

"In a courageous, daring journey of discovery and recovery, the journalist Avedis Hadjian moved for years through eastern Turkey to seek out the 'remnants of the sword,' those whose ancestors had survived the Armenian Genocide of 1915, who in most cases converted to Islam, and were wary but willing to speak of their family's experience. Eastern Anatolia is the contested geography where historic Armenia meets a present and future Kurdistan while both remain firmly under the gaze of the Turks. Hadjian's vivid and varied portraits reveal layers of tragic loss and survival that testify to the perseverance and resilience of ordinary, extraordinary people."

**Ronald Grigor Suny, William H. Sewell Jr. Distinguished
University Professor of History at the University of
Michigan and author of "They Can Live in the Desert But
Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide (2015)**

"Time opened a window and light transpired one of the darkest secrets of the Middle East: that of the surviving Armenians left behind after the mass deportations and massacres, continuing to live over their historic land, living in a state of denial. The window of time has closed since, with Turkish politics hardening again, devouring more of its children. Yet, it left behind voices of survivors in the form of oral histories collected in various forms. Among them Avedis Hadjian's remarkable book *Secret Nation* is the most complete narrative on the life and fate of Islamized Armenians."

**Vicken Cheterian, author of *Open Wounds:
Armenians, Turks, and a Century of Genocide* (2015)**

"The Armenian Genocide of 1915–16 has one great untold story. This is that there may be as many as two million Islamicized Armenians living in Turkey, whose grandparents and great-grandparents survived the death marches and massacres and were incorporated into Kurdish and Turkish families, often by force. To uncover the secrets and tell this story requires great perseverance, erudition and great sensitivity. This is what Avedis Hadjian has done in this remarkable, vivid and quite eccentric book. His research is impressive and the stories he tells extraordinary and moving."

Thomas de Waal, Senior Fellow, Carnegie Europe

"Deeply reported, and written with empathy and erudition, *Secret Nation* will prove to be an enduring work of journalism on the subject of ethnic slaughter and its long aftermath. Based on relentless travel across the Turkish countryside, the book examines a people who, for more than a century, have carried with them a liminal, quasi-clandestine heritage shaped by the legacy of the Armenian Genocide, and its official state denial. Avedis Hadjian moves through Anatolia's wounded landscape like a storyteller from the novels of W. G. Sebald, weighted by history, and compelled to excavate the connective tissue between present and past, trauma and acceptance."

Raffi Khatchadourian, staff writer at the *New Yorker*

SECRET NATION

The Hidden Armenians of Turkey

AVEDIS HADJIAN

I.B. TAURIS
LONDON · NEW YORK

This publication was made possible
by a generous grant from the
Dolores Zohrab Liebmann Fund

Published in 2018 by
I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd
London • New York
www.ibtauris.com

Copyright © 2018 Avedis Hadjian

The right of Avedis Hadjian to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by the author in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in a review, this book, or any part thereof, may not be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Every attempt has been made to gain permission for the use of the images in this book. Any omissions will be rectified in future editions.

References to websites were correct at the time of writing.

ISBN: 978 1 78831 199 1
eISBN: 978 1 78672 371 0
ePDF: 978 1 78673 371 9

A full CIP record for this book is available from the British Library
A full CIP record is available from the Library of Congress

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: available

Text design, typesetting and eBook by BBR Design, Sheffield
Printed and bound in Great Britain by T.J. International, Padstow, Cornwall



For my father and for Kirkor Menaf

The harsh iron age was last. Immediately every kind of wickedness erupted into this age of baser natures: truth, shame and honor vanished; in their place were fraud, deceit, and trickery, violence and pernicious desires.

Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*

Kılıç artıkları

"The leftovers of the sword," a Turkish expression employed to describe Armenian survivors of the Genocide who stayed on in the ancestral lands, especially women married off to Muslim men and forcibly converted to Islam.

Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	x
<i>A Note on Names and Spelling</i>	xiv
<i>A Note on the Bibliography</i>	xvi
Introduction: A Lost Map on the Tramway in Istanbul	i
I. SASUN	
1. Sasun	13
II. COMMAGENE	
2. Commagene	103
III. DIKRANAGERD	
3. Dikranagerd I	141
4. Siirt	190
5. Dikranagerd II	196
IV. DARON	
6. Bitlis	207
7. Mush	227
V. GARIN	
8. Erzurum	243
9. Hınıs	250
10. Bayazet	259
11. Sarıkamış, Kars and Ani	265

VI.	SEPASDIA AND ASIA MINOR	
12.	Sepasdia	281
13.	Ankara	286
14.	Cæsaria	298
15.	Amasia and Gümüşhacıköy	301
16.	Kastamonu	308
17.	Yozgat	314
VII.	KHARPERT	
18.	Argat	323
19.	Dersim	331
VIII.	VAN	
20.	Van	359
21.	Tatvan and Surp	368
IX.	CILICIA	
22.	Cilicia	373
23.	Urfa	374
24.	Marash	382
25.	Kilis	385
26.	Adana	387
27.	Antap	394
28.	Musa Ler	399
X.	THE BLACK SEA AND HAMSHEN	
29.	Hamshen I	413
30.	Poshas	433
31.	Horoms	455
32.	Hamshen II	464
	<i>Notes</i>	543
	<i>Further Reading</i>	555
	<i>Index</i>	557

List of Illustrations

Maps

Turkey and the Western Armenian provinces of Cilicia, Commagene and Hamshen	xviii
Hamshen villages in the western Black Sea region*	xviii
Cilicia	xix
Western Armenia (east of Kharpert) and Republic of Armenia	xx
Hamshen villages in the eastern Black Sea region*	xx

* Based on cartography prepared and copyrighted by Hagop Hachikian, in *The Hemsbin: History, Society and Identity in the Highlands of Northeast Turkey*, ed. Hovann H. Simonian (London and New York, 2007)

Plates

1. The residents of an Armenian village in Sasun (possibly Pışut), in 1973 (© Shiraz)
2. Pilgrims climbing Mt. Maruta in July 2011 (author's collection)
3. Baydzar Teyzé with her husband Sarkis Boğosyan at home in the grounds of Maryam Ana Assyrian Church in Dikranagerd (Diyarbakır), in December 2013 (author's collection)
4. Tea harvest in the Hamshen village of Garci (author's collection)

Acknowledgments

Family, friends, colleagues, and strangers made this book possible. Over the four years of travel and reading that went into the writing of this book, only their selfless help carried me to the conclusion. Whatever there is of worth in these pages is largely their merit. The inevitable pitfalls and faults are solely mine.

In New York, Ardash Chilingirian took hours away from family and work in the early stages of this project, providing incisive insight into the life of Armenians in Turkey as well as developments in Turkish politics and society, while also helping me in the translation of telephone and online interviews and surveys. Arpi Cankar gave me thoughtful tips on getting in touch with Hamshentsis and hidden Armenians at a time when they were still apprehensive about communicating with Diaspora Armenians; the connections she shared with me were fundamental in starting the work; inadvertently, she rekindled this book's idea, dormant since 1984, by inviting me to the New York premier of *Sonbahar (Autumn)* by Hamshentsi filmmaker Özcan Alper. Aris Sevag reviewed early drafts of the project, providing me with guidance that earned my growing appreciation as the work progressed; along with his wife Asdghig, Aris opened the doors to their home and their vast library, which they turned into a second home for me. Yelena Ambartsumian reviewed a very early advance, making suggestions that improved the writing. Vartan Matiossian came to my rescue more often than I can count, with precious bibliographical guidance. Herand Markarian, as then chairman for the New York branch of Hamazkayin Cultural Association, encouraged me to go ahead with the project by inviting me to make a presentation on the Hamshen Armenians, which later became the seed for the book project. For their help and advice, I also thank: Cristina Aby-Azar; Roupen Barsoumian; Ara Caprielian; Steve Degirmenjian; Bedross Der Matossian; Debra Ferman; Linda Ganjian; Rita Giragosian; Alan Huffman; Abner Katzman; Kirk Kazazian; Shant Madjarian; Armine Minassian; Alberto Riva; Ivan Rothkegel; Berjouhy Yesayan; and Liza Yesayan. In Fort Lauderdale, special gratitude goes to Victor Aimi, who has helped hone many of the ideas that shaped this book and whose family has always made their home also mine.

In Los Angeles, Liana Aghajanian published an advance in her *Ianyan* online magazine, magnifying the project's exposure. It was picked up in the

Turkish press, leading many Armenians and their descendants in Turkey to contact me. A conversation with Alina Aghajanian, Liana's sister, was key to developing a fundamental premise in this book. Edvard Sargsyan, also of Los Angeles, shared contact information on Islamicized Armenians, which was even more precious in the early stages of this work.

In Washington, an interview with me by Haykaram Nahapetyan, the correspondent for Armenian Hı Television, aired in Armenia, leading to new contacts and information on the Islamicized Armenians.

Prof. Bert Vaux, of Cambridge, UK, shared his expertise on the Hamshetsnak and Lomavren dialects, as did Prof. Patrick Taylor, of Mardin, Turkey. Sargon Donabed, in Providence, Rhode Island, and Nicholas al-Jeloo, in Melbourne, kindly put at my disposal their encyclopedic knowledge of Assyrians, their history and churches. To Hovann Simonian, of Lausanne, I owe the DNA tests that confirmed many hunches. More importantly, his seminal work on the Hamshen Armenians and our conversations were a source of inspiration for me. Seda Altuğ and Hasan Eken, in Istanbul, helped me with the translation of a song in the Kurmancî dialect of Sasun. Also in Istanbul, Lerna Yanık clarified questions on Turkish expressions. The invitation by the Hrant Dink Foundation to the conference on Islamicized Armenians at Boğaziçi University in 2013 was a major boost for this project. George Aghjayan, of Boston, discussed at length in our correspondence the complications linked to the demographics of Armenians and their descendants, Islamicized or otherwise, in the geography of the Genocide.

In Yerevan, Sergey Vardanyan, with his pioneering research on the Hamshen Armenians, lent his selfless support. Sofya Akobyan volunteered her profound knowledge on the Islamicized and hidden Armenians, especially in the region of Sasun. Meline Anumian, whose kind help I had come to appreciate after we first met in Dersim in 2011, built on her generosity in our later encounters in Yerevan. Diaspora Minister Hranush Hakobyan, Lusine Abrahamyan, Araks Kasyan, Harout Ekmanian, Salpi Ghazarian, and Sako Arian contributed to publicizing my work, with exposure that opened the doors to new contacts amid the Islamicized Armenians.

In Kiev, my deepest gratitude goes to the late primate of the Armenian Church, Archbishop Grigoris Bunyatyan, who shared with me his memories from the early times he had heard about the existence of villages of Armenians in the historical lands. To him I owed the first news about them in 1982, at a time when he was posted to Buenos Aires, and the coincidence of meeting him again in 2014 in Kiev brought the story full circle, shortly before his untimely passing the following year, amid the strains of serving his flock at a time of fratricidal war in Ukraine.

In Paris, I thank Prof. Yervant Bared Manuk, who shared his expertise on the history of conversion to Islam among Armenians since the Arab occupation of Armenia through the Hamidian period and the Genocide. I also thank Raymond Kévorkian for responding to my query on Sheik Said's role during the Genocide in Hınıs. His monumental history of the Armenian Genocide was the main primary source for this book's historical background, as I also cite in the bibliographical notes.

In Buenos Aires, Archbishop Kissag Mouradian and Adrián Lomlondjian provided unwavering support for this project, as did Aram Barceghian, Elida Bustos, Diana Dergarabedian, Federico Helman, Canan Kaya, Sergio Nahabetian, and Francisco Seminario.

In Venice, Samuel Baghdassarian was family rather than friend in his unsparing support for this project, enriched with his knowledge of the Mekhitarist historiographical tradition. Prof. Alberto Peratoner shed light on the nuances of national identity and how it interacts with culture and religion, especially in the case of Armenians and their Church, with his unique capacity to analyze history through the lens of multiple disciplines and fields of knowledge. The course on Islam and the Middle East by Prof. Maria Pia Pedani at Ca' Foscari University was crucial to understand Ottoman perspectives on history. Prof. Giampiero Bellingeri helped me interpret a verse from Nâzım Hikmet's *Human Landscapes from my Country*.

The sense of guilt for the funding that went into this book will dissipate only slowly, in the knowledge that it could have been devoted to more urgent and worthy causes. I can only hope that the result will not disappoint the people who invested in this project. At the Armenian General Benevolent Union, in New York, the unreserved support I found from Anita Anserian, Carol Aslanian, and Artoun Hamalian was as vital as it was humbling. The same goes for Stepan and Garo Arslanian, in Los Angeles and Buenos Aires, for their immediate and munificent response. In New Jersey, Zaven Khanjian and the Armenian Missionary Association of America offered their generous help, as did Maggie Mangassarian-Goschin and the Ararat-Eskijian Museum in Los Angeles. To all of them I shall always remain grateful.

At I.B.Tauris, I cannot thank Lizzy Collier enough. She made this project possible. I also express my gratitude to Sara Magness for her help in the production phase. A writer's best friend is a good copy-editor: Chris Reed excelled at it with his thoroughness.

In no small measure, this book was completed thanks to Doris Melkonian, of Los Angeles. Her support was pivotal in the writing phase, and my gratitude to her defeats my powers of expression. Likewise, this acknowledgment here does not convey the depth of appreciation to the Mekhitarist Congregation, which extended its prolonged hospitality for the writing of this book, completed at

St. Lazarus Monastery and the Moorat-Raphaël Armenian College, by the kind permission of then Fr. Abbot Yeghya Kilaghbian. At St. Lazarus, Fr. Vahan Ohanian shared his knowledge and resources on issues ranging from etymology to history and theology of the Armenian Church, as did Fr. Mesrob Lahian, especially illuminating coincidences and differences on the understanding of God in Christianity and Islam. Fr. Hamazasp Keshishian patiently assisted me in my bibliographical queries. In Venice and Istanbul, Archbishop Boghos Levon Zekiyan, primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Catholic Church in Turkey and pontifical delegate for the Mekhitarist Congregation, offered theological perspectives on martyrdom and Genocide, and the dilemma of forcibly Islamicized Armenians and their descendants.

Yet the people I owe the biggest debt of gratitude go unmentioned here. They are the protagonists of this book, and most are named by pseudonyms. The Armenians of Turkey and their descendants populate these pages, which are an acknowledgment to them and their existence, against almost all odds.

Along the way, mentors in my career and earnest supporters of this project passed away: Narciso Binayán Carmona, Aris Sevag, and Roupen Barsoumian. So did my first teacher, my father, whose example and ideals still guide me, foremost among them the love for books and words, and the humility to listen and learn. May this book serve as recognition to them, in loving memory. This long list cannot be complete without a mention of my mother, to whom I owe everything from stories about the Dikranagerd Armenians to digging up the roots of obscure words from Arabic; my siblings Araz, Alina, Ari, Alex, and Ania Karen; and Miriam, my life companion. Their patience and faith in this work got me through to the end.

A Note on Names and Spelling

A hybrid convention has been adopted for the spelling of names in this book. Armenian geographical and proper names, such as Khach or Mush, are spelled as commonly used in English publications. Most Western Armenian names have been transliterated according to the Western Armenian pronunciation or the usual rendering in the Latin alphabet by the Armenians of Turkey: thus, we write Hrant, for example, rather than Hrand, as it would be in Eastern Armenian. In the interest of easier reading, we have avoided the Hübschmann-Meillet transliteration system, preferred in academia. Again, guidance has been idiosyncratic: some names, including Dashnaksutyun, have been spelled according to the most common usage in the literature published in English. The phonetic chart below, based on the Turkish alphabet, has been adopted for Turkish, Kurdish, and Zaza names, as well as less common Armenian ones, including Ardanuş, spelled thus instead of Ardanush.

Â â	/a:/	faint and longer "a" as in parry
C c	/dz/	"j" as in joke
Ç ç	/tʃ/	"ch" as in chimpanzee
Ĝ ğ	/ɣ/ɾ	as the guttural "r" in Renée in French or the "gh" in Baghdad
I ı	/w/	"e" as in open
İ i, Î î	/i/, /i:/	"ee" as in seen
Ö ö	/ø/	"u" as in turn
Ô ô	/ɔ/	"o" as in bone
Ş ş	/ʃ/	"sh" as in shine
Û ü	/y/	"u" as in cube
Û û	/u:/	long "u" as in the French ou
Xx	/x ~ χ/	"kh" or a strong "h" as the "j" in José in Spanish or the "ch" in Aachen in German

The titles of the ten parts broadly correspond to historical Armenian provinces, except Commagene, an ancient Hellenistic kingdom, and the Black Sea and Hamshen, which has never existed as such as an administrative unit. The criterion, however, has also been idiosyncratic, as the cities and districts of individual chapters do not necessarily correspond to past or present

administrative units, but rather to the book's structure and the narrative flow. Thus, Ankara, Yozgat, and Amasia have not been part of the province of Sepasdia. Also, Urfa (the ancient Edessa) was just outside the borders of Cilicia. Most importantly, there is not necessarily a correspondence between the demographic importance of the Armenian population (Islamicized, "hidden," or otherwise) of any given district or province and the length of each chapter. This means that the length of the Sasun chapter, for example, does not necessarily indicate that there are more Armenians there than, say, Dersim, to which a much shorter chapter is devoted. This simply shows that it was possible to gather more stories from one place than another, and should only be seen as a limitation on the part of this author. Most administrative units, from villages to provinces, are quoted by their historical names but the official Turkish name is also employed. Hence, we have used Garin, the Armenian name for the historical province, instead of Erzurum, but the official geographical nomenclature is always quoted to avoid confusion. The same applies, for example, to Diyarbakır, which we have chosen to call Dikranagerd, even though the case here is more contentious, for reasons explained in the relevant pages. Still, the names are also used alternately, making clear that both the Armenian and the Turkish ones designate the same district.

Most subjects who were alive at the time of writing are named by a pseudonym. This is indicated in italics at the first mention (*Yusuf*, hereafter Yusuf, for example). The same guidance applies to some villages that have been disguised under fictional names to help protect the anonymity of interviewees. Even persons who had agreed to be quoted by their real names are mentioned here by pseudonyms. The reasons are twofold: consistency, and an additional precaution, out of concern for their safety, to limit exposure of the story subjects to the swings of Turkish politics, the fickleness of which may affect disproportionately minority members, especially members of a group—such as the descendants of Armenian converts in the geography of the Genocide—that only a few years ago were still reluctant to disclose their ancestry. Most likely the current deterioration of the situation in Turkey will dissuade some from revealing their origins, if they ever considered it. Others may find it safe to revert to their former, "hidden" condition, as much as that can be feasible. Pseudonyms have also been used for figures who are publicly known and have spoken for the record for other publications or are quoted in other books on this subject.

There are a number of exceptions. Most deceased persons are mentioned by their real names, but only in a very few cases are last names provided. High officials and historical figures are also quoted by their real names. This should not deter historians or interested experts from making their requests to this author should they need to establish contact with any of the persons mentioned in this book. In addition, some proper names—especially among the Hamshentsis—were preserved due to their linguistic curiosity as well as their beauty.

A Note on the Bibliography

The story of the hidden or Islamicized Armenians of Turkey has been the subject of a number of books released in the last few years, including Laurence Ritter and Max Sivaslian's *The Remains of the Sword*, first published in French in 2012. The book is also available in Turkish.

Fethiye Çetin's memoir, *My Grandmother*, remains the groundbreaking work on the topic. The book tells the story of her grandmother Hıranuş, a 1915 orphan, and through her she introduces us to the lives of survivors and their descendants who stayed in the historical lands. When it came out in 2004, Genocide testimonies in Turkey could expose authors to danger, the mildest of which was prosecution. Yet the slim volume encouraged others to come forth with their family stories and make the first dents in a century of denial.

The bibliography used in the writing of this book is quoted in the relevant passages. The three books listed below were the primary sources for reconstructing the historical background.

Raymond Kévorkian's *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History*, first published in French in 2006, remains to date the most comprehensive work on the topic. An English translation has been available since 2011.

