in order to “struggle with grief, to fill the silence, to offer something symbolic for the dead.”³⁴ The 2000s also coincided with the death of the last of these agents of remembrance who possessed communicative memory. However, once this information is transmitted to others and those born in generations after them, communicative memory becomes cultural memory.³⁵ Cultural memory is not fixed – and neither is the voice of the narrator in memoirs – however, these testimonies become carriers of cultural (if not collective) memory because they are the inventions of individuals within a group coming together in acts of remembrance: They record, publish, read and discuss in the public arena. Each agent takes on a different role: the grandmother narrates, the granddaughter records what she hears, a publisher prints the work and others come together to read and discuss content. Sometimes, the state acts, arrests or publically denounces the accounts in question. Significantly however, the content of memory takes on a collective and therefore political meaning. The family may be the largest space situated between the individual and state, but the act of publishing these personal accounts moves these memories beyond the family, out of the shadows and into the public domain.

Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity “feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that affects their group consciousness ineradicably, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental ways.”³⁶ The essential point here is the concept of changing future identity, which is inextricably linked to how memory work is carried out after the so-called traumatic events take place. For example, in *Those who Survived*, Kemal Yalçın records the interviews he held with survivors of the Armenian and Rum Genocides. In one instance, one assimilated Armenian woman describes how, before the 1915 massacres when aggression and discrimination against non-Muslims in Eastern Anatolia were on the rise, she witnessed her brother, Agop, being dragged out of their house by a group of Turkish men and beaten up in the village square for everyone else to witness and watch. Agop had supposedly stolen a turkey from the nearby village: “I looked around to see whether any of our neighbors would help [...] but everyone watched as my brother was beaten half to death for no apparent reason. We were helpless as a few people from the crowd screamed “infidels, you hide buckets of gold but still steal without shame!”³⁷ She then describes how this event was the “beginning of the end”; that the bonds that had held Armenians and the Turks together in a sense of communality had been severed forever by way of the act of witnessing this single violent event, for both the bystanders and victims alike. By attributing such symbolic meaning to the memory of the violence

³³ Jan Assmann, *Of God and Gods: Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press: 2008), 118.

³⁴ Jay Winter and Emmanuel Silvan, eds. *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 27.

³⁵ I am borrowing from Jan Assmann who maintains that “cultural memory begins where communicative memory ends.” Although everyone can take part in commemorative acts of remembrance, cultural memory work is more differentiated and exclusive in character because not every member of a community can legitimately influence the content of cultural memory. For Assmann, national archives are an illustrative example of reservoirs of cultural memory. I argue here that written accounts of survivors of Turkish atrocities have now transcended commemorative memory to become cultural memory, serving as a form of archival source. See, Jan Assmann, “Collective memory and cultural identity,” *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995).

³⁶ Jeffrey C Alexander and Ron Eyerman, eds., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004).

³⁷ Kemal Yalçın, *Hayatta Kalanlar* (Istanbul: Bir Zamanlar, 2007), 46-47.

of that day, this personal narrative highlights how traumatic memory is a metaphor for what is in fact a language of mourning. Personal narratives touch on traumatic events that could perhaps best be described as being commemorative acts that go back in time to reaffirm one's human values, and acquire some sense of redemption: This is the expression of traumatic memory.

Collective trauma on the other hand, occurs when the basic tissues of a groups' social ties are fundamentally impaired, resulting in the destruction of a sense of communality, damaging the bonds that attach people together.³⁸ This is perhaps one of the most striking subject matters that binds each of these personal narratives: The witnessing and experiencing of the violence towards non-Muslim groups who had lived in communities side by side with Turks and Kurds for over centuries left a permanent mark on the survivors of these crimes, as well as its perpetrators (even if they were guilty of passively observing).