James R. Russell's *Zoroastrianism in Armenia* is a vastly richer book than its title and size suggest. A fundamental study of the pre-Christian era, this 1988 publication is delightful to read and provides insights into everything from obscure passages in the *Sasuntsi Davit* (*Davit of Sasun*) epic to the Arab occupation of Armenia.

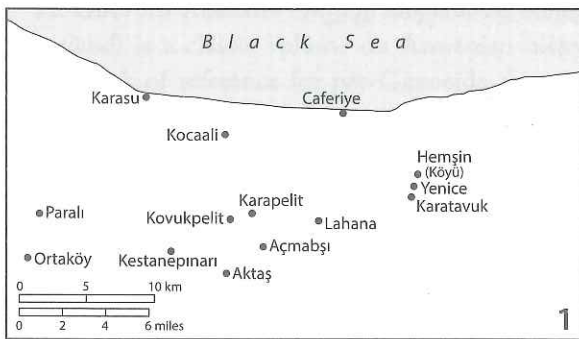
Fr. Ghevont Alishan's *Յուշիկը հայրենեաց հայրոց* (*Memories of the Armenian Homeland*) is a classic volume on Armenian history. First published in 1869, it is a book of reference for pre-Genocide Armenia. It is even more valuable for two other features: the arrangement of its contents by thematic relevance rather than chronological order; and the perspective of a monk writing from St. Lazarus island in Venice during a seminal period, when Western Armenia was still alive even if deprived of statehood.

Even though his book is about the past, Alishan's pen, in exquisite classical Armenian, is brimming with the joyous and impatient prose of someone who saw in the ancient civilization a harbinger of a new dawn. At the time, the

Armenian Renaissance movement, or Zartonk, was starting to take shape in Constantinople, in no small measure the fruit of the Mekhitarist Congregation's labors. It was killed in its infancy: the architects of the enlightenment of Armenian life and letters were rounded up on April 24, 1915. That day, the nation was decapitated. But Alishan was writing almost half a century earlier. It was also decades before the first massacres under Sultan Abdül Hamid II began to impact the psyche of Armenians, instilling in them a fear of complete annihilation. The Genocide embedded that fear in the nation, and it still informs it.

Readers interested in learning more about these topics are invited to consult the "Further Reading" section at the end of the book.

Turkey and the Western Armenian provinces of Cilicia, Commagene and Hamshen



Hamshen villages in the western Black Sea region

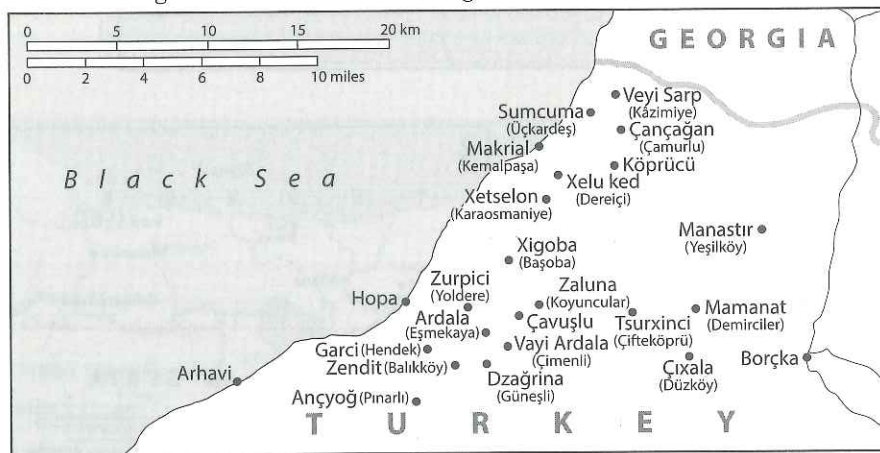


Cilicia

Western Armenia (east of Kharpert) and Republic of Armenia



Hamshen villages in the eastern Black Sea region



INTRODUCTION

A Lost Map on the Tramway in Istanbul

“Who are you? This is Turkey. Do you know what Turkey is?” a man asked me, his thick glasses magnifying the fear in his eyes. He was an Armenian from Anatolia now living in Istanbul. I was at a teahouse in the Kurtuluş district of Istanbul, where Armenian men originally from Sepasdia, Sinop, Kastamonu, and other provinces in the interior usually gathered, trying to interview them.

And he was right. I didn't know what Turkey was. But Turkey, and many Armenians themselves, didn't know who he was either. For a while, I had believed him and his friends to be Poshas, members of a secretive branch of the Roma nation that had settled on the Armenian plateau around the tenth century and still spoke a dialect based on Armenian. But I was wrong to take the moniker at face value, for “Posha” had also been used by Istanbul Armenians as one of the pejoratives for their Anatolian kin when the latter's migration to the former imperial capital had intensified in the 1960s. With most people in Turkey unaware of its Gypsy origin, the Anatolian Armenians were still known by some as Poshas.

For a century, the descendants of the survivors of the 1915 Genocide who stayed behind in Eastern Anatolia after forcibly converting to Islam kept their identity secret. Some still do. There are devout Muslims among them; others are Alevi, and a few secretly remain Christian, especially in the area of Sasun, where there are still mountain villages with secret Armenian populations. Yet many are agnostics or atheists. All the religious and ideological currents to be found in Turkey are represented among this group, called “secret Armenians” or “hidden Armenians,” even though some find the name offensive.

No one knows whether the hidden Armenians are in the thousands or a few million. Part of the problem stems from the difficulty of defining who is a secret Armenian. Some refuse to be called Armenian, even though they admit their parents or grandparents were so, but sometimes, often against their own will, they are still considered Armenian by other Turks or Kurds. Some are known to be Armenian to their neighbors and don't hide it, while others keep it even

from their own children, some of whom find out from other kids, who taunt them for being Armenian. Then there is the question of descendants of mixed marriages, and that vast majority of grandchildren of Armenian grandmothers, women kidnapped or forcibly married off during the Genocide.

Yet identity is a variable state, as many migrants know, some even changing countries more than once, others converting to a different religion. A conversation with a microbiologist on an unrelated topic in the summer of 2014 in Yerevan offered me a clue. As identity is not an immutable quality, it could be thought of as a state that can be defined along an imaginary spectrum. It may change over a lifetime, and it possibly will in many cases. We do not pretend to measure it in any manner: that would be as futile as it would be ridiculous, when not offensive. At most perhaps we can venture that people with a number of characteristics—have Armenian ancestry; consider themselves Armenian; live in their ancestral hometowns; or are in a way connected to a larger Armenian group (be that a family, clan, or community organization)—are far removed from those who only recognize a distant ancestor and do not see themselves as part of the community or nation.

As my first trip in search of secret Armenians was drawing to a close in the summer of 2011, I experienced an incident that shed new light on the characters that play out the drama of Turkey every day, a reminder that we are all actors trapped in the plot of history, playing roles most of us have not chosen.

I was heading to Istanbul Airport, where my flight to New York awaited me. I took the tram at Çemberlitaş station, near Sultanahmet, and got off at Lâleli Station to transfer to the metro train that would take me to the airport. After a ten-minute walk, I learned that I had disembarked at the wrong station. Then, trying not to panic, I also realized that I had left a one-meter tube on the tram, wrapped up in an old newspaper, containing valuable and potentially troublesome material: a map of Tunceli, a rebellious province, with the name “TÜRKIYE” torn off. Inside the tube, I had also placed compromising notes written in Turkish of an interview with an Alevi activist. But what I really agonized over was what I had rolled inside the map: four precious, autographed photos by the Armenian-Turkish photojournalist Ara Güler.

I debated whether I should try to get back the tube. I knew that, should anyone unwrap the map, the contents could cause me trouble with the police. I was also aware of how slim the chances were of recovering an item lost in the mass transit system of a city of 13 million people.

Although the Alevi activist had torn the name of Turkey from the map, fragments of the *E* in “TÜRKIYE” were still visible at the bottom, looking like the stripes of a tattered flag. The name of Tunceli had been angrily crossed out in thick black Sharpie, and above it the activist had written “Dersim,” the province’s old name. “Dersim is not Turkey,” the activist said.

In Turkey, “Dersim” and “1938” are mentioned in the same breath, the way people elsewhere speak of the Olympic Games. The year 1938 saw a massacre by Turkish military forces sent to suppress an uprising. Although the then prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had recently apologized for the massacre, calling it “the biggest tragedy in our history,” the name “Dersim” still had subversive resonances. Any Turkish police officer looking at the defaced map would have no difficulty getting the point. And it would easily pass for an “insult to the Turkish nation,” as defined in Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, punishable by up to three years in prison.

But that was small beer compared with what the notes revealed. During an interview conducted in a building facing the Turkish military base in Dersim, this activist had told me, as recorded in the notes:

You are Armenian. This land has been waiting for you. Come and claim back your land. Get a gun and go to the mountains to fight. If your wife doesn't join you, we'll get you one of our women, and she'll fight alongside you.

Dersim probably had a high concentration of secret Armenians, a topic that obsessed journalist Hrant Dink, who claimed that there are about 2 million of them in Turkey. And, in a way, Dersim and secret Armenians are connected to Dink's murder.

In an article published in his newspaper *Ağos*, Dink claimed that Sabiha Gökçen, the first female combat pilot in both Turkey and the world, and Atatürk's adoptive daughter, was an Armenian orphan from the 1915 genocide, Hatun Sebilciyan.

If Dink was right, she was a secret Armenian. Gökçen is considered a Turkish hero, in no small part due to her role in suppressing the Dersim uprising in 1938, strafing rebel positions at close range. Dink was murdered in the furious aftermath that followed his story on Gökçen's alleged Armenian origin and the tragic irony of an Armenian genocide orphan, with the identity of a Turk, taking part in a massacre of Alevi only two decades after the Genocide.

Back at the tram station in Istanbul, I went to see the stationmaster to report the lost map. A polite, solemn young man, he spoke with a thick Eastern Anatolian accent, his *ks* turning into *kbs*.

After taking my report, the stationmaster invited me for tea. Someone dropped by to greet him. The stationmaster's friend wanted to know where I was from. “Argentina,” I replied, but he wasn't buying any of it and kept pressing me about my origins. Why did I speak Turkish? Why did I look “almost like a Turk?” I insisted that I was Argentine. “Yes, of course, I'm Japanese,” he said with a sour smile. “You loved Turkey, didn't you?” he asked me and walked away without waiting for my reply. As I watched him leave, I remembered that a

few months earlier, Argentina had received unflattering coverage in the Turkish press over formally recognizing the Armenian Genocide. Many Turks were aware of Argentina's sizable Armenian community.

A few minutes later, a young man, in sunglasses and a black T-shirt and trousers, flashed a police badge and passed through the turnstile. He reminded me of a similarly dressed plainclothes agent who had given me trouble in Dersim, after I walked out of the building where the activist had given me the map. But this undercover officer did not approach me.

Then, the telephone rang inside the supervisor's booth. "They found the map," he said stoically, staring at me through his dark sunglasses. "It will be here in fifteen minutes." I began to steel myself for a trip to the police station.

Indeed, the tram pulled over fifteen minutes later. The driver quickly stepped outside and handed the tube with the map to the stationmaster. The stationmaster walked up to me, shook my hand, and wished me a safe trip home, "wherever that is," he said. He returned the tube with the map to me unopened, still rolled up in the old *Hürriyet* newspaper, a photograph of Prime Minister Erdoğan sporting an angry expression and wagging his finger at God knows what.

• • • • •

Turkey appeared to be set on the course of democratization, and it appeared that many in the country relished the new freedoms, as taboo after taboo was toppled in the press, in academia, and among people in the street. The Armenian Genocide, the Dersim massacre of 1938, and other topics that could have resulted in a trip to the police station if discussed in the wrong way in public, were now openly debated. But people with older memories knew better, and this springlike atmosphere did not fool them. Indeed, it was not the first time that Turkey had lurched toward democracy.

On August 29, 1908, a month after the Young Turk Revolution, Mihrdat Noradounghian published an article, "The price of freedom," in *Puzantion*, an Armenian newspaper in Constantinople. It was a moment of hope in the Ottoman Empire and the end of the brutalities that had marked the reign of Sultan Abdül Hamid II:

The change that took place a month ago had the biggest peculiar advantage, which the entire world views with bewilderment, and that is the lack of blood and uproar [...] Though during 15 years a lot of blood has been spilled, there was the fear of greater bloodshed which did not happen. One should know that this [bloodshed] has become a natural law and that natural laws are unavoidable. Whatever did not happen in the beginning could still happen. Whatever the

revolution did not do, the counterrevolution will be able to do [...] New freedom is always fragile. Let us be careful [...] We repeat that we need to be careful from shouting "Armenian" or to talk about an independent Armenia [...] The majority of the nation is in agreement that reforming the condition of the Armenians of Turkey is dependent on the reform of Turkey.¹

The predicament of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire was not benign. Yet it was a polity where they had a place, albeit a deteriorating one as violence in the Armenian provinces grew worse following the dissolution by imperial fiat of the Kurdish emirates and the power struggles amid Kurdish tribes to fill the vacuum, and their land grab and wealth appropriation at the expense of Armenians. Moreover, they were an integral part of the economy, if increasingly resented by the Muslim majority that lagged behind both in wealth and education.

The Young Turk Revolution began the exclusion process of Armenians and other non-Muslim minorities, a process that culminated in the Genocide and its direct outcome, Atatürk's "Turkey for the Turks." Yet Turkey has remained an empire in all but name, in terms of both a geography appropriated from other nations for the benefit of a dominant people, descended of conquerors arrived from elsewhere, and a state that has consistently excluded throughout its history its indigenous peoples, now reduced to token communities, from any position of power or public office.

With Armenians and Greeks exterminated and their remnants mostly deported, Kurds have been revolting against the Turkish state for almost a century now. Junior partners of the Ottoman sultans since the mid-seventeenth century, Kurds did not rebel against Atatürk's secular state project until 1925, when the fear of losing their privileges as Muslim citizens fueled the first Kurdish uprising. Even if the sources of Kurdish irredentism have undergone a fundamental transformation since then, from Islamic orthodoxy to revolutionary socialism, the response by the Turkish state has been consistent: massive firepower and the threat of unleashing it to preserve its territorial integrity. Turkey has proved extremely sensitive to any perceived threat to its state and territory, even if unfounded. Armenians in 1915 were not pursuing independence from the Ottoman Empire. The main nationalist party, the Dashnaksutyun (Armenian Revolutionary Federation), was allied with the Committee of Union and Progress in the 1908 revolution, following through with a conciliatory policy of moderate demands for reforms in the Armenian provinces to protect the lives and properties of Armenians.

Yet as former Turkish president Süleyman Demirel has observed, the fear that the country is permanently "on the brink"—of conspiracies that will tear it apart, or of a civil war that can break out at any moment—pervades the Turkish

establishment, including the military. These anxieties and the centrifugal tendencies in Anatolia help explain the “deep state,” an alleged power structure that is said to be engrained in the armed forces, the ruling elites, and law enforcement. It also serves as justification for repression by the state. Since its birth, the Turkish state has inflicted and withstood consistent and often high levels, often extreme, of violence. The state has proved resilient to it. It may even be argued that it needs it to feed the military and repressive foundations that underpin the Turkish state.

This can be observed in the man-made topography of the country while traveling in Anatolia, passing by military bases that extend for miles, with the distinctive black-on-red signs of a soldier wearing a helmet and holding an assault rifle. Sometimes these bases are separated by only a short distance. Deep inland, these fortified outposts are not against any external enemy. Unlike the citadels and fortresses from antiquity and the Middle Ages that dot the land, the contemporary ones do not protect it from invaders, but assert the power of the state, by the state and for the state, but not necessarily for the people. These bases are potentially or actually against the people.

Now that Turkey has descended again into a spiral of violence, it becomes clear why so many hidden or Islamicized Armenians smiled in silence or acknowledged with perfunctory courtesy the laudatory comments made by foreign visitors, including myself, about the new freedoms that seemed to be emerging in Turkey. Even if unconfessed for the awkwardness implicit in it, the absence of violence was making them uneasy, as it did for Armenians and others in 1908, as Noradounghian noted in his premonitory article. It could not last then, and it did not. It could not last a century later, and it did not either. The longer the uneventful days, the worse the backlash: it was a fear always proved right in Turkish history. Even if past behavior can never be an infallible predictor of the future, it does serve as guidance, especially as this pendular pattern has been consistently observed in Turkey at least since the advent of Sultan Abdül Hamid II in 1876.

People who were on the land knew better. An Islamicized Armenian in Mush grew agitated when I scolded a noisy child in the street, whose screams outside the office where we were having the interview made our conversation impossible. “Why do you fear a kid?” I had asked, angrier at the misbehaving boy than at the interviewee, who smiled sarcastically: “Don’t you know this people?” It was a call, one of several that I encountered and not always heeded, for humility and respect for the locals. That was how they had made it through a century of unacknowledged genocide that had obliterated their kin, on the land where they still lived.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

To this date, most Armenians tend to adhere to a narrow definition of their national identity. As in Ottoman times, many would still agree that it is hard to think of a person as one of their own if he or she is not a member, at least nominally, of the Armenian Church, or at least professes the Christian faith regardless of denomination.

While challenged by growing agnosticism or religious indifference mostly in the West, this traditional concept of nationality prevails both in Armenia and the Diaspora. And now secret Armenians, many of whom by now have genuinely converted to Islam and are solely Turkish speakers, come to blur even further what was until very recently a clear notion of what made an Armenian, in which denial and rejection of Islam and the Turk plays a big part.

That has been changing. Secret Armenians, as well as the Hamshentsis, are being embraced by Armenians from elsewhere, their contacts facilitated by social networks on the internet. Some are driven by a zeal that is almost evangelical in nature, sincerely believing in the need to save their kin, those that have stayed behind in their ancestral lands, from oblivion. This is regardless of whether these secret Armenians see it in their own best interest to engage on these terms. Others, however, approached this newly found group with curiosity—a curiosity reciprocated among the Anatolian Armenians, especially the youth.

Perhaps the real motivations behind this newly found enthusiasm for the hidden Armenians among Diasporans go beyond curiosity or rejoicing at finding lost relatives and fellow countrymen in a land where they were thought long gone. In the grand scheme of things, 100 years is the blinking of a star. Yet on a human scale, it spans four generations, and in a few decades the fifth one after the 1915 genocide will start taking over the reins of an Armenian Diaspora that has grown old and is beginning to wear out on several fronts. These include churches with declining attendance (in line with general trends in the West), schools with falling enrollment, and the dying Western Armenian language (originally spoken in the Ottoman Empire) which Unesco now officially considers endangered and may very well be extinct for all practical purposes by the end of this century.

In this scenario of decline and loss, the sudden discovery of Armenians who somehow escaped extermination in 1915 and stayed behind in their historical lands offered an unexpected jolt of life. There were still Armenians in Mush, Sasun, and Van: all hope was not yet lost.

Half a century ago nobody paid too much attention to the Anatolian Armenians, even though they were known to exist. Visits by Armenians from Syria, Lebanon, or other places to relatives who had stayed behind in places such as Bingöl, Sivas, or Diyarbakır—some having converted to Islam—were not uncommon in the 1960s. And there were known cases of lost Armenians

who left these ancestral lands to join the Diaspora, which at the time was barely beginning to stand on its feet after the devastation wreaked by the Genocide.

Sosi Kazanjian, who was staying at the Armenian Relief Society's orphanage in Aleppo in the 1960s, still remembers that, at the time, an Armenian woman had abandoned her Muslim husband in Diyarbakır and, along with her son, had come there to seek refuge and help. The boy, who was nine or ten, only spoke Turkish. His name, Kenan, was changed to the Armenian one Khoren.

But mother and son did not blend in, and after a year or two they went back to their home in Diyarbakır. At the time, nobody thought of them as special people or paid them too much attention in terms of rescuing or saving them as lost Armenians, other than providing the help available to anyone else, regardless of whether they came from historical lands. Moreover, it was not uncommon in the Diaspora to differentiate between the *kibar* (elegant) Istanbul Armenians and those who came from the "provinces," without pausing for a moment to reflect that these provinces were in fact the lost territories so sung and dreamed about in Armenian lore and political discourse.