In Çetin's *Torunlar (Grandchildren)* – which consists of a series of recorded interviews – a Turkish woman, Sima describes her surprise at discovering that there were students in her class called Tanya, Arto and Rafi. Her parents had enrolled her at a school in Istanbul after they moved there from a small village in Western Anatolia: "I thought they must be very European. I had been completely unaware that there were Jews and Armenians from Anatolia [...] I was therefore shocked to learn that my maternal grandmother's mother had been Armenian, from a village in the East of Turkey where there were entire villages of non-Muslims."³⁹ Once she approaches her father's family about the 1915 depositions and massacres, she notices how, although "no one denied that these were tragic events," there was resistance to talk about the vacated houses of hundreds of thousands of Armenians and Rums, and how these properties and lands had been seized by their Turkish neighbors. Sima comments on how "no one is prepared to say 'I seized such and such property and became rich,' it is always 'others' who have committed such acts [...] but you can see and sense their guilt."⁴⁰

The question of guilt as wrapped up in cultural trauma is an interesting one. Friedlander discusses how the feeling of guilt among Germans in post-World War II Germany was transformed over time: When German and Jewish contemporaries of the Nazi period –

Contemporary adults, adolescents or children, even the children of these groups – are considered, what was traumatic for the one group was obviously not traumatic for the other. For Jews of whatever age, the fundamental traumatic situation was and is the Shoah; for Germans, it was national defeat (including flight from the Russians and loss of sovereignty) following upon national exhilaration. To that, however, a sequel must be added, regardless of its psychological definition.⁴¹

The sequel is that over time, increasing information becomes available to Germans and the international community, and the question becomes one of dealing with the stain of genocide as well as the potential shame and guilt that comes with the obligation of recognizing these crimes.

This seems applicable to the Turkish case. For example, when Yorgos Andreadis describes his visit to his ancestral home Trabzon for the first time in 1970s, he writes of an encounter with a group of young men, more or less his own age, who approach him to ask where he is from in a mixture of English, Turkish and Greek (once he shares with them that he was born in Greece). In response, he points emphatically to the ground and declares: "From here."⁴² Reportedly, a few of the men do not seem to understand the significance of this response, whereas the rest of the

³⁸ Jeffrey C Alexander, *Cultural Trauma*, 9.

³⁹ Fethiye Çetin and Ayşe Gül Altınay, eds., *Torunlar* (Istanbul: Metis, 2009), 135.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.138.

⁴¹ Saul Friedlander, "Trauma, Transference and 'Working through' in Writing the History of the Shoah," *History and Memory*, 4 no.1 (Spring-Summer 1992), 45-46. Emphasis my own.

⁴² Andreadis, *Pontos'taki Evim*, 60-61. What I find striking about this account is that the men who approach Andreadis, speak some form of Greek, which must mean they spoke Pontic, a dialect of Greek. This account dates back to the 1980s, and it is significant that members of the third generation are still familiar with the language.

group “looked uncomfortably to the ground and did not know what to say.”⁴³ Denial is inextricably linked to feeling of guilt and collective trauma, where the perpetrators and/or passive observers, as well as the generations that were born after them bear the marks of the violent way in which social ties of communities were fundamentally impaired. Another example is Sude, the protagonist in *Fear is my Master* – which is the story of Filiz Özdem, who finds out that her grandfather was in fact Armenian following his death – and who declares “my [paternal] grandmother did not wish for me to look for answers about my [maternal] grandfather, because she knew what I would find would cause embarrassment.”⁴⁴ Both her mother (who discovers her own father’s Armenian identity at the same time as Sude) and Sude realize that Sude’s grandfather must have had no choice but to marry his wife (their mother/grandmother), and denied the right to talk about the circumstances under which he had accepted these terms. Sude is not told that this is the case, but assumes that it must have been so. In a similar narrative, Burhan Aydın, whose mother Feride – an Armenian woman “rescued” by a Turkish man in 1915 who then becomes her husband – states the following:

I think that because my mother did not want to remember those horrific times she never spoke of what had happened. It’s likely that my mother witnessed the murders of her parents, as well as her brothers and sisters and escaped to the mountains. Why else would a young woman hide up in the mountains all by herself? [...] I grew up with very little knowledge relating to my mother’s family.⁴⁵

Although she has no evidence to support this, Burhan Aydın comes to the conclusion that her mother must have witnessed the murder of her family after finding out that her grandmother had been found alone in the mountains. Significant here is how in the absence of memory, Filiz Özdem and Burhan Aydın make new memories to fill that void, framing events in the way they think it must have happened.