One night at our family home in 1982, the Armenian Church Prelate in Argentina at the time, Monsignor Grigoris Bunyatyan, said there were still "secret Armenians" in the mountains of Sasun and Mush. That was the first time I had heard about them, but even at my young age I was inclined to take the information with a pinch of salt and disregard it as probably wishful thinking.

In 1984, at the Buenos Aires apartment of Argentine-Armenian journalist Narciso Binayán Carmona, a man of encyclopedic knowledge and an almost insane hoarder of books (he had a library of 40,000 volumes in all kinds of languages and genres that went from history and philosophy to medicine and bad pulp fiction), I took out a little book from the shelf, *Les Musulmans Oubliés* (*The Forgotten Muslims*), an introductory guide by Alexandre Bennigsen to the Islamic nations of the then-mysterious Soviet Union. For some reason, my eyes stopped on the name "*Hemchin ou Hamchen*" (or some other variation in the French spelling). "That's interesting," I thought, believing it might be related to *hamseen* or *khamseen*, the Arabic word for "50" and also the name of a famous desert wind. To my astonishment, I saw they were referred to as "Armenian Muslims." Was that not an oxymoron? It was a shocking discovery.

When asked about this, my father vaguely said they were Turkified Armenians, and that was pretty much all I knew about them until 2009, when I saw the Hamshen filmmaker Özcan Alper, from the Turkish province of Artvin, and his movie *Sonbahar* at New York's Lincoln Center, in which some Hamshetsnak, an Armenian dialect, is spoken.

While most Western Armenian speakers would have serious difficulties understanding the dialect, some words were possible to make out, including

"*vordag eyir vorti*" ("where were you my child"). During a Q&A session following the screening, Özcan addressed a question by a viewer as to why the Hamshentsis had escaped the 1915 massacres. By not denying the Genocide, and explaining that they had been spared because they were Muslim, but also because they were in a very remote mountain area with difficult access, he was making a statement in itself.

As the event closed, I approached Özcan to congratulate him in Armenian, to which he replied something in Hamshetsnak, which sounded such a fantastically archaic, remote Armenian as if it came from the longest night of times. Only one word I understood, *ağpar*, a conversational variant of "brother" in Armenian. That was all I needed to get started in the quest for the hidden and lost Armenians in this part of the world that used to be their homeland.

This book was written during a time frame in which Turkey appeared to be muddling through toward greater freedom and opportunity. The humbler voices of locals, especially in villages of the historical Armenian provinces, cautioned me not to take it all at face value. They would often repeat the words of the scared man at the Kurtuluş teahouse: "This is Turkey." But back then, the Turkey for the Turks which Atatürk intended to create appeared to be shedding its old, brittle hide. The people were keen to rediscover themselves after decades of self-denial and rule by fear.

It was fortunate that I wrote then. Diyarbakır, which had become the biggest center of an Armenian community that was being born anew, with converts grouped around the restored Surp Giragos Church, has turned into a war zone under the autocratic government of President Erdoğan who, motivated by electoral concerns, chose a path of confrontation with the Kurds. Moreover, the Turkish state confiscated the church, aborting the renaissance of an Armenian community mostly composed of the descendants of Islamicized Genocide survivors and a few who had chosen to convert (or reconvert, depending on how it is seen) to the Armenian Church. The Islamic State and other militant groups have claimed responsibility for several terrorist attacks in Istanbul, Ankara, and elsewhere since 2015. In the renewed climate of violence, this undertaking would have been much more difficult, and parts of it impossible: some of the districts I visited are now off limits, and the people interviewed would probably take more precautions or refuse to speak for this project.

This book is a testimony for a little pilgrim I saw as we were climbing Mt. Maruta in Sasun, who recoiled in fear when she realized a stranger had seen the big red-and-pink Armenian cross embroidered on her bag, flipping it over to the blank side and refusing to have her photo taken. This book tells her story and those of her kin all over Turkey. In good measure, this initiative became possible in that window of opportunity in which prospects for democracy looked auspicious, especially for the younger generations whose

freedom and imagination are fueled by the omniscient internet, who are seeing the world, and who are slowly and painfully coming to terms with the common, but tragically unequal, history of Turks and Armenians.

In an initial version, this introduction finished with the following line:

“There is nothing you need to fear, little Sasun girl. You are not alone.”

These fine-sounding words are, at best, nothing else if not irresponsible. It may have been fear, that natural and accurate mechanism for vigilance, that carried her and her ancestors so far. Yet the last sentence is still true. Little Sasun girl, you are not alone.

PART I

Sasun

That night I spread the *döse* on the rooftop—a custom in the rainless summers of Mesopotamia—beneath the sky that spread over these mountains and persevering trees, which Siranush had addressed in her secret excursions to speak alone and cry out in Armenian to her little Kurdish son, to the rocks and to the woods, telling stories that are now lost to us. It was only in the small villages of historical Armenia that I had begun to learn the profiles of constellations, for the nocturnal lights of big cities dull the cosmos to a scattering of solitary stars. Yet as poor testament to my self-teaching of astronomy, I was unable to find the belt that would betray the outline of Orion, named Hayk in the Armenian tradition after the mythical founder of the eponymous nation, for Armenians refer to themselves by the name of *Hai*, and he is so identified in the Armenian translation of the Bible: “Can you bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Hayk?”¹⁸

Man cannot tether the constellations: that verse from the Book of Job poses by way of a rhetorical question our inability to dictate the movement of the stars or determine the good seasons and those of misfortune, while the righteous Job is put through ordeals as the result of a bet between Satan and God to test his faith. Night revealed in its splendor our powerless condition: “Nor do the stars appear and disappear without a schedule,” as Grigor Narekatsi, a tenth-century Armenian mystic, said in the Book of Sorrow.¹⁹

But in 1916, a youthful member of the Armenian volunteer forces that fought back the Turks had returned tormented from the ephemeral liberation of Western Armenia as the Genocide was underway, and proposed at the end of a long narrative poem, “to put out, and kindle the extinguished stars.” In his “Dantesque legend,” Yeghishe Charents endowed men with the divine mission, if not the power, to keep “the delirium of the universe forever alive.”²⁰ I could only identify the belt of Orion, or Hayk. But he disappeared in the summer that brought in Scorpio, as the two constellations had persisted in missing each other since men invented mythology. And before I closed my eyes in awe of the Commagenian night and of the exception called life—an interval of sentient existence amid the inanimate infinite—I thought all this was a blink in the lifespan of a dimming star. But what a heavy blink, as if our eyelids were made of bronze.

 PART III

Dikranagerd

Dikranagerd I

Agop Serkis pointed the torch at the steps, tall and uneven, but would raise it at the sharp end of each flight, the large stone bricks emerging dark and portentous in the amber gloom. The staircase was only wide enough to accommodate one person. We came out onto the rooftop of Surp Giragos Church while the last of day was departing in a sky the color of wine, the backdrop to the jagged skyline of Diyarbakır. Electric lights were beginning to reveal the city's entrails, the meandering streets of the old quarters enclosed within the black basalt of the Roman walls. A prevalence of orange colors came through unveiled and curtained windows, or the flickering blue and gray beams of television sets in darkened rooms. Gâvur Mahallesi (the Infidels Quarter) was exposed in its misery and glory, a maze of decrepit mansions and old houses become slums. The writer Mıgırđıç Margosyan, a native of Dikranagerd—the Armenian name for Diyarbakır—had catapulted the neighborhood of his childhood into national fame with his eponymous book, a trilingual collection of stories that brought back to life in Armenian, Kurdish, and Turkish his memoirs from the last era of the Christian Armenian community in the city, which had completely vanished by 1985.

The rooftop of Surp Giragos commanded views of Mar Petyun, the Chaldean church, dwarfed by the Hacı Hamit mosque right behind. The sharp edges of the Dört Ayaklı (Four-Legged) square minaret could be made out in the dusk. I thought I discerned the Ulu Cami (Great Mosque); or more likely it was the Kurşunlu Mosque, converted from the Armenian church of Surp Toros in 1518. But when I turned to check with Agop he was gone, leaving me alone in the company of minarets and bell towers beneath Hayk (Orion) and the other waking constellations. Yet a star, perched low outside the city walls, dominated the horizon with steady radiance. In my uncertain reading of celestial bodies, I assumed it was Venus. It felt appropriate that it should be, if only for the musical mood the scene conveyed: "Venus, the Bringer of Peace," the second movement in Holst's symphony *The Planets*, conjures up the soothing effect of

a sea moving in gentle waves, opening with a serene horn call that woodwinds answer, followed by counterpoints of ascending chords of oboes and descending ones of flutes in a mellow adagio. The melody corresponded to that moment of quiet in Diyarbakır under the pristine night of winter of 2013, with 4,000 years of history and religions built into the cityscape of spires and domes that rose amid the roofs, staggered and flat, of old Armenian houses. Apartment buildings, scattered randomly or grouped in clusters, loomed bright and ugly in the distance. Shrouded in darkness, the Tigris drew its course to the east of Surp Giragos, feeding civilizations and the rest along her path, before dying in the Persian Gulf.

Agop, the church porter, had not changed much since the last time I had seen him in the summer of 2011, except perhaps his forehead that had grown bigger with the receding hairline. He made up with his mustachio, copious and black. His wife was Kurdish and Muslim, but he only felt the urge to convert to Christianity after getting married in 1986: "It is the true religion." Armenians no longer felt fear: "Among the Kurds in the east we are freer, and the living is easy." Yet at home he was alone, with none of his five children willing to abandon Islam for their father's faith.

"We are assimilating," Agop had commented when we had first met amid the unfinished construction. The approach of a red-haired man had stifled our conversation. By his looks, I had assumed him to be a Turk, but Agop had read my eyes and gestured with a subtle tilt of his head that I ought not to worry: just within minutes of meeting, a rapport of codes and winks had been established naturally, just like those that exist between friends of a lifetime. The redhead was an architect working on the restoration of Surp Giragos, then only months away from completion. A Laz, an Islamicized Mingrelian from Turkey's Black Sea coast, he had lived ten years in France leading the renovation project of a monastery: "Is there *any* place free from assimilation?" A cultured man and agreeable talker, he had a somewhat blasé stance on the matter, which peoples with no fear of extinction can afford, and the conversation weakened into abstractions on globalization and how the world was losing its way.

Of Agop's ten siblings, only two were married to converted Armenians. There were 270 people of Armenian origin in Lice, his hometown, but only two families admitted it openly. Until the 1990s there were secret Christians, but then a few had sought to convert or return officially to the Church as fear began to wane. He had 25 friends who had become Christian in Silvan, Kulp, and Lice, major towns in the Diyarbakır area. Converted Armenians had kept in touch with each other since the Genocide, he said, but mixed marriages had become the norm a long time ago.

A group of Americans was lingering about, one with a professional camera: a filmmaker from New York was working on a documentary about Henry

Morgenthau, the American Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire who had denounced the massacres of 1915. The filmmaker was assisted by *Mr. Barsamian*, a guide from Los Angeles who had pioneered visits to the historical lands since the late 1980s, when for most Diaspora Armenians visiting Turkey was still a taboo. As we exchanged travel anecdotes with Mr. Barsamian, I mentioned the crazy little experiment I had done in Istanbul of stopping Armenian-looking people in the street under false pretexts such as asking for directions to a sight or store, asking them in passing if they had Armenian ancestors: "Out of five, perhaps two would say they did," I said. "These ancestors were always women, weren't they?" he guessed, correctly. "Mothers transmit the Armenian culture," I remarked, but Mr. Barsamian shook his head: "No, no, it's not that: they kidnapped the women during the Genocide; they killed the men."

That was intimately linked to the history of the Armenians of Diyarbakır. In his memoirs, Tovmas Mgrdichian, British vice-consul to Diyarbakır, referred to an extraordinary meeting convened in late June 1915 by the Committee of Union and Progress at the Ulu Cami (Great Mosque). Local Muslim notables were to determine the fate of the province's 150,000 Armenians. It would be the decisive phase: the arrest and murder of prominent individuals and smaller groups had begun months earlier. Mufti Ibrahim and parliamentary deputy Pirincizâde Feyzi were in attendance. One issue on the agenda was discussed at length: "Should every Armenian man and woman, young, old and infant without exception be massacred? Is this allowed by the sharia of Muhammad's Qur'an? Or should children and women be spared?"¹

Mufti Ibrahim, endowed with the religious authority to issue *fatwas* (edicts), was the only one of the opinion that "children younger than 12 should be spared to be Islamicized, and the beautiful women and girls should be taken into the harems, to embellish the Kurdish race." Yet after three days of deliberation, the assembly voted for "the collective extermination of the Armenians, with the exception of the choicest women." Attendees swore on the Qur'an to execute the decision.²

On my first visit to Surp Giragos in the summer of 2011, restoration work was still in progress, prior to consecration in October of that year. Two years later, the church, said to be the largest in the Middle East and probably built in the sixteenth century, had become the gathering point of the nascent Armenian community of Diyarbakır, or rather its rebirth. But this was an arguable concept, for what was coalescing around Surp Giragos was unknown in recorded Armenian history: Islamicized Armenians and a handful of Christian ones were organizing themselves around a church. They were a growing circle of family and friends of descendants of Genocide survivors, forced into Islam, even though some had decided to convert or return to the Armenian Apostolic denomination.

So fundamental a pillar was the Church for the nation that it was now gathering the Islamicized descendants of Armenians. Even in the absence of a permanent pastor, the community of Dikranagerd, as the Armenians call the city, was the only one in the historical lands of Western Armenia that was slowly regrouping in a century, and only because they had found in the church their center and common ground, regardless of conversion and how irreversible some felt it was.

Three years later, on the last Sunday of every month, more than 100 Muslim Armenians would gather there for breakfast, a lavish occasion in the custom of the land. One of the attendees in January 2014 wore the white skullcap of a *hajji*, an affable old man known to everybody: the Mecca pilgrim was the father of the Diyarbakır Armenians' leader, *Sevag*, himself converted back to the Apostolic Church in 2010.

Yet most of these Islamicized Armenians—among whom there were agnostics or atheists who had never set foot in a mosque—would first step into the church and light a candle on the sand trays that flanked the entrances. They would stand in reverence in front of the seven altars, which represented the seven sacraments, called *worburt* (mystery) in Armenian, the more so for the converts after three generations outside the faith.

That winter's night, *Sevag* had proposed I climb to the rooftop and admire the topography of sacred architecture in Diyarbakır. The three Abrahamic religions and their various denominations coincided within the city walls: Maryam Ana, the Assyrian Orthodox church, was too distant to be seen, and the synagogue, desecrated into a post office, was not visible, and I did not know where to look for Surp Sarkis, the Armenian Catholic church.

The bulbous bell tower of Surp Giragos stood on four tall legs that encompassed two rows of single arches on each side. It was taller than that of Mar Petyun almost next door, which was as distinctive, with a rounded, mushroom-like head atop four pointed arches. The Chaldeans had erected it along with their church in 1602, a little after their schism from the Assyrian Church of the East in 1552 and their communion with Rome: they were renamed Chaldean then, even though they are completely unrelated to that long-extinct Babylonian people and are just Assyrians of Catholic affiliation. Albeit newer, the Armenian church's bell tower was more storied: built in 1884, it had collapsed in a thunderstorm on Easter Eve in 1913. It was replaced the same year with a new one, crowned with a gold cross and a bell built by Zildjian, the family name of the cymbal-maker Avedis, founder of the eponymous company made famous in the twentieth century by the drummers of most rock bands.

Since the time of Babel, towers have been associated with bad omens. In 1999, echoing the pun in the title of the 1970s British TV comedy *Fawlty Towers*, the

investment banker Andrew Lawrence identified the "skyscraper curse." There was a strange correlation, he observed, between the tallest buildings in the world and economic crises: the projects of the Singer Building and the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in New York were started before the financial panic of 1907; the Empire State Building was finalized in 1931 as the Great Depression was underway, and the Petronas Towers in Malaysia opened their doors only two years before the Asian Financial Crisis.³

At a height of 29 meters, the new belfry of Surp Giragos did not compare to any of the projects named above. It attracted, however, a disproportionately larger damnation, and not mainly of an economic nature. The Ottomans shelled it into rubble on May 28, 1915, arguing that it was taller than the minarets, even though by then they needed no excuses to exert violence. The church vicar, Fr. Mgrdich Chlghadian, was made to watch the bell tower's destruction, a harbinger of his own fate.

Two days later, Fr. Chlghadian was taken to prison: his torturers pulled out his teeth, pierced his temples with red-hot irons, and gouged out his eyes.⁴ He was then paraded through the Muslim quarters of Diyarbakır, to the beating of tambourines by the sheiks and dervishes who led the procession "in an atmosphere of collective revelry." The column marched on to the courtyard of the Great Mosque, where in the presence of government officials and religious authorities Fr. Chlghadian "was sprinkled with oil, a drop at a time, and then burned alive." The next day, an American missionary, Dr. Floyd Smith, found the Armenian priest thrown in the stable of the Municipal Hospital, unrecognizable and moribund beneath a dirty blanket, but was unable to save him. The district governor had an attestation drawn up and signed by several doctors; it stated that the prelate had died of typhus.⁵

The Surp Giragos Church was rebuilt with the original, bulb-shaped belfry. In a three-paragraph report on a Turkish news website about the first peal of the new bell in 2012—the first time one had tolled in Diyarbakır in a century—there were as many references to its size: "It has not escaped attention that it is five meters taller than the minaret of the Four-Legged Mosque, which is 500 meters away."⁶

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Diyarbakır had not seen so much snow for half a century and everybody was morose. It was to be my base in Western Armenia for the winter of 2013, yet my efforts to find a small apartment or room had proved fruitless. The carnage of a century ago against Armenians had confirmed Kurds as the unrivaled masters of what since 1915 had become the informal capital of the Turkish section of Kurdistan, and the habitats of nuclear families or lone professionals were alien

to a population organized in clans and tribes, with households of ten or more children not being uncommon in the city proper. There was no market for floor plans smaller than four or five rooms, not unlike in size or appearance those of suburban homes in America, albeit conceived to accommodate at least twice as many dwellers.

A friend had found me a basement spot with a skylight onto the street level of Dökmeciler Sokağı, in the city's old quarter, and only a five-minute walk to Surp Giragos, but he took the offer back, saying he could not allow me into that manhole, damp and dark. The location near the church was fantastic, but in the middle of hell: it was the neighborhood of blacksmiths and tinsmiths, and he guessed that the din of banging metal and the screeching sound of knife sharpeners would drive me mad, if poisons or fumes did not claim my sanity sooner. But some of his comments in half-sentences indicated his real concern were the neighborhood's residents: these fears were unfounded, as I would experience daily during my stay in Diyarbakır.

In the time-honored tradition of Armenian travelers, exiles, and refugees, my first stop was therefore the church. This one, however, was extraordinary: it had been called back into new, and vigorous, existence. Agop Serkis had a new colleague as *jamgoch* ("beadle" in Armenian), a man of slim build and youthful smile, who in the span of a few months had garnered enough mastery of Armenian to conduct a basic dialogue. *Vartan's* green eyes had an aquatic quality, reflecting the gray of winter; but they were also transparent, and deep wells of sadness. The first day I visited in the winter of 2013, there were also three other men; as I would learn in due course, they were churchgoers of sorts: all three were third-generation Islamicized Armenians; two—*Garbed* and *Ertem*—were atheists, in observance of Marxist convictions; *Malik*, the last one, attended mosque on celebrations such as the Bayram. Yet all three were regulars at Surp Giragos.

A printer by profession, Garbed was working his cell phone seeking a place for me among the local Armenians. He called *Udi Manug*, an oud musician who had moved back into Dikranagerd, his birthplace, after almost a lifetime in Los Angeles, causing a sensation in the press and the public of Diyarbakır. The return of a local celebrity of Armenian origin from the United States was a symbolic, and powerful, vote of confidence in the city's rebirth in the tradition of diversity that the local Kurdish government officials sought to promote. "Manug is living with his girlfriend," Garbed said, a little embarrassed, but he finally got through to Sevag. Not an apartment, but he had an empty room in his office, an offer that I accepted right away. A weeklong stay at the hotel, unspectacular as it was, had eaten up the funds I had set aside for a whole month's accommodation. Sevag would come and pick me up the following morning from the hotel within the city walls, in the vicinity of the Armenian

Gate, the northern one. The gates were named after the direction their roads led to; after the Genocide it had been renamed Harput, as the territory known as Armenia inside the Ottoman Empire had ceased to exist.

Garbed walked me from the church to his printing shop, with a floor coated with the dust of ages and cigarette ends squashed flat. The overlapping pages of Facebook, a Kurdish news site in Turkish, and the Skype window were open on the somewhat blurry screen of his old computer, a graininess that evoked the ghosting of old black-and-white TV sets. An offset printing press made by a German family firm occupied center stage, with external plastic veins that pumped red, blue, and yellow fluids into its body. Oddly, I felt a familiarity with the place. The smell—that most powerful of senses—of ink and tobacco took me back to the summers of my childhood at the *Armenia* newspaper in Buenos Aires, where I worked in the print room setting headlines with movable type on a composing stick. Time travel continued when a Lebanese-Armenian came onto the Skype screen from his office in Cyprus, even though he had mentioned some Bulgarian connection I did not understand. An old computer with an internet connection was helping a member of a fragmented Diaspora connect with those who had remained, Islamicized, in the ancestral motherland. This would have been a technological and psychological impossibility only 20 years earlier. But I decided to cut short my brief dialogue with the Lebanese-Armenian, who had asked me about my political convictions as soon as Garbed had introduced me onscreen to him. I had guessed his, a fossilized ideology that dated back to the Ottoman era. It was in bad need of an update, if it was not to be discarded wholesale and get its well-deserved retirement into the history books. I was impatient to get out and see other Armenians in Diyarbakır as they had a more complex understanding of their own identity than quite a few of us, the descendants of Genocide survivors, believed. There was no time to reenact dialogues with phantoms that already had a cozy life in our nostalgia, but were unwelcome in the present.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

A German guest joined me for my last breakfast in the low-ceilinged cafeteria at the hotel. Had he been a few centimeters taller, he would have had to walk with his head bowed. A freelance translator, he enjoyed the freedoms afforded by the internet to globe-trot year-round, but especially when the weather got nasty in Hamburg. *Karim* showed great interest when I told him I was born in Aleppo, which he intended to reach. "Surely with your inconspicuous looks you can make it for two miles into Syria," I told him. "Hopefully, the worst that will happen is that mom and dad will have enough savings to ransom you, or else that you won't suffer greatly," I told him. Gallows humor was not something we had in common for his face had taken on a stern expression, and he muttered

something along the lines that maybe I had been in journalism for such a long time that I had come to believe the gibberish we peddle to the gullible masses. The *Ummah* (community of Muslims) was undergoing something akin to the Protestant Reformation, he believed. Islam would emerge stronger from these trials and tribulations, he said. "Like Christianity did, right?" I commented, still in a vein he did not seem to appreciate.

"But what are you?" he asked in surprise, thinking me a Shi'a (and thus revealing on which side he stood in the Islamic divide). His father was German and his mother a Kosovo Albanian—and for a moment I found it incredible that a refugee from a war that to me had happened only yesterday had already spawned a child who was staking a claim to his share of the world. Karim at that moment appeared to be navigating sea changes that were too remote for me to grasp fully—he was a Muslim and did not have a sense of belonging in Germany. The Kurdish experiments in non-national democratic federalism intrigued him, and he wanted to visit Rojava (the Kurdish name for Qamişli) which, at least until war broke out in Syria in 2011, used to have a thriving Armenian community made up of Genocide survivors and descendants.

Sevag had left his car idling and double-parked; he made me hurry up as he was trying to negotiate a better rate for my bill at the hotel reception. Only concern about a parking fine cut short the haggling on my behalf that he was conducting with the skill of a bazaar merchant. And then we plunged into the chaotic traffic of Diyarbakır, of buses and *dolmuş* cutting us off as they dueled among themselves for passengers along the northern wall. We made a right turn through the Urfa Gate and drove into the business district. "Remember the stadium," he told me. It was the most prominent landmark near his office, which would be my winter home.

The room inside the office opened into a ventilation shaft, across from the kitchen section of an apartment building. Sevag had stored accounting books of yellowing pages and boxes of leaflets and programs from past seminars in his line of business. A dead Rolodex was forgotten in a corner of the amber-colored walls. Tones of brown ruled the room, including the sofa bed, the bookshelf and a rolled-up mat that turned out to be a prayer rug with the image of the Dome of the Rock woven into it. A leftover from Sevag's Muslim past, I thought, even though he said he had never been of the practicing type. Brown were also the two sparrows, a male and a female, which would be perched every morning on the corrugated pipe of electrical wires on the building's exterior, across the shaft. The couple welcomed dawn by chirping away even at that angle forgotten by the sun, in a space with no other view than the tall buildings that enclosed it in an asphyxiating perimeter. They enlivened it with their incomprehensible song, oblivious to what in our eyes would be ugliness or beauty. Sparrows, I had read once, after attaining maturity would move away from their nest and

community, which sang in variations unique to them, or "dialects." But when the birds paired up and moved into a new community on a different tree or habitat, they would adopt the melodic dialect of the new group.

Sevag's voice had a rich musicality, enhanced by the clarity of his diction and discourse, that of a priest who has honed it over years of homily, always lively yet never straying into the registers of anger or despair, regardless of an abundance of reasons for either or both. It may have been the key to his salesmanship, with an ability to get things done or have others do them for him, and that allowed him to manage the affairs of Surp Giragos with political savvy in the fickle environment of Turkey and its Kurdish areas. He was a cousin of the General Vicar of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople, Archbishop Aram Ateshian.

Diyarbakır had been Sevag's home for more than 20 years, after he had come from his birthplace of Apka, a village near Kozluk, in Sasun. "We had an ambiguous relation with our Kurdish neighbors back in Sasun," he said. "They were kind, but they would also put us down, calling us *gâvur*, belittling us ... We were not scared of being Armenian, as everybody knew it anyway, but of course we didn't talk about the Genocide ... That we did fear."

Of 19 siblings, ten had survived. "We were poor, so if someone got ill and did not heal, they died: there was no doctor or hospital, there was nothing we could do." His first wife, a Christian Armenian from Sasun and the mother of his three children, had also passed away. A common friend had once told me that a seer had come to Dikranagerd from Armenia. She had read the palms of three local Armenians, including Sevag's, and had seen in him a dark soul. But as he did not speak Armenian and nobody wanted to translate for him, Sevag got anguished, this friend said: "He feared she had seen a cancer or some bad disease, so I finally told him that it was about his soul and that she had not said good things about his personality, but that he was not dying any time soon."

Only three children from his family had survived the Genocide, and that was all they knew about it:

They killed every member of our family. That we know for sure. Nobody was left, other than these three young brothers, the oldest of whom was seven or eight. One left for Armenia and the other two remained in Turkey. The grandchildren of my great-uncle now live in Yerevan. The ones left in Turkey eventually became Muslim. They reminded each other that they were Armenian while the rest of their family had been obliterated, but we know nothing else of what they spoke or said, for they did not tell us anything else. One of them was my grandfather ... We think they walked to a village near Kozluk looking for an uncle, but that's just a supposition. What was their family name? We have no idea. We only know they were Armenian and from the village of Rabet, in Sasun. I still try to search, read, inquire everywhere that I can, but that's still all we know. My father does

not know who protected and raised his own father and uncle. He could not have known, anyway: his father passed away when he was one year old, and he was raised by his mother alone. She was Armenian and sang lullabies in Armenian for him, but he has forgotten it all.

When I was little, I didn't know our history, nor that we had been converted by force. But I was Armenian in my spirit.

His eyes had turned sad when he had said "*rubu*" (Turkish for "spirit"), and in the depth of his gaze and the long cadence of the *u*, the word of Arabic origin came across as the closest sound to the whisper of a wind that came from the center of the Earth, blowing across a vast space and stirring the leaves of solitary trees. On researching its etymology I was astonished yet relieved to find that these were not the ravings of my mind alone: "The problem must have begun in the gray dawn of time, when someone made the bewildering discovery that the living breath which left the body of the dying man in the last death-rattle meant more than just air in motion," Carl Jung had said in October 1926, in a lecture to the literary society of Augsburg. "It can scarcely be an accident onomatopoeic words like *ruach*, *ruch*, *robo* (Hebrew, Arabic, Swahili) mean 'spirit' no less clearly than the Greek πνεύμα [*pneúma*] and the Latin *spiritus*."⁷

This spirit went deeper than his religious filiation, Sevag said: "For me it is a formality; what matters is that I know in my heart that I am Armenian, and I have had that awareness since my childhood." He had registered as a Christian only in 2010, but one of his brothers had converted back to the Armenian Church many years earlier, after a gap of two generations. Sevag's wife and his children had joined him in the Church. "But to me, whether Muslim or Christian, what matters is that we remain Armenian: I am now a Christian, but I am not a different person, or more Armenian, than when I was a Muslim."

My sister is a Muslim and she does the *namaz* every evening. This is the reality. She acknowledges she is Armenian, but she is also a practicing Muslim and good at that. The older one comes to church and is a Christian. I also have brothers and sisters that neither pray nor do the *namaz*, who neither come to church nor go to the mosque. They feel neither Kurds nor Turks. They are Armenian. Some are holding back from changing their religious affiliation on their ID because we live amid Muslims here, and it makes them uneasy to convert to the Armenian Church. Some Armenians still feel embarrassment, and some fear. Why? Because Armenians here are called bad people, infidels, unpleasant, bitter. There are Muslims who think and speak like that: in today's Diyarbakır and in today's Turkey. Still, I have relatives who do not speak to me because I became a Christian. Diyarbakır is full of Islamicized Armenians, so many that it is impossible to guess. But a majority of them do not acknowledge it. Some will say, "My grandfather was Armenian, I am Kurdish."

There are many who joined the Kurdish guerrillas, but they are already Kurdified. They did not join the PKK as Armenians. They see themselves as Kurds. Do you know Sakine Cansız?⁸ She was of Armenian origin; how would she not know? But she fought 40 years for the Kurds. Of course she knew, but she would not say it.

Nothing is permanent. Only three years ago you would find only one or two Armenians in Diyarbakır. Today we have more than 100 who come to church every month. We have breakfast together, we talk, and socialize. Of this 100, 90 are Muslim. But they are Armenian. That's why they come. Not all of them want to become Christian, or not yet at least. They have been Muslim for 100 years, do not forget that: it is not easy. But they own up to their identity. And if we have 100 coming to church, we have another million who do not. In all of Diyarbakır there are 3 million people; perhaps more than one-third, or 1 million, are Armenian. The Turkish state knows very well who is who. They know better than I do.

Now, the first thing is that they acknowledge themselves as Armenian. Why is it that Armenians insist so much on their Christian faith? The Armenians became Christian in AD 301, isn't that right? We were not Christian before. And we know that the Islamicized Armenians in Turkey did not convert for their own pleasure ... They forgot their own religion, the Church, the language, the culture, and they are not baptized. But they are Armenian: they did not become Turks and they did not become Kurds ... Even if some do not admit it now, an apple is an apple; it does not become a pear. My sister may do the *namaz* 100 times, but she remains an Armenian. And even if she did not, maybe one day her children will decide to embrace their Armenian identity.

My own father is a Muslim, he went to the *Hajj*, and does the *namaz*, but I, one of his sons, changed my religion. He did not. He adheres to what he has learned: he is now 80 years old and will not change now. But he raised me as an Armenian, he made me aware of my identity ... German TV came to interview him and the reporter asked him, "Sir, who are you?" And my father responded, "I am an Armenian." The reporter then asked him if he attended church. "No, I am a Muslim," my father responded, and said that he did not meddle with his children that converted to the Church. But he first identified himself as an Armenian. My father does not read and does not write, but he knows he is Armenian.

I was born and raised in Western Armenia. Kurds say this is Kurdistan, but I tell them, "This is not Kurdistan; this is Armenia." And whether you are born in Tokyo, New York, Yerevan, or Diyarbakır, if you are Armenian, you are Armenian.

It is likely that there are more Islamicized Armenians than Christian ones in Turkey today. What would become of a community overrun by Muslims? Would that not change the nature of Armenian identity? Sevag smiled, a man who probably would not have been completely out of place in fifteenth-century Florence, with an enigmatic stare, behind eyeglasses that I always

remembered to be dark but were not. He responded with a joke, or what I assumed to be one:

An imam was once posted to a remote village. Within days of arriving, he was surprised that nobody was turning up for prayers, so he decided to go door to door asking why they were not coming to the mosque. The villagers were being insincere in their responses but when the imam pressed, they admitted: "*Hoca*, we do not come because we do not like to take our shoes off to pray." The imam asked them if that was their only concern and they said it was: "Come to pray with your shoes on," he told them. So everybody started going to the mosque, doing the *namaz* with their shoes on. It went on like this for years, until this imam was reassigned elsewhere. But his replacement was astonished to see the locals walking into the mosque with their shoes on. "What is this?" he asked, outraged. "You have to take your shoes off!" But the locals responded: "By Allah, our former imam said that in Islam it is like this." The new imam went out to search for his predecessor and challenged him: "*Hoca*, did you tell them that they could pray with their shoes on?" The other imam explained that nobody was coming for prayers: "I got them into the mosque; if you are smart enough, now get them to take their shoes off."

"We just got these Muslims to come to church," Sevag said. "We can think about their shoes later."

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

"When I was little, I didn't know that Armenians were a people," she said. "I knew the word, 'Armenian,' but we used it as an insult, so that's what I thought it was; a bad word, or a curse: I didn't know it named a nation." She also remembered that in the surrounding villages of Diyarbakır elders called misbehaving children "*dığa*," which she thought to be a dialect term for "brat." Only in adulthood did she learn it was Armenian for "boy."

Perwin was one of the partners in the nonprofit cooperative society that operated Sülüklü Han, a 1683 caravanserai built in basalt in the old quarter, now turned into a café. It was a ten-minute walk to Surp Giragos Church. She owned the bookstore in the basement, which included an ample selection on Armenians, Assyrians, and other peoples, but she had coined something of a neologism in Turkish, "*azaltılmış halklar*," or "minoritized peoples," to indicate that they had been forcibly turned into minorities.

In Dersim, where she had many relatives, the word for the daughter-in-law's mother was "*xinami*," another Armenian term that has entered into conversational language. "That's how many Armenian female in-laws there were in Dersim," *Perwin* said. "They were all brides from the Genocide." Once, at a family

gathering when she was about 12, around 1980, the children were gossiping that the *xinami* of their host was Armenian. Mystified, she approached the elderly woman and asked her in Turkish: "*Siz Ermeni misiniz?*" ("Are you Armenian?"). "The woman just broke out into loud crying," *Perwin* remembered. "She was there just sobbing, not saying a word." In the Diaspora, some grandchildren of Genocide survivors recalled their grandmothers weeping out of the blue, for no apparent reason. For those growing up in Istanbul or elsewhere in Turkey, where being Armenian was a big enough taboo—let alone speaking of 1915 even in the safety of their homes—it was not uncommon to be told by their parents as explanation enough: "Granny is old." An Armenian from Istanbul who was now based in Maryland had once told me that as a child she grew up convinced that "grandmothers cried" as a normal thing, like babies do.

My conversation with *Perwin* had started with a good laugh about how Atatürk had explained away the singularity of the Kurds, calling them "Mountain Turks," whose name he said derived from "*kurt, kurt*," the crunching sound of walking on frozen snow. "There is a book, *Dünya hepimize yeter* (*The World is Enough for All of Us*) that says it clearly: in this land there are Assyrians, Armenians, Kurds, Turks, Yezidis," *Perwin* said. It had been written by Sarkis Cherkezian, a carpenter and lifelong communist, born in a camel stud in the Syrian desert in 1916 to Genocide survivors. "Primacy and power are the problems."

She was soft-spoken. This comment was her gentle rebuttal of my calling into question national borders and a world parceled up into plots large and small, cut off from each other by barbed wire, border controls, and restrictions. Nation states survived, I posited, for lack of a better substitute, as in a world of free circulation of ideas and goods the checks and curbs on the movement of men were outdated. Her stare was hardening and so was, slightly, the tone of her comments, as the discourse shifted away from Lenin and Lennon into a questioning of the international polity of flags and frontiers.

She was an idealist who seemed convinced of the democratic decentralization advanced by Apo in his discourse, but I felt that I was inadvertently calling her bluff. Kurds were aching for a nation state of their own, an independent one with their own emblems and borders, which they never had. For a second, I imagined *Perwin* like a Medusa, with budding tentacles coming out of her head and then retreating in regret, ashamed of hostile thoughts. Notwithstanding my views, I conceded I could not imagine Armenia tearing down its own frontier markers in its present neighborhood any time soon.

"We are all African, if it is true that we came from there," I told her. Even though my comment was only intended to clear the air somewhat, she had a contribution to make to the idea. A recent article she had read confirmed it.

Fourteen thousand years ago, waves of migrants came to Mesopotamia from Africa, Perwîn said. All men came from there: "This land is everybody's, it does not belong to any particular group, because everybody passed from here, because they found prosperity here, everything." Every people had passed through these territories, so everybody was everybody else's relative. If we wanted to return to our origins, we had to go back to Africa. According to a joint American-British team of researchers, only 70,000 years ago we shared a common father. "We are all brothers," she said.

"Like Adam and Eve in the Bible," I commented, as the powerful chords of a *bağlama*, a popular stringed instrument related to the lute family, filled the arched gallery where we were sharing a tea.

"That's symbolic, I don't believe in that, but at the time there were few people, we had a common father," she said. "Mankind was very small; one group came here from Africa: we are all the children of that group." Perhaps one large part of that group stayed in Africa and died, she conjectured, as another group went on to America. "Mankind was very small, just think about it: the Ottoman Empire stretched for half the world at its apogee and its population was 35 million," she added. "That's very little." Perhaps a very reduced group came, she imagined. A family: a father, brothers, children, and then another.

But a parallel conversation between two young men who had joined us at the table was distracting me. I was picking up fragments of a story that was apparently, from what I could gather, related to Armenians living in a village near Diyarbakır in the 1920s. At that time in Anatolia, nobody would be punished for killing Armenians. It involved two Armenian women that had gone to visit a Kurdish neighbor, the grandfather of a certain Fatih: these visitors had soon fallen out with each other or their hosts for some reason. Below are the disjointed parts that I could rescue of this crime story, which do not make much sense except for the conclusion:

Two women go to visit Fatih's grandfather. But they start bickering. And he comes out: "What did I tell you? When you are someone else's guest you do not fight." The women argue with him, so he kills them with blows to their heads. He goes into the room, where his friend pleads, "I didn't do anything! Just let me go!" But Fatih's grandfather said, "I just killed the mother of your children, why should I let you get off?" And he kills him with a blow to his head, too ... Within 15-20 days, both women get married on the same day ... After this incident they fight for three days and three nights, the friend who is fighting side by side with him, a Muslim, falls injured. Both die ... Six months later, the government digs up their graves. They don't understand. The Muslim's corpse had decayed, nothing was left, but the Armenian's was intact, like a martyr's, his blood and face still fresh, as if ready to walk back into life. One was Muslim and the other one was Armenian. Nothing had happened to the Armenian. Martyrs

don't die, their soul doesn't decay, their body doesn't rot, they say. Even when her eyes had gone blind, every time I drove by that house with my grandmother in the car, she would tell me, "Son, they murdered my father here; the fighting was here; they fought for three days and three nights." And her eyes no longer saw but she sensed the house.

Perwîn was still in Africa. "And we all came from them," she giggled. "Not from Adam and Eve, but from an intelligent family."