The consequences of collective trauma in the backdrop of the arguments of this essay are twofold: First, by denying the reality of others’ suffering and suppressing expressions of those memories, the Turkish nation was able not only to diffuse its own responsibility for this suffering but also projected the responsibility of its own suffering on others.⁴⁶ In other words, the refusal to take any accountability over the question of the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek deaths has provided the Turkish state with a homogenizing discourse: The Turkish people cannot be – and is not – responsible for the deaths of the other, i.e. Armenian and Greeks. This not only enables state discourse to separate the two camps of Turks and non-Turks sharply into a definitive them and us, but also rallies undivided support over one single issue. As Selim Deringil has highlighted, “there is no other issue in Turkey today, other than that of the question of an Armenian Genocide, which manages to rally the entire Turkish nation behind it.”⁴⁷ Therefore, the “Armenian question” and the state’s denial to accept any responsibility in either Armenian, Assyrian or Greek suffering becomes a nodal point in the process of the homogenization of the Turkish people-as-one.

The second issue at hand is the question of how the concealment of vast numbers of Armenians, Assyrians and Rums who took on Turkish identities, and the inability to speak of these atrocities resulted in the transmittance of a fractured perception of self across generations. One passage in the *Fear is my Master* highlights how Sude faces a crisis in her sense of identity because she feels that she no longer knows who her grandparents’ really were, and that her maternal ancestors are “forever lost” to her:

No one knows their names, and no one calls their names... Who knows what attributes they have passed on to me? Perhaps the way I flick my hair to the side and how I sleep at night

⁴³ Ibid., p. 62.

⁴⁴ Filiz Özdem, *Korku Benim Sahibim* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi, 2007), 54.

⁴⁵ Gülçiçek Günel Tekin, *Kara Kefen* (Istanbul: Belge, 2008), p.99.

⁴⁶ Alexander, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 1-2.

⁴⁷ Selim Deringil, Boğaziçi University Lecture, 2 May 2011.

with my left knee hug tight resembles the mannerisms of some dead person whose name I do not know. Perhaps my clumsy walk and the way I fall in love is like someone I do not know [...] to whom am I indebted for my patience?⁴⁸

The passage I quoted earlier from Çetin's *My Grandmother* also signals a similar sort of crisis. Çetin feels that "most of what I thought I knew until that day was in fact wrong [...] all my values were being shattered by what I was hearing."⁴⁹ Both Çetin and Sude feel disconnected from their 'former' selves; memory and identity are, after all, fundamentally bound to one another. Each individual remembers as part of a social group and our memories are almost always rehearsed in the past "in reference to the individual memories of other people; that is, those persons who are significant at different levels for that individual."⁵⁰ What happens when the validity of such rehearsed memories is challenged by an alternative set of realities that one has no access to? Sude and Fethiye Çetin, as well many other men and women in these narratives, feel that they have been deceived by the memories they have previously formed.

However, in Sude's case there is no chance of her forming new memories, (unless she fills in the gaps by inventing new ones) because her grandfather is dead and there are very few people she can talk to about who he was and what had happened to him. When Sude expresses her wish to find out more about her maternal grandfather's history, her paternal grandmother declares: "Why has this foolish girl become infatuated with her family's maternal side, why does she question the past so? If she wishes to inquire on family history, she can do this by looking in to her father's side of the family!"⁵¹ However, Sude feels as if "a branch of the family tree is broken; I wish to learn more of that broken branch."⁵² Sude needs to make new memories; and Çetin feels that she has betrayed her grandmother and herself by taking part in "false" collective acts of remembrance by reading nationalistic poems in Turkish; whereas Nazlı, whose account was recorded by Gülçiçek Günel Tekin, expresses huge regret at never probing her own grandmother to recount her memories. Nazlı knew of her grandmother's "Armenian past", yet did not understand the significance of what this meant until after her death. As a consequence, Nazlı never finds out what her grandmother's real name was. She states that "I have asked others who knew her [...] would you believe it? No one knew. I don't know what my own grandmother's name is [...] I feel incredible regret."⁵³ These women's legacy to their children and grandchildren seems to be a sense of collective trauma. In other words, they are faced with a form of shock when they realize that their communities no longer exist as an effective source of support, and that a significant part of the self has disappeared upon the discovery that many of their rehearsed memories shared within their communities no longer represent their family history and by extension, their selves. This ultimately means that many of their exchanges of information, values and memories – be it at school, at work, or amongst members of their Turkish family – no longer contribute to their present selves.