We had just created a political party, we said: The Africans. "The Africans, yes! We want Africa back!" she concurred. And we agreed that Armenians and Kurds should join forces to reclaim our original continent. Conversations sometimes flowed at their easiest not necessarily among those who shared ideas, but among those who had a common sense of humor.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Adil and Hamdi Akkaya had introduced me to Sülüklü Han in the summer of 2011. A mural-sized inscription carved in wood at the entrance offered a brief description of the former caravanserai, in Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian, and Syriac. The Armenian, however, was Eastern, and the reformed Soviet spelling of 1923 had been used. Perwîn had put up the notice, she told me years later: "A policeman came over and pointed to the Armenian writing, asking me what it was: 'Aramaic,' I told him."

The Akkaya brothers had been my Diyarbakır point-persons during my first pilgrimage from Dersim to Mt. Maruta, and the leader of the Sasun Armenians' fraternity had arranged my trip with paternal care, having me meet his Islamicized relatives for a bus change on the complicated itinerary. A few weeks later, in August of 2011, I met them again in Diyarbakır.

It was a Sunday, and Adil, the older brother, was working at his law office on a last-minute case. Three young Kurds had been arrested trying to import heroin from Iran. Drug trafficking was a huge problem, Adil told me. Turkey was a major narcotics route into Europe from the East. There were also rumors that some of that money went into financing the Kurdish guerrilla operations, but then again, the Turkish government had an interest in sowing disinformation.

Armenian on both sides, the Akkayas were fully integrated into Kurdish society and its central unit, the *aşiret* (tribe). Their mother's family hailed from Bitlis and their father's from Varto-Mush. Their paternal grandfather Sarkis Vartanian, who was known as "Serkiş Ağa," had 12 siblings, all of whom survived but scattered after the Genocide. Kurds beheaded their father, and they do not know what happened to their mother. Some of the siblings went to Malatya, and from there to Aleppo and on to America. Contacts have been lost. Sarkis,

who was 12 in 1915, and one brother, Azad, were adopted by a Kurd, Hasan Arkan, who raised them within his family. The two Vartanian brothers were brought into the Salo tribe of Varto, and Islamicized.

The Akkayas were 13 brothers and sisters, only two of whom were married to Muslim Armenians: the others were married to Kurds or Zazas. Hamdi was still a bachelor and thinking about leaving Turkey, at least temporarily, for Germany, where they had relatives. Adil was married to a Zaza woman. There were no more arranged marriages; he smiled when I suggested if that had been the case. "It was for love," he said. "We now marry for love." But, he said, "I am raising my children as Armenians: I am their father." That I understood to mean an awareness of their identity, as there was no other vehicle to express it, other than becoming active within the community that was coalescing around Surp Giragos.

That was more than Adil and his siblings could afford when they were little. Adil had known it since he was seven or eight years old. Kurdish kids would call them "*filla*" ("unbeliever" in Kurmanci). "I cried the first time they called me that," Adil said. He ran to tell his parents, and they said that they were indeed Armenian but they had to be careful not to acknowledge it in public. "We had to say we were Muslim." Yet the Kurds knew that their grandfather was Armenian.

But most Islamicized Armenians in Diyarbakır did not want to return to the Christian faith, Adil ventured, also guessing that perhaps one-third of the local population was of Armenian descent, the same proportion Sevag reckoned: "Man is man, religion does not matter." Perhaps it did, I thought to myself, which was why people did not usually convert or reconvert. I also imagined the disruptive effect that a return to the Armenian Church would have for a family like the Akkayas, integrated into the Kurdish tribal society and its hierarchies.

Islamicized Armenians knew each other in Diyarbakır, but perhaps not as well as the state, according to Adil: "We are now Kurdish speakers but the state knows we are descended from converts." Even when the descendants of converted Armenians eventually forgot down the generations about their origin, "the state knows." He pulled from a drawer a document from the Civil Registry showing his family's lineage: date of birth and death, civil status, name changes, and other data. Beneath his grandfather's name a note said "*mühtedi*," Ottoman Turkish for "convert."

The attitude of Kurds toward Armenians started to change with the PKK, Hamdi said. "They preached fraternity with Armenians, out of their Marxist convictions," he explained, unaware of how improbably he was weaving his Armenian roots and socialist convictions into his Kurdish and Muslim identity. Hamdi thought Öcalan's mother was of Armenian descent and that there were Armenian fighters in the PKK. These were rumors Armenians bragged about,

was my riposte, but it was Turkish propaganda to discredit both Armenians and the Kurdish guerrilla. It was a myth, I told them. It was not, the brothers responded.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

A common friend introduced me to Z. in a forgettable building outside the northern wall of Diyarbakır, a few blocks away from the local headquarters of the Emniyet Müdürlüğü (Security Directorate). To the astonishment of my Armenian and Kurdish friends, I had once visited the Security Directorate to request a visa extension. During the repression of the Kurdish uprising in the 1980s and 1990s, it used to be a black hole for dissidents and others who had earned the state's distrust or enmity. A military police officer, in helmet and bullet-proof vest, and an assault rifle slung over his shoulder, guarded its narrow entrance, while another guard scanned the street from behind a security cabin, slightly bigger than a shower booth. Past a number of Atatürk portraits, I walked into yet another office presided over by a different picture of Atatürk, this one in a gala tailcoat and looking up, as if in the opera.

A police officer, polite yet wide-eyed in surprise, had taken my application. He was of dark complexion and black eyes. "But what are you doing in Diyarbakır?" he had asked in English, which was unusual in the police force, especially in the eastern provinces. "This is not a touristic place." My interest in the Roman walls had not convinced him—a week was more than enough to see them, he thought. "Is the friend you are staying with Turkish?" he probed. I refused to give Sevag's name and address, in no small part because I did not want to call him a Turk, or say who he was. "When you come to visit a friend you don't repay him by reporting his name to the police," I had said, which the officer took in good stride and with a big laugh. Not to play the unconvincing role of too dumb a tourist, I did hint that I was Armenian by telling him that my mother had ancestors from this city, and he seemed to acknowledge the cue with a smile, and did not push further. As I was getting ready to leave, a plump man with an unkempt appearance walked hurriedly in, a gun tucked into his jeans. Two attractive young women, fashionably dressed, with clear-colored eyes and of a Slavic look that would stand out in the streets of this city, were working on one side of the office, and I fancied them to be undercover agents.

Two weeks later, the wait in the nondescript building made me a little nervous, as I kept thinking about the proximity of the Security Directorate. My friend walked out of the room after ushering in Z., a shaven man of average height and looks, who could blend in among the crowd in Diyarbakır or anywhere else in Turkey. As part of the agreement, Z. would not tell me his name, nor would I be allowed to take his photo. He had fought with the PKK for 13 years.

He was Armenian, born in 1976 in a village near the city of Batman, but his grandparents' hometown was Midyat, a historical city in the province of Mardin in the south-east. An ancient Hurrian center, it had been incorporated into the Assyrian Empire in the ninth century BC. Assyrians called it Tur Abdin. Before the Genocide, it had an Assyrian majority and a tiny Armenian population that was mostly Catholic, but also included a small Protestant congregation.

"Of course I know about the Genocide," he said. The young in his family did not know much about what had happened to their family. Only his grandfather, along with his brother and sister, were saved in 1915: Kurds killed his mother and father. At the time there was famine, too. They had been Christian and did not know when their grandfather had become Muslim, or if it was forcible.

"There is the political dimension of 1915, because the interests of the Russians, the Ottomans, and the English concurred, and the Kurds lent themselves to it, and they massacred the Armenians: but they were the hands behind the massacres, not the mind." I asked him if he remembered how he felt when he learned he was Armenian, but he answered something else: "I am only talking to you because our common friend told me, otherwise I would not be speaking with you, do you understand?" And then he responded, using the local formula of "taking to the mountains" to indicate joining the Kurdish guerrillas:

They called us "*filla*" because we were Armenian ... I learned this concept first, *filla* [unbeliever], long before I knew I was Armenian. That I found out later, but I remember the first time I heard *filla*: I was five or six years old, and I remember it since then. One day an old man came home as a guest ... I was in my room, and he had an argument with my maternal grandfather and my father, and he called my father "*fillanın oğlunu*" [infidel's son]. And when we were children the other kids bullied us; my mother, too, was called "*kurre filla*" [unbeliever's girl], and after growing up I learned I was Armenian. I was born and raised in Batman. I had no Armenian friends, and I had my cousins. My first language was Kurmancî.

Perhaps because I grew up hearing my aunts and my father and his family talk about what they did to the Armenians, I took to the mountains. I snapped. It still angers me. Once a man asked me, "Son, why did you take to the mountains?" And I told him, "I am avenging my grandfather's family." It's not the only reason, obviously, but it had an effect on me, too. It was also in rebellion against my father, because my father is in denial of his own origins. My wife is Kurdish and I look at man on his own merit, but I say I am Armenian and I do not deny my origins, and I have my feelings about it. And when I joined the PKK my first statement to them was that I am of Armenian origin. When I met Apo, Öcalan, in the mountains in the winter of 1995, I told him I joined the fight because I am Armenian: "Perhaps that's the reason why I took to the mountains." Apo is different: he listens to everyone, he is not a racist, he is a pioneer, but he is a

simple man ... Some say his mother is Turcoman and that his grandparents came from Iraq, but I have never heard he was of Armenian origin.

In 1994, when I went to university to get a degree in electrical engineering, I learned that all these Kurdish cities were built by Armenians. Then I joined the PKK. I told them: "I come from an Armenian family and I don't deny it." At the time of the Assyrian king Sargon, Armenians and Kurds were brother nations, and have been so since then. The protectors of the Commagene empire were Kurds and Armenians. Kurds and Armenians have lived like brothers since then, until the 1915 massacre, and in the 1915 massacre it was on behalf of the political interests of the Turks that they acted the way they did. I have Armenian friends who say, "The Kurds massacred us." There were the political interests of America and Britain behind it, and the result was the Armenian massacres.

There was no mention of Kurds in Commagene in the kingdom's historical records. Yet it fitted in with the new nationalist narrative of Kurdish revolutionaries, which tended to describe Kurds as one of the aboriginal populations as well as to minimize, if not absolve, their participation in the Genocide by blaming it on outside powers and the Kurds' naïveté. The elaborate cruelties on a massive scale, however, were not the making of ignorant hands, if only sophisticated in their debauchery: in Diyarbakır, "they hammered red-hot horseshoes with large nails on the bare feet of some, like Mihran Bastagian's and his friends' [...] some had their limbs amputated, others' thumbs were flattened with machines [...] some were skinned (butcher Vaho and his friends) and their bodies were hung at the butcher's shops, where their cuts were sold, and others were crucified (policeman Ohan and his friends)."⁹ The flayed goats at the butchers' stands in the city's food market, with their round eyes terrifyingly bulging out, would remind me of that passage in Mgrdichian's memoirs. There was nothing simple-minded in that perversity, and none of that could be traced to Britain or the US.

Indoctrinated as he was in the Marxism of the Kurdish revolutionaries, this man with no name was still, a century later, a *fedayi* like those that in the late nineteenth century had started to defend the Armenians from the brutalities inflicted by nomadic Kurdish tribes. He was the proof of what Sevag had told me: the Islamicized Armenians had lost the language, the religion, the culture, the memory, but just the awareness of their identity kept them going. At the same time, he confirmed what other former militants in the PKK said. There were very few Armenian fighters. One veteran Kurdish member of the PKK did not remember coming across one in a decade with the guerrillas. And the man from Midyat had met very few in 13 years:

In my PKK battalion there was only one other Armenian from Midyat, called Kemal. He was my close friend, but I am no longer in touch with him ... When

they ask me what I am I say I am not a Kurd, I am Armenian, that's my first response: I am Armenian, but I don't know about religions or anything. I have plenty of Armenian friends. I went to the mountains not only for the Kurdish people but also Armenians, Assyrians, Turks, that's what I like, it's not only the Kurds. We fight to establish a state for every nation.

Our common friend accuses me of only fighting for the Kurds, and I say I don't: I do it for the Armenians, the Assyrians, the Greeks, and every other minority.

An Armenian himself, he no longer saw his own people as a native nation in its homeland. To him, they were a minority, timidly regrouping, only now, as a community. And I understood the historical dimension of what Perwin had labeled in her bookstore as "nations turned into minorities." In the mountains, the former guerrilla continued, there were Germans, Russians, Kazakhs, a bit like the international brigades in the Spanish Civil War.

We want a confederation for every nation. Our life was very difficult in the mountains. But I'll tell you this: man adjusts to everything. Man is not aware of his own strength. We learned alone in the mountains: the settings, the experiences, the psychology, the friendships are very different. You need to live it, we cannot express ourselves: we lived many different things. We had a saying in the guerrilla: "*Bazen vezirdin; bazen rezildir*" ["Sometimes a vizier; sometimes a wretch"]. Sometimes you lived like a general, and sometimes you were hungry, and went about barefoot, you had no shoes. I saw many of my friends die. The first time a man sees combat he feels fear, and I did too. I have had to shoot, too: it was either him or me. It's war, and war is that: it's death. That's the reality: only once was it face-to-face combat, and I shot him first. It was a soldier; he was tall.

Armenians called these lands Western Armenia, I told him. "That I don't know," he responded, somewhat curtly. "As long as Kurds and Armenians live like brothers they can coexist." The third *ezzan* of the day issued from the city's minarets, a five-minute wail calling for the afternoon prayers, the *Asr*, performed when the sun is bright or when "the shadow of something is twice its own length."

We want justice for the Genocide. Of course I took to the mountains to seek justice for 1915: that has its share, my feelings on that count. I believe Genocide recognition will come. But I returned to Diyarbakır because I got injured, and I got tired. I was in the mountains for 13 years. In the summer, the weather was nice, we had our military uniforms, not formal and not hierarchical; we ate rice. And in the winter it got difficult, we stayed wherever we were, and we concentrated on our education.

I met other Armenians in the villages; also Assyrians. In the vicinity of Metin, in Iraq, there were Armenians; they had villages. In Zakho, we were friends with

an Armenian family. I met many. We talked about their problems: theirs were economic.

We had an Armenian friend in Turkey who used to work with my wife. She was from the Ağrı area, and had a map of her grandfather's that showed treasure he had buried at the foot of Mt. Ararat, but I didn't go to dig it up.

Once we entered an Assyrian village in Iraq, and were seated having tea: a boy walked up to me. The child was six years old, and his mother was young, perhaps 25 years old. Then I asked the boy, "Who was the Assyrian's biggest emperor?" The boy did not answer. He went inside the school's classroom and said, "Our greatest emperor was Asurbanipal." I was impressed, do you know why? Because on these lands we do not know who our ancestors were.

Nothing ... I regret nothing. I am a PKK member, but I am not a Kurdish nationalist ... Turks since the 1920s have been pursuing a twofold campaign against the Kurds, with weapons and with assimilation policies, and against Armenians as well. Both sides are hitting each other, but at some point there has to be a solution. War and peace never separate from each other. Each has the potential for the other.

The time for borders is over. But the four parts of Kurdistan will have to come together in a confederation out of their own will. But saying this is the Armenians' land, this is the Kurds', and that the Turks' is over. The world of national borders is coming to an end.

On religion, I say I am neither a Muslim nor a Christian, I believe in the freedom of religion. For me, man, regardless of religion, language, or race, is man. There are virtuous Christians and there are those who are bad people. There are Muslims who are bad as hell, and there are those who are good people. That is why I don't go to mosque or church. But I feel closer to the Church, I find it warmer, perhaps because it has been oppressed and attacked so many times. I am more loving of it. In Iraq, I went to an Armenian church in a village near Zakho, to a friend's wedding, and that was the only time I have been to any house of worship.

On their own, Armenians and Kurds live together like brothers. I returned from the mountains in 2006. My wife is a former guerrilla. We met in the mountains in 1999. We got married in Iraq, at a little gathering with friends: it was not a religious ceremony. She is 100 percent Kurdish.

The interview with the PKK Armenian was over. He had spoken in haste, with no signs of emotion or pauses for reflection. He had never been to Surp Giragos, even though he knew where it was. We could take the 20-minute walk there, I suggested, but he turned it down. But he had not finished his story, for he decided to take a look back to his childhood, by telling a story relayed by his father, the self-denying Armenian that moved him to rebel. It was the only moment when I noticed an effort to fight back raw feelings that had the power to overcome him:

Back in our village in Batman, my father said the imam used to gather the neighbors to pelt our house with stones, because we were Armenian. So there would be days when 40 people, led by the imam, were throwing rocks at our home.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

His mother used to remember an Armenian priest who was being marched off in the extermination caravans of 1915 telling his Kurdish neighbors: "We are the breakfast; you will be the lunch."

Abdullah Demirbaş, the mayor of Diyarbakır-Sur, the city's ancient perimeter, grew up in Gâvur Mahallesi (the Infidels Quarter), the old Armenian neighborhood now settled by Kurds who migrated from villages, especially after Turkey launched all-out war against the PKK in the 1990s. "When I was little on my first day at school my teacher slapped me across my face because I only spoke Kurdish: I didn't know one word of Turkish."

I had followed the advice of a friend from Diyarbakır, now based in New York, and had introduced myself at the city hall as an Armenian journalist from New York. It took me five minutes to be received by the mayor, who had just arrived from Germany. We spoke for an hour and a half.

This was 2011, and spring was in the air, and so were hopes for a renovation in Turkey, breaking its pendular pattern of reform and violence that had defined the country after the Crimean War of 1853–6. The key to solving Turkey's problems was decentralization, Demirbaş said. He was working to promote languages and local rights. "Not only for Kurds, but also for Armenians, Assyrians, and all other minorities," he said. "The state has tied too many things into its centralized nature: we need to evolve toward a multicultural, multilingual state." Kurds did not want a separate state: "We want freedom in a democratic Turkey."

He wanted to make Diyarbakır a multicultural city again. Demirbaş blamed the state for destroying peace among communities. Diversity, he said, was a garden: the more flowers of different kinds it had, the richer it was. "We can be different but we can live together." In Diyarbakır, he had given Kurdish, Armenian, Arabic, and Assyrian official language status to be used alongside Turkish. He had also ordered publications in Hebrew. Under his administration they had published works by the Armenian author Miğirdiç Margosyan as well as an Assyrian writer, Naum Fadik Palak, and a Kurd, Ahmed Arif. All three were born in Diyarbakır. In Armenian, he had also published "A Drop of Honey," a short story by Hovhannes Toumanian.

At the time of the interview he was facing 27 lawsuits for charges that could send him to prison for a combined 232 years. His youngest son had run to the mountains and joined the PKK at the age of 16 in 2009—he last had seen him on December 24 of that year—and he had not seen him again in the two years since.

The Turkish state used the Kurdish people against Armenians, Yezidis, Assyrians, and even against other Kurds. "We have learned," he said. And he mentioned his plan to rename the city's old quarter Dikran-Amed, in recognition of the Armenian name. Eventually he made the project public but nothing had come out of it.

He felt he was being persecuted in Turkey because, as they say, "The head of the snake has to be crushed when it's small." His experiments with democratic multiculturalism were a dangerous precedent for the principle of "Turkey for the Turks," of foundational import for the Republic. "Many feel that my head has to be beaten now," with the goal of decimating diversity.

In 2005, a demographic survey was conducted in Diyarbakır. It involved 8,970 families, a total of 70,000 people, for a survey of the language used at home. A majority, 72 percent, spoke Kurdish at home; Turkish was the mother tongue for 24 percent; 1 percent spoke Arabic; and the remaining 3 percent was split among Chaldean, Assyrian, Armenian, and other minority languages.

According to this survey, 30 families at the time had identified themselves as Assyrian, five as Armenian, and one as Yezidi. There were also four Jews, even though he was not sure if these individuals were members of the same family. Still, some 300 families have come forth as Armenian after that. Another interesting piece of information was that there were two villages of Turkish Alevis.

We had to believe in our ideas, he said. We could sacrifice our bread and our water but we could not sacrifice our ideas. "Just imagine what kind of world we would live in if Socrates and Galileo had recanted."

After leaving his office, Demirbaş' assistant, a nephew, told me to be careful when going to the Surp Giragos: it was not a very safe neighborhood. "There are many street kids," he said when I pressed him what he meant, but he would not be more explicit than that. The Akkaya brothers had also told me to be aware of my surroundings when going to the Infidels' Quarter. "There can be unruly children ... you'll see when you go there," and Hamdi, too, was hinting at something he appeared embarrassed to say.

"Beware the Gypsy kids," one street vendor just outside the Ulu Cami (Great Mosque), from whom I bought sweets on my way to the church, told me after the interview with Demirbaş. Nothing ever happened the dozens of times I visited Surp Giragos, other than cheerful little children playing soccer or with kittens, posing with wide smiles for photos, except sometimes for one or two very little girls, who would be too shy and hide behind their mothers' long skirts. Only once did a group of teenagers run after me angrily when I took a picture of them smoking, but left me alone when I told them, a bit too loudly, to mind their own business.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

As a child, *Aynur* used to play with other children in the ruins of Surp Giragos Church. "We did not know what it was," she had told me in our first conversations. Her family had moved from Mizak, their village in the province of Diyarbakır, and had settled in the old Armenian quarter.

Vartan, the beadle of Surp Giragos, had come to Sevag's office for some documentation to run church errands. His eyes rested on Aynur, the young office assistant. She cut a delicate figure, dressed in simple but exquisite Islamic fashion, with a black skirt and a matching sweater. The silk shawls over the hijab cap, always in a plain color and very often red or blue, made her stand out. The headscarf rose slightly toward the back of the head and sloped down to the neck, like Nefertiti's crown cap: the effect, seen in the headdress of many young women in Turkey, was caused by their long hair, tied up in a ponytail, hidden beneath.

Yet Vartan did not admire Aynur. "You are Armenian," he told her. He had recognized her from the village of Mizak, in the vicinity of his hometown of Lice. Her family was indeed of Armenian origin, she admitted. She had seen me speaking with Sevag about my book project, which I had also discussed briefly with her, but she had not said anything. Flabbergasted as I was, I was even more surprised that not even Sevag knew it, despite employing her for the last two years. He, however, acknowledged it with phlegm—"Oh, is that so?"—and continued his conversation over tea with Vartan about church affairs.

With initial reluctance, Aynur agreed to speak with me. She had just turned 23 and was planning on getting married in a few months. Outside of Diyarbakır, she had spent three years at university in Urfa, and she had been once to Ankara, a city she had found chaotic. In no hurry to see Istanbul, she was impatient to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. "I cannot afford it now because of my wedding, but I will not wait for old age to do the *Hajj*; I will do it in my youth, *inşallah*." Her voice was diaphanous, yet some of her thoughts, wrapped in the velvet of her soothing whisper, would have sounded much different from other, sullen lips.

"When I was little, my family mentioned that we were of Armenian origin but they would not enter into details about how or where we came from. My mother and my father did not know. They only knew that in the past Armenian fugitives came into our village and afterwards they converted to Islam, whether our grandfather or grandmother, we do not know. Nothing else. We only know this. Perhaps our elders knew but did not speak. My paternal grandparents are dead and my maternal grandfather never leaves the village. Maybe he came to Diyarbakır once to visit a sick relative, and perhaps one other time, but that was it."

Mizak, some two hours by car from Diyarbakır, used to be an Armenian village in the past, "in the time of our elders, but afterwards they obviously became Muslim."

Everybody was related to each other in Mizak: "Only our clan and its branches are Armenian. The other families do not know their origin. Nobody does. There are more than 50 homes in Mizak. More than 20, perhaps 22, are families of Armenian origin, all related to us, because our clan is the biggest there. There are no *aşirets* or tribes in the Kurdish style. We are just a big family."

"Do you know how you became Muslim?"

"How did I become Muslim? I was born a Muslim. In my family, I think an Armenian woman married a Muslim man and that's how we became Muslim. But we are not Muslim on both sides. My father's grandmother was Armenian and Islamicization came by way of marriage. I don't know anything about Armenians in Turkey."

"How about 1915?"

"Ah yes, they call it genocide? Armenians of course call it a genocide. That's how she became a Muslim. At the time of what you call the genocide she fled and sought refuge in our village, and married a Muslim man."

"Don't you think it was a genocide?"

"It may have been, but how much of it is true and how much a lie, I don't know. There was something like that. But if it was one-sided or reciprocal, that I don't know, but they talk about that."

"Do you feel anything that links you to Armenians?"

"I never mingled with Armenians. I have never been involved with them."

"Would you call yourself Armenian?"

"I don't know. I feel Muslim myself."

"It is possible to be both Armenian and Muslim."

"Is it? I only say that I am of Armenian origin, because I am Muslim."

"There are atheist Armenians but they are Armenian."

"I don't know."

"When you were little, was 'Armenian' used as a bad word in school?"

"No, never. I've never heard anything bad about Armenians. I studied at Haran university, in Urfa, so it was safe there to say that I was of Armenian origin. My fiancé is Muslim proper on both sides, both his mother and father. He is a Zaza, a relative of ours from Mizak. He is not a stranger. He is a distant relative. His elders were *bocas*. I love my religion, very, very much."

"What do you feel about Christians and Armenians in Turkey?"

"In Turkey it is possible to live with a different religion. Coexistence is good, that everybody can talk about his own religion and practice it."

"There are problems between Christians and Muslims."

"But that is more related to politics, isn't it? I think Christians and Muslims can talk and be friends. It's not a religious problem. It's politics."

"How would you feel about your religion if you learned that you are Muslim because of forced conversion?"

"I want to read about 1915, find out whose rights were violated. Forced conversions? I had never heard about that. We just know we are of Armenian origin: only my father, my mother, sometimes my older brother says we are of Armenian origin, but that's it. I don't know anything about that. On my mother's side I don't know, we don't know. She says, 'My grandfather died but I don't know where he came from, how he came here.' They may have been converted by force, but I really don't know."

"Did you feel fear when you were little about your Armenian origin?"

"No, everybody knew and I said it at school or university, I never hid it. In Urfa I was in a district that was Kurdish so nobody bothered me. I have two older sisters and two brothers, I am the youngest. My older brother knows a little more, because he remembers my grandparents, so he spoke with them and he knows a few things. Armenians were mistreated; he said that."

Aynur wanted to know what I felt about Muslims of Armenian origin. She was also curious about Muslims who were forcibly converted and wondered how they felt toward Islam. But the conversation was cut short when her boss, Sevag's daughter, came over with work.

She had not spoken about the forced disappearance of people in her hometown. Some locals, including at least one member of her clan in Mizak, had last been seen in the company of policemen or gendarmes, including Mehmet Can Aysin, a peasant and imam. The father of nine had not been heard from since May 8, 1994, during the repression years of the Kurdish uprising.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

"My father was born in 1910, so he was five," Vartan said. "They killed his three brothers and his parents before his eyes, and he was left wandering, alone in the bazaar: an honorable Muslim family took him in and hid him. When he grew up they also gave him one of their women and converted him." His father, Husep (a dialectal form of Hovsep, or Joseph in Armenian), had changed his name to Abdullah. Probably by mistake, he was conscripted twice, once under the Armenian name, then under the Turkish one.

"I learned after I was 25 that I was Armenian." Vartan had found out after returning from military service in Northern Cyprus. "Until then I thought I was a Kurd." The Muslim family that had raised Husep called him "*filla*," they told Vartan at the time. "My father did not say a word about it to protect us."

Uncelebrated in Diyarbakır, New Year had dawned amid a thick fog. It had found Vartan, the church beadle, badly sick.

As he knew my hangouts, he would drop by for a talk, often in the literary café, a mezzanine above a bookstore run by an Islamicized Armenian in the commercial district, where he came after church for a tea or, more often, a

Danish beer. He also left at the bookstore the newly received copies of *Agos*. But on that glacial day, I first met him in the church, briefly, where I hibernated around the stove with him and Agop Serkis as we watched some banality on Turkish TV with the police officer—even though I had not expressed concern, they told me that he was a Kurd to reassure me, deployed by the municipality for protection. There had been some minor incidents in the past, including stone-throwing, and I had once seen offensive graffiti on an adjacent wall. Vartan later joined me at Sülüklü Han, which had become one of my writing dens, as I was drawn to the conversations with Perwin that flowed like a deep river, the charm of its gallery of basalt, and the black cat that climbed onto the table to inspect my notebooks and computer screen.

The cafés were usually his last stop after church before heading back home. With some urgency, Vartan told me he was planning a trip to Armenia in the spring. As Diaspora Armenians used to do, he also idealized Armenia. Born and raised in Western Armenia, he was not a Diasporan. Yet despite being more indigenous than others in the land, he now belonged to a people that had shrunk to a minority and, as such, could only behave like a community.

In Armenia, he would become a citizen and begin a new life. His wife did not accept his Armenian identity. But did she not know he was Armenian prior to getting married? "*Biraz*," he said in Turkish: "A little." I was not sure what it meant to "know a little" that he was Armenian. He was also distressed about his sons and daughters, making some sad comments in Armenian, of which he had a basic command, all the more remarkable because he had studied late in life and then only for a brief time. His four children rejected the Armenian identity:

They say, "We are already Muslim," but my youngest one is a sensitive girl: she has been learning Armenian words, she likes it, and her name is Miro. They are Muslim Kurds. We speak Kurdish at home. They consider themselves Kurds ... Of course I would like them to feel Armenian. I feel alone and cold.

Their mother also opposed her husband's and children's baptism. She would tell her husband to quit his work at the church. "Taking money from the Church is *haram*, she tells me," he said, using the Islamic word for something sinful or forbidden: "My wife is the granddaughter of the family that raised my father, the daughter of an uncle of mine."

This was also proof that the paternalism which supposedly ruled identity in Turkey admitted exceptions, especially when it pertained to less stigmatized groups. Sose, my Sasuntsi friend in Istanbul, had told me as much, advising me not to believe the theory to the letter. "Most will choose what expediency

dictates," she said. "When they are living among Kurds, they will say they are Kurds: it doesn't matter if their father is Armenian."

Theirs had not been a marriage for love, Vartan said. His mother, who was Kurdish, had arranged his wedding with a Kurdish girl from the family they were friends with. Vartan's mother had not loved his father either, like a double curse prefigured by Tolstoy in the opening line of *Anna Karenina*, "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." He wiped off the sweat from his brow, and complained of his headache as he lit another cigarette: "Marriage is like a prison sentence." He laughed, his eyes bloodshot after downing half a pint of beer in one go.

Life in Armenia, which he was planning on, might not be easy, I told him. Why would I think, he retorted, that life in Diyarbakır was easier? His home had become alien, or he had become a stranger to them. Heavily congested, he was now looking down at the table. His marine eyes had welled up. It was the cigarette, he said. Winter felt endless:

Is it possible to be both Muslim and Armenian? It's impossible, but this is the reality, unfortunately. To be Armenian you need to be Christian, but my religion is Islam. I don't like the mosque; I haven't liked the mosque since I was little. I have been three times for the *bayram* feast when I was a child, and have not been back to a mosque since. I am a leftist and I don't like religions, but I like the Church. It gives me peace, I find everything there, I find my friends there, I find relatives there, we relate there. I don't like Islam.

We are five brothers and the oldest does the *namaz*, goes to mosque every Friday, but we all acknowledge we are Armenian. He knows the history very well, too. But for him Armenian is an ethnicity. Religion is different. He is 72 years old and lives in Bursa, where he receives cancer treatment. And he knows which Kurd took which property from our family after the Genocide; that I don't know. I know these Kurds, but growing up in Lice I didn't know they had grabbed our properties.

In 1975 there were still three Armenian households in Lice: the families of Dikran Duman, Ares, and Ayo, but two left after the earthquake of that year. The last left a little later, when they tried to kidnap their daughter, who was beautiful. They moved to the Netherlands.

I knew about the Genocide from the time of my youth; that things happened. That I knew. But when I learned I was Armenian it affected me deeply. I cried inside myself: only my father was saved from our entire family. He didn't tell us one word about it to put us out of harm's way. He feared very much. He saw his mother, father, and three brothers murdered. He was protected by my maternal grandfather, Mehmet Kızılkaya. My paternal grandfather's name was Dono and my grandmother's Hanım Demirciyan. Two of my uncles were called Davit and Artin, but I don't know the name of the third one.

I learned about my origins at the time of the PKK war. I never felt fear. As Lice is small everybody knows each other. There are still many families in Lice that do not admit their Armenian origin, and try to pass themselves for Kurds. Everybody knows they are Armenian.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

The week before Christmas Perwîn introduced me to an Armenian woman at Sülüklü Han. There was an intensity in the face of *Zuhal* that reminded me of Mary in the icon of the Tokalı Church of Göreme in Cappadocia, holding the Christ Child tightly close to her, aware that her son was doomed. But unlike the Madonna, Zuhal's eyes engaged the viewer's like those of a Bulgarian princess in the Middle Ages, whose stare in a blinking contest with her father, the king, had so disturbed the monarch's guards that they had wanted to intervene against his daughter.

Her ancestors were survivors from Erzurum who had made it as far as Diyarbakır in 1915 and had found refuge. Her facial type and other characteristics—the black eyes, almond-shaped and big; the copious black hair; her darker skin—corresponded to the physiognomy that three generations later everywhere in the world, and notwithstanding mixtures with other groups (including Armenians from elsewhere), had survived among descendants of Armenians from Erzurum, the ancient Garin.

Zuhal took me along to visit *Damla* and her husband *Ümit*, an engineer with a Turkish father and Georgian mother, specialized in the architectonic heritage of Turkey. A government consultant for the restoration and preservation of historical monuments, he was a man of voluminous build and humor that expanded with his boisterous laugh, which boomed out from under his big mustachios with their traces of red hair. By virtue of his wife, a considerable part of his social life was spent amid Armenians and Assyrians, Islamicized or otherwise, for *Damla* was registered as a Muslim but was a practicing Christian, and as such she was to be found frequently at Surp Giragos or at Maryam Ana, the Assyrian church.

"There are angels." Zuhal was reading *Ümit's* Turkish coffee cup: she was unsure of its interpretation but she did not seem to like the signs. It was a strange coincidence, *Ümit* said. During a commission at Mardin a few months earlier, he had noticed angels and a crucified Christ on the minaret of the Şehidiye Cami (Martyrs' Mosque) built in the thirteenth century. "Of course," he said, "Armenians and Christians were the architects and masons; Turks didn't have time: they were going from one battlefield to the other; that's how the Christians sneaked their prophet onto the minaret," he said with his big laugh. "People from all over have come to Turkey and fought: we came and won; and

we told the Christians, 'You stay here: build the mosques, the caravanserais, the churches,' while the Turks went to defend the country's borders, conquer other peoples, and occupy other countries." Turks were the rulers and soldiers; Armenians the masons and craftsmen.

Regardless of the accuracy of the statement, it illustrated, in passing, the imperial logic with which an educated layman in Turkey saw land appropriation from Greeks, Armenians, and Assyrians, and how he interpreted the country's history. It was also the justification for the military means, the ultimate remedy—yet very often the first—to any real or perceived challenge to the Turkish state, whether it be the existence of Christian minorities, exterminated but for a token presence; the Kurds' demands, chronically made with violence and met with more of it; or a tendency for the repression of dissent even under constitutional rule: if the experiences of dozens of leftists I met were anything to go by, incarceration rates in the country had to be very high, for the vast majority of them had served time in prison—sometimes for more than a decade—even if they had committed no other crime than being members of Marxist groups.

Turkey was still an empire in all but name, in the strictest sense of the world: one centralized state with a dominant nation that ruled over other peoples on territories conquered from them. Turkish rule was still contested in discourse by its original populations and, in Eastern Anatolia, by arms, in the periodic Kurdish rebellions. Since Atatürk, Turkey was trying to fit into the narrow framework of a nation state: but it could not, due to the centrifugal tendencies of the Kurds, an indeterminate number yet easily 30 percent of the 80 million of the country's population. Turkey had not found any other remedy for surviving these demands other than suppressing them by force, and by the violence it has unleashed on other nationalities that it has perceived as a threat or have contested the unity or nature of the state.

Ümit attended the commemorations of the Armenian Genocide by the budding community of Diyarbakır, and also honored the memory of Hrant Dink on the anniversaries of his murder. In his mind, there was obviously no conflict between the homages he paid and his views of Turkish nationhood, a consequence of which were these crimes. If he was aware of the contradictions, the routines of life glossed them over.

On Christmas Eve, Ümit gave me a little silver crucifix as a gift. As he was an expert, I wondered if he could give me a rough estimate for restoring the Gomk monastery in Sasun. Very preliminarily, looking at the photos, he told me it would cost at least \$3 million.

That evening he was peeved by the news. Turkey at the time was riven by a corruption scandal that implicated Erdoğan's family. The government accused Fetullah Gülen, an Islamic cleric living in the US, of orchestrating the scandal

by mobilizing his followers in the police and the "deep state." Ümit expressed support for Erdoğan by omission, comparing Gülen, who was holed up in a compound in Pennsylvania, to Hassan al Sabbah. "A traitor," Ümit said. "Turkey is full of traitors." Sabbah, the leader of an uprising against the Seljuk Turks in the eleventh century, was the founder of the Hashashin sect, a group of Islamic militants that were narcotized with hashish to murder political opponents. He commanded the rebellion from the fortress of Alamut, in the Albruz mountains of Persia, which he apparently only left twice in his life. Introduced to a wider audience by Marco Polo as the "Old Man of the Mountain," he survived in the word "assassin," a cognate of the militia's name.¹⁰

A week later we were driving through the polar landscape of Diyarbakır as a confused motorist from torrid Urfa slowed us more than the snow, exasperating Ümit, at the wheel of a powerful SUV. The brake lights of the small car from Urfa shone through the heavy snow flakes that blanketed the road. We were headed to Zuhâl's home. She had moved far from the city center, she confided to me later, after one of her brothers had threatened her for taking on the unbecoming job of a teacher, rather than remaining at home to raise her children. "He put a gun to my head," she said.

Erzurum was the original hometown of many Armenians in Diyarbakır, one of the later stops in the death march routes, but Zuhâl's family had a special claim to fame. Her great-grandmother Sare, she said, was the woman who had inspired *Sarı Gelin*, the most popular Armenian song in Turkey, where the Turkish version (rather than an accurate translation of the Armenian lyrics) is better known. The origin of the song is the object of much dispute, but it is acknowledged as an Armenian song.

Sare was a beautiful 15-year-old, the only sister of six brothers in the city of Hınıs, formerly a major Armenian center in the province of Erzurum. "One day, Sare had gone to the market in Garin," Zuhâl called Erzurum by its Armenian name, "and she caught the eye of the money changer's son."

But her family was opposed to the courtship of the young man, who would wait for her every night and day outside her home. Shortly after, Sare fell gravely ill. At the time, people in Garin started talking about a lovesick man singing a forlorn tune that would become *Sarı Ağcig* in Armenian and *Sarı Gelin* in Turkish. Finally, her family consented to her marriage.

By 1915, they had two girls and four boys. Her husband was conscripted and murdered with the Armenians drafted into the labor battalions. Sare lost her boys in the convoys from Hınıs: the six-year-old one died of hunger at the beginning of the deportation. Two others, of eight and ten years old, disappeared. Further down the road, Sare was injured when trying to defend herself from an attempted rape: her attacker drove a dagger, a *hancar*, into her chest that went through the hand of her two-year-old daughter, Azniv, which cushioned the impact.

Sare, her oldest daughter, Shushan, who was 12, and Azniv, arrived at Surp Giragos in Diyarbakır. Sare died in 1918 and a few months later Shushan also died, of hunger and disease.

Zuhal brought up ASALA, the Armenian militant organization that attacked Turkish targets in the 1970s and 1980s. They were taking revenge for the Genocide, she thought, saying aloud what others still whispered in Turkey: not long before, I had been stunned to hear one Turk credit ASALA with bringing back from oblivion the memory of 1915, which had been erased amid the Turkish population, except for old people. And she raised a toast to “*Ata . . .*,” but she substituted the suffix following “*Ata*” (father) with a different word, in allusion to the Republic’s founder.