In the case of all the narratives under scrutiny in this essay, the memory work being carried is very much intertwined with what Emmanuel Silvan calls "grief work";⁵⁴ in that all these memories pertain to a past that is particularly painful and fraught with death and loss. Why, then, did these women choose to overcome the silence that they have so dutifully kept throughout the years? Why do their children and grandchildren choose to repeat the stories that they have been told? Two separate themes connect these memoirs and could help explain the reason behind their coming out. The first is the fear of being forgotten and/or forgetting, as well as the wish to reconnect with relatives that may still be alive. In *My Grandmother*, Çetin's grandmother initially shares her secret only to ask that her granddaughter track down members of her family in America. However, once

⁴⁸ Özdem, *Korku*, 80.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵⁰ Winter and Silvan, *War and Remembrance*, 27.

⁵¹ Özdem, *Korku Benim Sahibim*, 54.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 54.

⁵³ Tekin, *Kara Kefen*, 34.

⁵⁴ Emmanuel Silvan, "Private and Public Remembrance in Israel," in *War and Remembrance*, 179.

Çetin is able to get in touch with Heranuş's brother in New York, Heranuş declares that she has no desire to speak or see her brother, or other members of her family. Her assertion that "Who am I to them? They have long forgotten me"⁵⁵ is only challenged when Çetin informs her that Heranuş's brother has named his daughter after his lost sister: He has named her Heranuş. Upon hearing this news, Heranuş weeps, uttering "so they have not forgotten me after all."⁵⁶ Çetin remarks on how for the very first time in her life, she heard her grandmother sing to herself on that very day.⁵⁷ In *Tamama*, Andreadis describes how Tamama starts asking for her relatives and speaking Greek on her deathbed, obliging Ayşe – her Turkish sister – to inform her own son (who we are told is like a son to Tamama who never married) that his godmother is in fact Rum. In both cases, these women would probably have chosen to keep the silence which was essential in ensuring that they avoid discrimination, stigma or even worse,⁵⁸ had it not been the need to reconnect with the past by seeing and speaking to members of the families of their former selves.

The other reason why these stories are passed on is the wish to make known to a general public that these atrocities took place. One other narrator in *Kara Kefen*, Taner – whose mother was Armenian – asserts that "We never could understand her. We never asked her why she wept. [...] Now that I know the fate that befell her, I want others to know what we never asked her."⁵⁹ Yorgos, through Tamama, expresses his wish that everyone know that "what befell [them] was so catastrophic that a seven year-old was willing to abandon her only living relative, a sister, for a single slice of bread."⁶⁰ Therefore, it seems that the act of narrating serves both the purpose of rebuilding ties as well as that of socio-political testimony. The effort of collective individual testimony, as is the case in Çetin's *Grandchildren*, Tekin's *Black Shroud*, and Kemal Yalçın's *Those who Survived* demonstrates how survivors and their children and grandchildren become witnesses, linking the private and the public. However, note that although the direct victims of these atrocities take on the role of witnesses by narrating these stories, the need to publish these accounts is one that is felt most acutely by the third generation. This kind of memory work takes on a particularly significant meaning as they serve the purpose of resurrecting an otherwise vanishing universe that has so far not been given a place in Turkish collective memory. Whether these testimonies, and the memory of genocide and suffering they transmit become part of collective memory in Turkey is not possible to determine just yet, but these works are certainly being read, circulated and discussed.⁶¹ They have also encouraged others with similar stories and testimonies across the country to appear on television, write in newspapers, journals and give speeches in schools and universities. I maintain that these personal accounts have been effective in providing a public space in which victims as well as citizens of the Turkish Republic are coming together to mourn the crimes committed at the very inception of the Republic. They also serve to unsettle the official definition of "fixed" Turkish identity, which has thus far systematically excluded other ethnic expressions from partaking in the making of the nation.