She had five brothers, one of whom had died fighting for the PKK in 2000, in what the family thought was a chemical attack by the Turkish army. Another one was still in the mountains with the Kurdish rebels. Of the other three, one was married to a Kurdish woman, while the other two had taken two Islamicized Armenian sisters for wives, *Nazli* and *Jalenur*, their distant cousins on their mother’s side.

The sisters’ family had bought back the lands that were taken from them during the Genocide in the village of Norşen, in the province of Mush, where many family members were killed. Some were rounded up and brought to a cave on Filla Tepe (Infidels Hill), where they were slaughtered. *Jalenur* remembered their old last name, Hagopian, and their great-grandfather, Soğo, and his brother, Sarkis *amca*, telling stories of the Genocide and their old last name.

There were several other villages with Islamicized Armenians in Mush, the other sister, *Nazli*, said: Gortaqum, Orginos, Golosik, Muşuni, Muşk, Mışuş, and Mikragom. In Norşen, Kurds and Arabs still called the Islamicized Armenians *filla* to this day. After the Genocide, they had brought in Turcomans from Bulgaria to be resettled in Norşen but they couldn’t adjust, so they sold their properties and they were all gone by 1918. The Turkish government brought in Arabs from Sasun to take their place, but some Armenians returned as well, albeit already converted.

Among those who returned was their grandfather, Hacifaykı, whose Armenian name the family had forgotten. He had bought back the old family house and an additional plot. Hacifaykı, together with his father Soğo and his uncle Sarkis, had escaped the massacres in 1915 by fleeing to a nearby village where they had worked for a Kurdish *ağa* as shepherds. There, Hacifaykı had met his wife, an Islamicized Armenian girl called Aslıxan.

Dilhan, the brother to whom Zuhal was the closest, had proposed that I visit an Armenian cousin’s widow to see if we could find anything of value in her trove of old photographs and books, as her husband had been a man of

intellectual curiosity and the author of a thin volume that weaved memoirs and socialist ideology. The visit had not yielded much, except Dilhan’s surprise in finding out the widow’s displeasure when he had described her as a Turk.

“I am not a Turk: I am Macedonian.” Dilhan, a little taken aback, asked her if she was a Muslim born in Turkey. “So are you,” came her swift riposte. “But you say you are a Kurd because your father is a Kurd, and your mother is Armenian,” she said after sitting mostly silent while we browsed old papers amid furniture with a style and wear that pointed to the 1970s. Her parents had been relocated in Turkey from a village called Vranovça in Macedonia, not happily for them, during the population exchanges that followed World War I, and they did not speak Turkish. They would be pestered by a slogan they loathed. “*Vatandaş, Türkçe konuş!*” (“Compatriot, speak Turkish!”). They had first settled in Izmir, on the Aegean coast, and then somehow had ended up in Diyarbakır.

Dilhan gave me his telephone number as we were leaving the Macedonian woman’s home. “Our *aşiret* is one of the biggest in Diyarbakır,” he said, referring to the Mandel, the Kurdish tribe on his father’s side. He said it comprised more than 1,000 households in the city. Zuhal had also promised me the tribe’s support. Should I have any problem in Turkey—and he repeated it, “any problem”—I ought to call him.

• • • • •

Nesim Yazar was one of the church regulars.

He was the grandchild of Simo, a blacksmith who after the Genocide had moved to Hazro, where a Kurdish strongman called Camil Paşa had taken him under his protection. At the time he became a Muslim. He then settled in Kulp, where he got married and had two boys and two girls, all of whom would eventually marry other Islamicized Armenians. Someone called Tumo taught him the art of gunmaking.

Simo never spoke about the massacres and got upset if anyone did. Nesim remembered him doing the *namaz*, the Muslim prayers. His father, Selahattin, did the prostrations too. “But I don’t believe in God,” said Nesim, with the choked laugh of a smoker. “I neither go to church nor to mosque.” His was not atheism, that of the uncomplicated Marxism of Garbed, the typographer: Nesim’s seemed to be a different order of the soul. Still, he would go to Surp Giragos at least once a week, I observed. “I am Armenian,” he responded. “Where else would I go to meet other Armenians?”

Then Nesim got married and went to the village of Argint in Sasun, the one that had fought off the Kurds for decades. He lived in Argint, where he married the daughter of an Armenian gunmaker in the village, from 1982 to

1987. Christian and Muslim Armenians lived side by side and intermarried without any discrimination. And then he mentioned the last battle of Argint that Seto, my informant, had omitted to tell me. In 1987, a Kurdish *aşiret*, the Bekira Mahmutka, attacked the village, and killed at least six people. He and his wife moved to Kulp. The Kurdish attackers didn't care that there were Muslims in Argint, too. "Muslim or not, they were Armenian," Nesim said. "Religion does not make any difference." And he made some sarcastic yet obscure joke that I missed about wives, and was at a loss to make a connection to the murder story he had just told, except that it was not in praise of marriage.

A friend of his, Gevro, was expelled along with his family in 1985 from the village of Baham because he was Armenian, even though he had been born a Muslim, the son of a converted man. "Islam doesn't make a difference: being Armenian in Turkey is impossibly difficult," and he coughed or laughed, and lit another cigarette. And he elaborated on his answer to the remark that he went to the Surp Giragos Church: "I just go there to visit, I don't pray." He had the tired eyes and the decadent elegance of gamblers of expensive tastes, those who played for high stakes that you encounter in the wee hours in the cafeterias of casinos, the bitter pleasure of those aware that life ended alike for all, no matter how good or bad had been our bets.

On Christmas Eve, Sevag introduced me to a visitor in his office: a tall man, dressed in a tailor-made suit and an olive-green cashmere coat with a matching beret. Sevag said I was a journalist and a writer. The visitor asked me what I was writing about. "The Anatolia Armenians," I said. "Which regions?" he wanted to know. "The historical Armenian provinces," I said. "Western Armenia," he responded with half a smile. "Oh, you know we call it that," I said. Before, he had said that this area was called Kurdistan.

"Van, Garin, Kharpert, Pağes, Sepasdia, and Dikranagerd," he listed the *vilayets* by their Armenian name, including the one for Bitlis—Pağes—which was little used even among Armenians. He had smiled widely when he called Diyarbakır by its Armenian name. "I am a history teacher," he said. And he then said he was of Armenian origin.

It was clear he was attached to his roots. "I am of Armenian origin," he said. "But what am I now? I am neither a Kurd, nor a Turk, nor an Armenian." It was almost an adolescent statement for the simplicity in which a complex issue was cast, coming from a man of his age and his learning. Yet the sense of dislocation was clear. Born, raised, and living on his own ancestral lands, he found himself displaced. Only later would I find out that he was Nesim's older brother. Even though I had never met them before, the Yazars seemed familiar, in a strange way that I attributed, without much conviction, to their resemblance to people I knew.

He arched his eyebrows and looked down at his Oxfords, tightly tied and polished to a fault, incredibly free of the slush that was everywhere those days in Diyarbakır. Sevag tried to dispel the air of gravity, saying *Emin bey* had a fine sense of irony: "He is as Armenian as any of us." His head bowed down, holding his cashmere beret, Emin bey was smiling, a little embarrassed listening to other Armenians acknowledge him as one of their own.

Emin's wife was Turkish. He was a subscriber to *Agos*, which he used to teach himself Armenian. It showed in the literary Armenian words he was prone to use; from his questions you could tell it was the written language, that of the solitary reader, with an unusual knowledge, if a little uncertain, of inflections from classical Armenian that had some residual, formal use in the modern language and were only found nowadays in the increasingly rare Western Armenian prose. "It's Church Armenian," remarked Sevag's daughter, who ran the day-to-day work at the office. "*Krapar*," Emin bey said, using the Armenian word for classical Armenian. When I asked for his contact information, he wrote his name in Armenian with the care of a student who is taking a test, spelling out the large and rounded cursive of the new learner, a handwriting fresh and hopeful, unslanted by almost seven decades of life.

Nesim, his younger brother, had become a nihilist. Emin bey, the history teacher, was still seeking, teaching himself Armenian well past his retirement age, reading laboriously the Armenian page of *Agos* in a home and a city where he had nobody to speak the language with. Now hardly on speaking terms, they were born to the same parents in that house where, as Emin bey said, "there was something crooked, something that did not feel right, but I could not tell what it was."

Many years later the brothers would learn they were Armenian. They were from Silvan, near the site of the real Dikranagerd, built by Medzn Dikran, or Tigranes the Great—the name by which King Tigranes II is known among Armenians—under whose rule in the first century BC Armenia attained its greatest extension, stretching across the Armenian plateau and beyond, from the Caspian to the Black Sea. But Diyarbakır was not founded by the Armenian "king of kings"; it owed its eponymous name to a much earlier Dikran, from the Orontid dynasty, who was believed to have erected the first fortification of Diyarbakır around 560–535 BC.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Emin bey and I met again at Sülüklü Han. He came for the interview and agreed to be photographed and recorded on condition that his photo and his real name were not used for publication. He was upset that I was late, and it took me some persuading on the phone to please reschedule the meeting for

half an hour later. As initially agreed, he had come at nine sharp that freezing morning. Stately dressed, even for an informal conversation on a winter weekend, he had taken to Diyarbakır's slushy streets in his Sunday best. We were the only patrons at the caravanserai.

"I am not a Kurd, nor a Turk, nor an Armenian," was his opening statement, again. Then he added, "I was raised as a Muslim Kurd."

Nobody knew how many people like him there were in the country, he said. It was difficult to define them, too. Would the children of mixed marriages count? And those who only had one Armenian grandmother? Perhaps there were up to 2 million descendants of converted Armenians, he conjectured, but it was as good a guess as any. "Time is required to process what all this means and its implications." On both sides, he said, meaning Armenians and Turks. The *derin devleti* (deep state) did not want democracy in the country.

People in Turkey still lived in fear. "I used to feel fear, but during my time teaching nobody ever approached me to tell me anything, let alone harass me, for being Armenian." At the time, he said, it was even more dangerous.

By the time he was 30 he had stopped believing in religions. "But I still believe in God." His brothers and sisters thought like him on religion, he said.

Turkey was going to recognize the Genocide when it became a fully democratic state and acknowledged all its minorities. "There is still no place for Armenians in Turkey," he believed. "Only when the country changes, there may be, but only now has the country begun to change."

Then he inverted the proposition with which he had commenced the conversation: he felt close to the three identities he could lay a claim on: Armenian, Kurdish, and Turkish. At the same time, he did not feel any patriotism for Turkey: "That is a straitjacket, and only now are we coming out of it."

But he also spoke about the limits of Kurdish-Armenian friendship. "Only a small group of Kurds feels close to Armenians," Emin bey said. "Most do not."

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

After I concluded the interview with Emin bey, I took the short walk down Dökmeciler Sokağı, the welders' street, silent and deserted on Sunday morning, to meet his uncle, *Ertem*, at Surp Giragos. An Islamicized Armenian, Ertem was an atheist who had never set foot in a mosque despite being registered as a Muslim.

Without being sure why, he had visited Surp Giragos every Sunday for the last 20 years, even when the roof had collapsed and the church had been to all intents and purposes abandoned, a place where kids like Aynur would go to play hide-and-seek, and stray cats had made a home for themselves. There was a 30-year gap between Ertem and his oldest sister, the mother of Emin

and Nesim Yazar. This made Ertem, also a teacher, younger than Emin bey, his nephew, by more than 20 years.

Ertem's Kurdish wife had an Armenian grandmother, Gilen Xaço, from Kulp. At the time of the Genocide, Gilen Xaço fled to the mountains of Kulp with her two sisters and brother, who was nine. A Kurdish woman saw them, and told the men of her family, "These Armenians are wealthy, they keep gold in their belts." The young boy indeed had gold coins hidden inside his belt, which the Kurdish men stole after killing him.

Sinan was at Surp Giragos that day, too. The grandson of Islamicized Armenians, he had been married to a very observant Muslim woman for 22 years. Approximately a month prior to the Christmas celebration of 2013, his wife had mentioned in passing that her grandfather's name was Garo. "Garo?" Sinan had asked her, stunned. "But do you know where that name comes from?" She did: "From Garabed." Sinan had not yet succeeded in bringing out from her why she had not told him about her Armenian origin, knowing that he was Armenian and that he embraced his identity: "I thought my wife was Kurdish." She had also told him they were Armenians from the village of Eremlı.

I continued the conversation with Ertem at his home. Once he had met Aram Tigran, an Armenian singer revered by Kurds. Aram Tigran was an idol in Dikranagerd, his family's hometown. His image was woven into tapestries the size of prayer rugs and sold like souvenirs, along with those of other local idols, including Kurdish rebel leader Sheik Said, and international ones such as Che Guevara, which hung at the entrance to stores in the Gâvur Mahalle.

"Why don't you compose Armenian music?" Ertem had asked Aram Tigran during their meeting in Diyarbakır. "He got upset and pulled out a fat notebook with more than 400 songs in Armenian." He sang in the Armenian dialect of Diyarbakır, now only spoken by a few families in the Diaspora, mostly in the US and Syria. Aram Tigran was perhaps a prophet in his own land but not for his own people, as he never gained among Armenians the adoring following he had among Kurds, and his Armenian repertory remained mostly unknown.

Ertem sometimes watched singing or quiz shows on TV. When an Armenian song—*Sarı Gelin* was a popular one—or an Armenian name or word came up, participants would often remark: "We had very good Armenian neighbors." Of course, Ertem said. What else could Armenians be? In Turkey, they could not be anything but good. And yet, if he lived in Armenia, he would not be a nationalist. Averse to inward-looking communities, he felt Istanbul Armenians, the *bolsabays*, looked down on their Dikranagerd kin.

Then he repeated a phrase that I would hear all over Turkey, and not only from Armenians of any condition: "There is fear." It was diffuse, like the air. Three years ago, at the presentation of Şeyhmus Diken's book on Diyarbakır Armenians, the writer Mıgırđıç Margosyan had asked if there were any other

Armenians in the room. Ertem raised his hand first, and he was alone for a moment. Then he saw another three hands hesitantly going up.

Ertem's father, Alexander, was known as Fillit Goşgar (Infidel Cobbler), his religious and national identity typified in Kurdish, and his trade in Armenian, a dialectal variant of *goşgagar*. Decades ago, his father did not hide his identity, but in the more democratic Turkey of today Ertem still did, even from his own neighbors.

We had been joined by Udi Manug, the oud musician who had returned to his hometown from Los Angeles. "If you raise your voice they will shut you up." Udi Manug spoke out of personal experience. "Twenty years ago I had a fistfight with locals because they called me 'gâvur,' because I just couldn't take it anymore," he said. A visitor who had come to see me in Diyarbakır that winter had noticed in the streets many young men with crooked noses and deviated septa, which she had interpreted as a sign of conflict resolution.

At the time, growing numbers of Diaspora Armenians were flocking to the historical lands and the press was full of stories of Islamicized Armenians from Diyarbakır coming forth to reclaim their identity. There was a general impression that Turkey was changing, but Udi Manug saw through it. "I don't believe these people have changed: Armenians will never be left in peace in Turkey."

Pour la galerie, his homecoming had been lauded in the local and Turkish press as proof that a new era was dawning in Diyarbakır: an Armenian son of the city had left the comforts of American life to return to his birthplace. Not everybody was pleased, he laughed. "Turkish fascists," as he described them, had left comments below an interview published online by a major Turkish news site: "Filthy Armenian, why did you come back?"; "Go back to LA."

But the truth was that Udi Manug had returned for *Talar*, a woman of mixed Armenian and Kurdish ancestry, with whom he had fallen madly in love. He was now distraught over their breakup. Lovesick as he was, he was now also missing the easy living in California.

After that I entered a bookstore not far from the Assyrian church to look for a Diyarbakır map. The man, with a long beard and Islamic skullcap, asked me why I wanted a map of the city. "What are you looking for?" he asked with a knowing smile. I did not understand. It would take me some time to learn that maps in Turkey, especially in the historical Armenian provinces, were often meant as code for a chart of Armenians' gold. He had thought I was Muslim because of the length of my beard. It was yet another instance, and not the last, that I encountered a religious reading of facial hair. The length of my beard would prompt some in Eastern Anatolia to enthusiastically ask me if I was a Muslim.

When he was disappointed to hear that I was a Christian, he invited me to read the Qur'an. "Islam is a more perfect religion than Christianity."

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

"Three years ago there was no one who said 'We are Armenian,' but look now: nobody is scared anymore," Sevag told me the following day. But he also spoke of those who suffer from the fanaticism of the converts. Some members of Hizbullah, the group of Islamist extremists in Turkey unrelated to the homonymous Shi'i militia in Lebanon, were of Armenian descent. "They were more fanatical than Muslims," Sevag said, meaning those who were not descended from converts and unintentionally revealing, like most others, that he did not consider them proper Muslims. "Everybody knew they were Armenian."

I was surveying the Armenians of Diyarbakır with Sevag. He described one close friend, actively involved in the community, as a "chameleon" by virtue of the multiplicity of her heritage, that allowed her to claim ancestry according to whatever quarter or house, whether residential or of worship, she entered: "She is Armenian with the Armenians, an Assyrian with the Assyrians, a Turk with the Turks, and a Kurd with the Kurds."

The Yazar brothers were barely on speaking terms, he said. Emin, the history teacher, was "a great man." Nesim was "a bit more of a complex character." Sevag did not want to delve too much into details but he tried to deter me from meeting Nesim, whom I was going to see a few hours later.

Always courteous, even Nesim's most serious comments would be marked by a laugh or smile that would throw you off. He saw everything through the lens of sarcasm. That evening, Nesim was expecting me at the office of another friend or relative of his, *Raşit*, a Kurdish man with an Islamicized Armenian grandmother on his father's side. It was a real estate or import-export office, very posh and large, heavy on wood furniture and panels, with plush Italian-style chairs, all in good taste yet just short of tackiness. The building was adjacent to a large box of a mall outside the city center. Nesim was wearing a navy blue pinstripe suit, always holding his amber *tisbeh*, the beads men in the East fiddle with. His were of the finest type. Raşit ordered shish kebab dishes. The food came like a succulent jolt into sociability, which the polar cold of Diyarbakır had numbed in me.

A friend of Raşit was in the office too: he was fully in black, wearing his leather jacket indoors. He was curious to know how many countries I had been to. He had not done military service so he could not get a passport, he said. "He is condemned to staying in Turkey," joked Raşit. "Or Kurdistan," I said, to which they laughed hard. Then Raşit's secretary walked in with the coffees, a relative luxury in Turkey, at least twice as expensive as tea. Her appearance was

very striking, in high heels and tight clothes, and the scene felt more like Las Vegas than Diyarbakır. When she was serving coffee, she engaged Raşit's eyes for a fraction of a second, which he acknowledged with a minimal nod, and then she said she was off for the day.

Raşit made some noises about brotherhood with Armenians, but it was clear he was busy with his work. For reasons I was unaware of, Nesim was especially keen that I heard his friend's story, which he insisted was worth recording, so I accepted Raşit's invitation to dinner with his family a few weeks later.

His wife was unlike his secretary in beauty and demeanor, refined in her understatement yet in Western-style clothes. Only occasionally would she intervene in the conversation. She was his relative, per the custom of land and tribe.

Their oldest son, who was 12, spoke fluent English, remarkably for a child of his age in Turkey, where even many professionals were not proficient in it in Istanbul, let alone in the south-east. He wanted to become a doctor. They introduced me as a writer who was collecting stories for book. As we were waiting for the food, Raşit asked, with half a smile, if I would take him with me to America, with a tone that indicated that it was half-serious rather than half-joking. Not joking, his wife said, "There is no life in Turkey." But, I said, this was not Turkey: this was Kurdistan now, right? The little quip did not work as well as it had at Raşit's office; they smiled a bit nervously and Raşit, who had celebrated the same comment with a booming laugh a few weeks ago, now avoided eye contact.

The 12-year-old asked me if I liked McDonald's and Burger King. Then he wanted to know if it was true that in America they ate pork. He wanted to know if I had ever tried it. "It's excellent," I said, and I explained to him that there was a delicious cold cut, a variant of ham, that I liked a lot. The best ones were made in Spain, where it was known as *jamón serrano*, and Italy, where they called it *prosciutto*. He made a gagging gesture and sound to indicate his disgust. "I am a Christian," I told him.