⁵⁵ Çetin, *Anneannem*, 69.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁵⁸ I do not consider silence to be an inability to remember, or the expression of how traumatic memory is irretrievable. The victims of the genocides have not gone through a collective amnesia. In two separate accounts, one in *Black Shroud* and the other in *Grandchildren*, examples of how some of these women chose not to speak about the atrocities they witnessed is drawn on. Burhan Aydan, whose mother Feride (he does not know her Armenian name) used to refuse to talk about how her brother and parents had perished in 1915 saying "those days are in past, do not ask about them." (Tekin, *Kara Kefen*, 99). However, she did eventually talk about her family and life prior to 1915. In another account, Zerdüş't's grandmother used to tell her "I do not speak about those days because, they are in the past, and thank God that they are in the past." (Çetin, *Torunlar*, 94). The point here is that the memory of the events is there, as is the choice to discuss these. Some women simply chose not to.

⁵⁹ Tekin, *Kara Kefen*, 5.

⁶⁰ Andreadis, *Tamama*, 105.

⁶¹ That these works are being widely read is demonstrated by the number of time these publications have run out of print and were then reprinted: *My Grandmother* has been rerun nine times; *Fear is my Master* had been reprinted three times; and *Black Shroud; My Grandmother was an Armenian* and *Grandchildren* have all been rerun twice.

Conclusion

To what extent can these forms of memory, recorded as personal narrative and then published for a greater audience outside that of the immediate family, be integrated into history writing, if at all? Catherine Merridale comments on how historians, in their focus on the “destruction of social memory and how it is linked with starker instances of censorship and denial” in countries such as Soviet Russia – and for the purpose of this essay – Turkey, have overlooked how private and personal stories have often been preserved.⁶² Although a refusal to speak publically about Turkish atrocities committed against non-Muslim minorities in Anatolia, dubbed by some as silence, has been the predominant trend in Turkey, the last decade has ushered in certain changes. The upsurge of memoirs written by granddaughters and grandsons of the victims, as well as Armenian, Rum and Turkish writers who have sought out other carriers of memory to record their narratives, have resulted in the publication of a wide-range of works dealing exclusively with the memories of survivors of these crimes.

The Turkish state has gone to great lengths to deny any responsibility for the mass killings of non-Muslim minorities across the Anatolian landscape, and has repeatedly refused to recognize the Armenian Genocide.⁶³ It has also denied access to or destroyed the material basis for any meaningful debate or discussion on how approximately one fifth of the civilian population of Anatolia perished during World War I, and has by extension attempted to destroy the social memory that pertains to these events. Moreover, in the absence of any formal recognition of the dead,⁶⁴ those who survived were denied the social recognition of the violent and unnatural character of these deaths. Such recognition must be seen as a crucial stage in the process of coming to terms with loss individually and as members of a society as a whole.⁶⁵ The lack of archival material accessible to the general public – and to some extent, historians – has created a vacuum in the historical explanation of the persecution and elimination of Armenian, Assyrian and Rum minorities. Until archival material can be used more freely by members of the public, this vacuum can therefore only be filled with the memory of those who bore witness to these events, and whose testimony can be transmitted to a broader audience in the form of literary testimony.

Let us pause and consider Primo Levi's works on the Holocaust, such as *If This is a Man* or *The Black Hole of Auschwitz*. As a writer and communicator of how he survived Auschwitz and how he then tried to come to terms with surviving when so many other millions had not, he did what so many others had not been able to: He bore witness to an event that millions of others could never do, and became a carrier of memory. Levi's role has been likened to a self-imposed responsibility to write, so that humankind is reminded of the Holocaust and such crimes never repeat themselves again.⁶⁶ Whether or not Levi was successful in ensuring that a crime as horrific and large-scale as the Holocaust never occurs again is beyond the scope of this essay. However, his personal accounts have certainly worked towards recognition of the horrific nature of the violence that was inflicted on the Jewish people and has become an important part of cultural memory and imagination pertaining to the Second World War.

Following the publication of *Anneanem* in 2004, a number of Turkish newspapers promoted this work by reporting extensively on its content matter. By writing about *Anneanem*, many journalists discovered that it was possible to talk about the death marches, and the human misery and cost of

⁶² Catherine Merridale, “War, Death and Remembrance in Soviet Russia,” in *War and Remembrance*, 63.

⁶³ Greek and Armenian historians alike have tended to treat the first persecutions of the Greeks in 1913-1914 and the Armenian Genocide of 1915 as entirely separate phenomena. For observers of the Armenian Genocide, the fear that any contextualization and historical comparison will diminish and relativize the Armenian genocide's significance seems to motivate such differentiation. However, I will treat the forced deportations of Rums and the systematic killings of Armenians as fundamentally similar aspects of the CUP's policies of violent Turkification, which were interconnected policies of ethnic cleansing and genocide aimed at the homogenization of the Ottoman Empire. Matthias Bjornlund also raises this point in “The 1914 Cleansing of Aegean Greeks as a Case of Violent Turkification,” *Journal of Genocide Research*, 10:1 (March 2006), 41-57.

⁶⁴ Although a precise count of the number of killings cannot be given, it is generally agreed that one fifth of the population of Anatolia ‘disappeared’ during the course of these organized deportations. See, Richard G. Hovannisian, ed., *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998).

⁶⁵ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 5-9.

⁶⁶ Nicholas Patruno, *Understanding Primo Levi* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 8.

the mass persecutions which took place in Anatolia during the World War through Çetin's narrative and through Heranuş's words. For example, Celal Başlangıç, writing for *Radikal*, wrote of the death marches Heranuş witnessed; about the "truth that had been hidden for decades" and concluded the article with the sub-heading "Please forgive us."⁶⁷ Such declarations in the media were made possible – perhaps for the first time – with the publication of *Anneannem*, which was followed by publication of other similar testimonies. *Yeni Şafak*, a newspaper close to the government, responded to Başlangıç's article, and criticized his piece. Here Alper Görmüş questioned how genuine Heranuş/Seher could have been in her desire to reconnect with her family: "With whom did Seher Hanım wish to resume relations at the end of her long ninety-five year life? [...] When these supposed events took place her father was in America looking to start a business anyway, [are we to believe] that this woeful story is borne of her longing for two long lost brothers?"⁶⁸ Significant here is that regardless of either outlet's stance on this contentious subject, the publication of personal narratives and testimonies ignited a public discussion concerning the accounts of the witnesses. Moreover, that these witnesses were not historians, politicians, representatives of foreign states or human rights activists, but ordinary Turkish citizens humanized the debate as never before. This, then, brings us to the role individual testimony plays, especially when similar works are published collectively whereby they acquire a platform via which these survivors and their stories finally attain some sort of sanction and recognition from society. The survivor and their families need to assert their identity through public testimony⁶⁹ whereby they invoke from their audience the respect, empathy and compassion that has so long been denied them.

The present paper has also attempted to illustrate how mainstream literature on the Armenian and Rum massacres has been gendered, often overlooking how men and women have been exposed to different forms of violence: It is not a coincidence that all the victims-turned-witnesses that have carried out the memory work in question have been grandmothers, and that they have chosen to interact with their daughters and granddaughters (much more so than their sons and grandsons) by means of verbal communication. The positive reactions these personal accounts elicited from readers across Turkey, and the fact that books such as *My Grandmother*, *Grandchildren*, *Those who Survived* and *Black Shroud* have all been reprinted and rerun several times, is testimony that the memory work being carried out by the witnesses of the Anatolian persecutions goes beyond the level of the individual. The silence which has been kept for so long is now finally, albeit gradually, being broken: To what success is yet to be seen.

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⁶⁷ Celal Başlangıç, "Heranuş'tan Seher'e", *Radikal*, 20 December 2004.

⁶⁸ Alper Görmüş, "Hassas Sorunlar Gazetçisi Bitti mi?", *Yeni Şafak*, 26 December 2016.

⁶⁹ Wieviorka, 140.

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