He swung his head round to the right, in search of his father's eyes. Raşit's face had frozen into that smile-like rictus he had displayed when I had mentioned the name of Kurdistan. The child felt cheated: "But you said he is a relative of ours!" he reproached his father. Now it was my turn to look with surprise in his embarrassed father's direction. "And he eats pig meat," the boy complained, sulking, to confirm his shocked nausea. It was too much for his mother, who told him that every nation and faith had different customs.

I asked the child if he knew that most of the people in these lands, including Diyarbakır, used to be Armenian, and Christian. He pretended not to hear. I had asked him if he knew that his great-grandmother was Armenian, like me. Raşit mumbled that indeed, his grandmother was Armenian. "I am Muslim,"

the boy said hurriedly as he continued playing with his younger brother, who at seven was still enjoying without other distractions the thrill of rolling his friction toy car with some difficulty on the rug, making the noises of "Vrraam, vrraam!" in the spacious living room. His older brother had learned fast the ways of the land, but was now shuffling around heavily in oversize slippers modeled after the Garfield cartoon cat.

Every time I pronounced conversational expressions in Turkish that had Islamic etymology but were mostly employed for daily banalities—such as *vallah* or *inşallah*, used to indicate gratitude or hope, words that atheist friends in Turkey deterred me from saying in their presence—he would exclaim in Turkish, "He said *vallah*! He said *inşallah*!" turning his bespectacled face toward me, with the malicious gaze that children do not disguise. While I was not bothered in the least, his parents' discomfort was revealing, probably because his surprise stemmed from hearing the name of his god from the lips of an Armenian. And Armenian, for schoolchildren in Turkey, is very seldom used to denote or connote good things. Every time he exclaimed that I said "Allah!" his weary mother—her head uncovered—would tell her son that God was one. From the embarrassed hushing he invited from his parents, unamused and upset, it was clear that the boy had strong Islamic convictions, perhaps as strong as his command of English.

Raşit wolfed down his food, the cacophony of chewing filling the silence across the table. It was, in a backhanded way, a manner of complimenting the cooking, which was tasty if uninspired. Smiling a little tensely, Raşit asked what I thought of his son's English. It was really very good, especially for someone his age, and he was able to conduct relatively complex conversations. So, he finally asked, was there something I could do to perhaps find him a place for higher education in the US, when the time came? Would I know organizations that awarded scholarships for people of Armenian descent? It was obvious that my eyes were not as eloquent as his child's, for the patina that comes with age, sociability, and weariness must have disguised my ungraceful amazement. He must have interpreted my silent smile as a positive answer. Raşit called me a few more times to inquire about it, always with urgency in his voice, and he did not relent even after I had forgotten about him and wondered who was that insistent voice, which once induced me to tour every store and stand of the bazaar in Diyarbakır and speak with every shopkeeper, tailor, and antiquarian that I knew had Armenian ancestors. Then I remembered who he was and I tried to make the most of it: I was curious about his grandmother's story and how she had met her Muslim husband, and had converted to Islam. Raşit did not know much about it, except that it had been "for love."

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Not that this ignorance was too uncommon: there were so many grandchildren of Armenian women in Turkey, especially among the Kurds, so at some point you stopped counting, especially as memories had been wiped out. That was the case, too, with *Rahman bey*, Sevag's father, who now spent old age in a congested neighborhood in the modern section of Diyarbakır, after a lifetime in his hometown of Çermik.

He was four when he lost his father, Ibrahim, an Islamicized Genocide survivor, who knew very little about the family's history except that they were Armenian. His father's family was thrown from a bridge in Batman in 1915 and only he and a brother had survived. Sevag had told me that the children had wandered off in the area, looking for an uncle or other relatives, but did not know anything else.

Rahman bey's mother, Hizna, daughter of Sarkis son of Xaço, was from the village of Şedirki, near Kozluk. She was Armenian too and spoke the language. Her two brothers had survived and moved to the northern Syrian city of Qamişli, which the Kurds called Rojava. At the time of my visit, it was besieged by the Islamic State and Kurds had started a media campaign in Turkey: "*Rojava'da katliam var*" ("There is a massacre in Rojava").

The life of Islamicized Armenians was undisturbed, Rahman bey said. He had once visited his relatives in Syria. His uncle was sending a gold Armenian cross, "the size of my palm," for his sister, Rahman's mother. "But I was afraid to bring it into Turkey, so I brought clothes instead for her." Back in the day, his relatives also gave him \$2,000. "Our family lived for three years with that money."

His children, he said, were free to choose their religion. "I am Muslim, that is what I know well: but I know well, as our elders did and told me, that 60,000 Armenians were forced to convert." Regardless of merit, the figure was interesting, for it reflected what was being told among converted Armenians in Anatolia in the 1930s. "I love the Armenian Church, and I go to Surp Giragos, and I ask questions to God: about the past, about the Armenians' fate," he said. "But I have not seen the Genocide." The last phrase caused me to wonder what he meant.

There were no more Armenians in Diyarbakır, he said, reverting to the Ottoman use of the word to indicate both the nationality and the Christian faith. He obviously, instinctively perhaps, omitted those who had returned to the Christian church from Islam, including his own son, Sevag, who was sitting next to him. "I no longer have Armenian friends in Diyarbakır," he said. "There are only Kurds left."

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Baydzar Teyzé and her husband, Sarkis Boğosyan, were the last Christian Armenians left in Diyarbakır. They were the last two who belonged to the old community, the one that had miraculously survived in some guise until the early 1980s and then had vanished because of migration and attrition. Lack of means had stranded the childless couple in the city. They had lived at a home in the grounds of the Maryam Ana Assyrian Church, since a winter storm in 1990 that had caused the roof of Surp Giragos to collapse.

Baydzar was too sick to attend the Christmas service that had gathered most of the five or six remaining Assyrian families as well as a few Armenians, including her husband Sarkis and her sister, who was visiting from Malatya. There would be no liturgy at Surp Giragos due to lack of a priest.

The congregation at Maryam Ana's Christmas mass was comprised mostly of women who had covered their heads with loose shawls. A tall bonfire made of thorn bushes burned at the sanctuary of the church, which the officiating priest and the altar boys and girls circled, singing a mellow, monophonic hymn. Sunlight and shadows created a living chiaroscuro that swept the church in a westward progression, from the altar toward the gate.

Rebuilt several times, Maryam Ana had been erected on the site of what had been a Zoroastrian temple in the first century BC. It was said to have been turned into a church in the third century, which made it one of the oldest churches in the world. Next to the bell tower, and taller than it, rose its distinctive gable, a facade in brick, with the outline of a stepped pyramid that evoked a ziggurat.

Sarkis Boğosyan had been nominally registered as a Muslim but everybody in his family was a practicing Christian. In 2002, he formalized it by registering as a Christian on his ID as well. His wife, instead, had been born in a Kızılbaş village, Kadı Köy. Ostensibly followers of Ali, the cousin of Prophet Muhammad, the Kızılbaş were an Alevi group, a heterodox confession that did not call for observance of the five pillars of Islam. "Nobody in her family had to change their religion," Sarkis said. The Alevis, however, changed the Armenians' names on purpose to disguise their identities: Baydzar Teyzé's father was Dono but they called him Halo; her uncle was Artin but they called him Hamo; her other uncle was Yervant but they called him Meyvan.

"They remained Christian under the Kızılbaş," Sarkis said. "But Sunni Muslims killed Armenians wherever they found them." His father and his two brothers had been taken under the protection of Ali Ağa, the Kurdish chieftain in a village in Silvan, who had inscribed them as Muslims in the Civil Registry to spare them from death. His family's had been a bureaucratic conversion, but they had remained practicing Christians.

Baydzar was the last person left in the town who spoke the Armenian dialect of Dikranagerd:

Քիչ ւր զիտնմ ամա մենք հայ չի խրպրինք քի, մենք զիդէ մընծեր ենք ... Չեմ զիտնամ եւ ... Բմ պապան ալ Տօնապետ էր, Գատի Գէոյէն Ալեւիներու գէոյէն ... Էն խըտըր հայերէն չեմ զիտնայ: Էկանք քաղաք, ամմոներ զացին, Իսթանպուլ զացին: Մարդ չի մնաց քի որ սորվինք ... Գիդ մենծեր ենք, էն ատնն ադէտ էր ... Միմակ մենք հայ էինք ...

I know a little but we don't speak Armenian, we grew up in the village ... I don't know ... My father was Donabed, from Kadı Köy, the Alevis' village ... I don't know that much Armenian. We came to the city, the uncles left, they went to Istanbul. There was nobody left for us to learn from ... We grew up in the village, it was the time of the catastrophe ... We were the only Armenians ...

Beloved in the city, Baydzar Teyzé received a stream of visitors, such as the two young women who came to see her while I was there. One was a Kurdish photographer, whom I would encounter a few more times on newsworthy occasions, and the other was a Turkish teacher from Kayseri. “*Asonk dacik en, bay çen*” (“They are Muslims, they are not Armenian”), Baydzar Teyzé told me. The Kurdish girl looked askance at me, perhaps having understood *dacik*, a somewhat pejorative word in conversational Armenian to designate Muslims.

Baydzar Teyzé was in bed under thick blankets and she had barely been able to prop herself up to speak to us. Her sister was next to the window, brewing tea on an ancient stove, as the cat looked out of the window into the garden, a red rose in bloom rising from the mound of snow. Sarkis was sitting with his hands in his lap. “She was born in 1927 and I was born in 1930, and we married young,” he said, waving at the photos hanging on the wall, including a few from his military service. “We stayed because it is our hometown, we could not go anywhere else: it was not in our hands.” Poverty had kept them in Diyarbakır.

“We are the last Armenians in Diyarbakır,” Sarkis said. “There are many converts.”

Baydzar Teyzé died in June 2014 at the age of 87, two months after her church wedding at Surp Giragos. It was her last wish. Sarkis passed away in January 2016.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

On Christmas night at Sülüklü Han I engaged in conversation two young Kurdish men from the region of Ararat. They gave me the telephone number of an Islamicized Armenian in the area. The grandmother of one of them was a converted Armenian, too. But they said they themselves did not use cell phones, did not have email or social network accounts, and had decided to spend some winter time in Diyarbakır far from home, which they called Ağrı.

Earlier in the day, a journalist had taken me for a tour of Kurdish media in the city, including a stop at a female news service, run by six or eight young women from a lively newsroom in one of the towers at the outer edges of the city. The conversations had included the ritual references to democratic decentralization and a confederal structure with equal representation for nations, but as I was walking around the open-plan office I noticed a decorative plate with a picture of Mt. Ararat, the mountain Armenians viewed as the supreme symbol of their nation. On the plate, Ararat bore its Turkish and Kurdish name, Ağrı Dağı, and was encircled in a ribbon of red, yellow, and green. It was the flag of Kurdistan. These were not the colors of the democratic confederation that Kurdish militants and progressives alike said they sought. A journalist looked up as she saw me examining the shelf. “Armenians call it Ararat,” I told her, as she continued typing away, her mind elsewhere.

The editor in chief, a 28-year-old woman from Van, where her grandparents had moved from northern Iran, had told me she would have preferred to have this talk in Kurdish. “It would have been nice in Armenian, too, since you come from Van,” I responded. The journalist that brought me there smiled, but she did not.

Their news service was filling a gap for a society undergoing a radical transformation, from the conservative ways of a tribal society to a progressive one. Women, for themselves and their children, were instrumental in this emancipation until they attained equal status to that of men, the woman from Van said.

Our first stop had been *Azadiye Welat*, where I had been introduced to a grim-faced journalist from Qamişli (Rojava), a Syrian city with a large Armenian community, at least until the present Syrian war. This reporter did not disguise his hostility. It may have been related to the arithmetics of community loyalties and enmities in wartime Syria, with most Armenians seen as supporters of the government of Bashar Assad. Yet that guess was surely wrong, as I had met a very pleasant group of Kurdish journalists from Rojava a few days earlier, and the English speakers in the delegation—none spoke Turkish—had told me that Armenians in the city were allied with the Kurds.

Dimo was the head of a Diyarbakır journalists' association, housed in a former Armenian residence in the old quarter, built around a square inner court. Prior to the tour of Kurdish news organizations he had planned for me, Dimo had taken me for a coffee at a large Kurdish bookstore. One of its lateral windows was decorated with poster-size pictures of Kurdish men of letters, including nationalist poet Cegerxwîn and Osman Sebrî, nephew of Mehmet Nurî, the Kurdish husband of Siranush in Adıyaman and avenger of his uncles.¹¹

Dimo was talking about Öcalan's newest ideas on democratic decentralization as a remedy for the inadequacies of the modern nation state, in a world where information and goods travel more freely than men. Yet the proximity of

a man was distracting him. With a round face and curly red hair that was more common among the Laz and Georgians on the Black Sea coast, this person was a rare sight in Diyarbakır. But that was not the reason for his concern: the man, in a gray raincoat, was right beside us browsing school textbooks for longer than seemed usual. I had seen him throwing a sideways glance at us as he leafed through a compilation of Mathematics exercises.

We moved to a different table, with the poetry shelf behind us. A few minutes later, the gray raincoat man came to linger over poems. He held in his hands *Memleketimden İnsan Manzaraları* (*Human Landscapes from my Country*), the prison writings of the celebrated Turkish poet Nâzım Hikmet, who had died in exile in Moscow in 1963. Hikmet's portrait, the head slightly tilted back, was reproduced manifold on the cover. The 1940s book, perhaps his masterpiece, was a novel in verse about Turkey's transition from Islamic empire to Atatürk's secularism:

"Hay Allahım,
dedim kendi kendime
öldüreceksen
beni böyle öldüreydin
elimde silâh diz
çökmüş, yüzüm
gâvura karşı ..."

"Alas, my Lord,
I said to myself
"If you are going to kill me
It should be so,
With gun in my hand
on my knee,
facing the infidel ..."

"Who is this man?" Dimo asked the two girls tending the bookstore's café, not raising his voice but loud enough to be heard. The man in the gray raincoat got the message and walked out into the winter of Diyarbakır. It was amusing how cartoon-like it was: a man in a gray raincoat eavesdropping. The police could not possibly be so clumsy.

Yet by the accidents of free association of ideas I had figured where Nesim and Emin bey, the Yazar brothers, so different and so alike, were familiar from. They were Dostoyevskian sketches, seeking their place in that space of moral suspension defined by God at one end of the spectrum of faith, and nothing at the other. In the summer of 2006, I had met a former CIA operative in Miami, a veteran Soviet hand with a shared admiration for Dostoyevsky.

Yet the former intelligence agent had shamed me into reading *The Brothers Karamazov*. That drab December of snow on a Russian scale and the characters I had met in Diyarbakır had brought me back to Alyosha and Ivan, and their real-life variations I had encountered, "those exceedingly deep wells, but only at some points of the human soul," as Marcel Proust had found in the cast of the Russian writer's book.¹²

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

On December 31, 2013, I was walking down to the old quarter but some five blocks from the Urfa Gate I saw a couple of police patrols and a cell phone store cordoned off, with a crowd gathered outside. It was around eight in the morning and faces looked numb from the cold. Thieves? I asked. No, a young man shook his head, but he did not explain further: "Something very sad," he said, sending forth clouds of steam. A woman asked too, and another man said there had been a suicide.

When I got to Sülüklü Han on Dökmeciler Sokağı, the dark alley was silent. At that time on a weekday morning, sparks would be flying amid the din of clangs that came from the little stands. A group of welders and bazaar merchants had surrounded a little white kitten on his back, agitating its feet rapidly and meowing loudly. It was still early and there were only a few blacksmiths warming up to a slow start, the knives hanging unsheathed top down on displays. I squatted down to play with the little cat but he was pushing back frantically, with his eyes closed. One of the blacksmiths, with white hair and black mustaches, looked sad. "*Can çıkar, soğuktan can çıkar*," he said. "His life is going away, his life is going away because of the cold," was the literal translation. Other blacksmiths had left their work and stood around the kitten as it squirmed and fought to stay on. Inexplicably, I walked away and so did the others, and I still wonder why none of us picked up the little animal, new to the world, and tried to save it.

That day at the caravanserai, Perwin introduced me to her sister-in-law (calling her *xinami*, an Armenian word for "in-law") from Dersim, whose grandmother was Armenian. There were also two young women with their children. One was a Christian from Iskenderun, the Levantine part of Turkey, near the Syrian border, and her complexion confirmed the geography of her origin. *Ana* and her family thought they were Greek, until recently when they were contacted by a Chuljian family that had found a common relative, their grandfather from Sis, now called Kozan in Turkish, the old seat of the Armenian Catholicate of Cilicia. *Ana's* family had forgotten about that grandfather.

Her friend, *Selin*, was brimming with vitality and *joie de vivre* that manifested itself in everything from her carefree speech to the free flow of her hair and her

sea-deep eyes. Her family had recently begun to suspect they were of Armenian origin, too. Most unusually, the person leading the efforts to find out was her father, a ranking officer in the Turkish army: I double-checked if that was so; indeed, she said, her father was excited, and was looking forward to finding what he believed were his lost Armenian relatives. I did not want to spoil the moment by expressing my doubts about a Turkish officer embracing any trace of Armenian past, which could compromise his military career in a country where racism is tacitly institutionalized. Selin told me she had written the lyrics for a song dedicated to Hrant Dink, inspired by his final column, nine days before being shot dead on January 19, 2007. "I feel just like a pigeon ... Just like it, I am in a constant state of keeping my eyes out, looking left and right, in front of me and behind me."¹³

Selin's friend *Metin* would compose the music to the lyrics. She asked me to translate it into Armenian:

Pigeon

The white pigeon was shot down
 He saw the persecution of his people, he saw massacre
 The baby came and returned soon back to the ground
 You could not reap your dream
 My little Armenian girl
 Did you perchance forget the atrocities?
 They broke my knees, you lying pigeon!
 This is my mother, and this is my brother
 There is no past in my memory, I told the pigeon
 I told you so, but the sky collapsed over my head
 Pigeons fell on my lap
 I recognized them all: my uncle, my mother, my brother
 The memories from the distant town
 Came to sit next to the pigeon.
 Return to your sleep, mother
 I will be adopted, I will be taken as a bride
 But an unspoken poem weighs down in my chest
 Don't tell me to shut up
 They do not sacrifice pigeons anymore.

Metin's grandmother on his father's side was Armenian. She remembered family members murdered inside a bread kiln. In Hani, a district of Diyarbakır, they would throw babies up into the air to practice marksmanship, Selin said.

Diyarbakır was built by Armenians, *Mevlüt*, Selin's husband, said. He was one of the partners in the cooperative that ran Sülüklü Han. Himself a Kurd, he said, "Kurds have been a bad nation: I don't know Armenians who are bad

people." It was yet another example of the proverbial "good Armenian neighbor" Ertem had spoken about. "But who can say that they don't know bad people who are Kurdish?"

"What happened here was our fault," *Mevlüt* said, and he surveyed the topography of the old quarter. Diyarbakır's post office, on the street leading to the Surp Giragos Church, was previously a synagogue. The Chaldean church, the Assyrian church, the mosque with the four-legged minaret, were all in the same neighborhood, the three monotheistic religions together, thanks to the Armenians, he said. Everybody did well. "Do you know any other place where so many religions coexisted so close together?" he asked me. "We have eaten the same bread and the same food and heard the same stories since childhood; we died together and we will rise again together." *Mevlüt* was thinking about renovating a home and returning it to an Armenian as symbolic compensation. It was not enough for Kurds to apologize for what they did: they must compensate, he said.

Eastern Anatolia had sunk into misery after the Armenians' extinction. For a renewal, they had to return.

One hundred and twenty years ago, there were four major routes in Anatolia, two of which originated in Diyarbakır thanks to the wealth of Armenians. He said Kurds had learned from their own mistakes to become good people. "Man is man's wolf," he quoted from Hobbes' *Leviathan*. Greed was the source of evil. "The head of a man with a full belly does not work," *Mevlüt* said. "Conversely, the hungry man's belly is permanently functioning."