Acts of Defacement, Memory of Loss

Ghostly Effects of the "Armenian Crisis" in Mardin, Southeastern Turkey

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The article explores the multiple articulations of the 1915 deportations and massacres, predominantly of Armenians but also of Syriac Christians, in the Ottoman Empire and the ways in which the descendants of the victims, the perpetrators and the witnesses experience and narrate the historical and political effects of those events. Stories about Christian converts to Islam and houses abandoned by the victims become subjects/objects of ethnographic inquiry which are analyzed to reveal the discourses and imagination surrounding the taboo-like secrecy of the events and the hidden bonds between the subjects, who belong to different ethnic and religious communities in the cosmopolitan border city of Mardin in southeastern Turkey.

In his analysis of the historiography of the Armenian deportations and massacres of 1915, Selim Deringil compares delving into the "Armenian crisis" to venturing into a minefield, fraught as it is with the risk of being stigmatized either for having betrayed one's country or for having denied the historical fact known as the "Armenian genocide."[1] As a "critical event" the 1915 events have continued to mark the history of Turkey—in families, communities, parliaments, states, supra-national organizations and international courts.[2] The nature of the debate was long confined to two opposing arguments, namely the Turkish thesis and the Armenian thesis—the former defining the events as *tehcir* (relocation), a legitimate act of war intended to protect Turkish sovereignty from the Armenian

gangs who had betrayed the Turks by collaborating with the Russians, and the latter defining the events as the Ottoman Empire's "genocide/ethnic cleansing" of the Armenians during World War I. According to the Turkish thesis, *tehcir* was a defensive action that resulted in the deaths of both Armenians *and* Turks during wartime but did not plan to systematically kill or eradicate the Armenians.[3]

During Turkey's membership talks with the European Union (EU), which began in October 2005, the Armenian issue was reframed under the rubric of "human rights," with special reference to minority rights. International actors insisted that Turkey's acknowledgment of the true nature of those events was required in order to certify the democratization of Turkey prior to its entry into the EU. Faced with political pressure on the international stage, Turkish bureaucrats decided to change state strategy and sought to base their denials of genocide on historical evidence, thus allowing for a wider discussion that would include material from the Ottoman archives. To this end, a series of archival works were published by official institutions such as the Turkish Historical Society (Türk Tarih Kurumu), which maintained that there was no credible documentation of an official decision taken by the Ottoman state to kill Armenians. In response to these claims, Armenian scholars accused Turkish authorities of blocking access to specific documents, thereby avoiding complete disclosure of the historical facts.[4] The issue's growing notoriety led to myriad arguments about the events of 1915 in the public sphere, which were expressed in such questions as "Who killed whom?" "How many people were killed?" and "Who were the real betrayers?"[5]

Notwithstanding the battle over the multiple interpretations of the events of 1915, "genocide" remained the meta-narrative dominating the signification of events in contemporary Turkey, on the one hand underpinning legal decisions, and on the other perpetuating anger and fear on the part of descendants of the victim populations, and the sense that their suffering had been forgotten. State officials have maintained the taboo-like version of the events, thereby reinforcing the proscription of any attempt to define them as "genocide." Many intellectuals, journalists and political activists have been prosecuted for criticizing the official discourse, particularly for speaking about genocide, under Article 301 of the Turkish Criminal Code, which makes it illegal to insult Turkey, the Turkish ethnicity or Turkish government institutions. In 2007, in the ruling on

two Armenian journalists accused of having used the term "genocide," the court's decision was based "on the necessity to protect national security, public order and public security" and read: "Talk about genocide, both in Turkey and in other countries, unfavorably affects national security and the national interest.... The acceptance of this claim may lead in future centuries to a questioning of the sovereignty of rights of the Republic of Turkey over the lands on which it is claimed these events occurred."[6] In 2009, these national-security-based concerns were also cited in documents produced by the ultra-nationalist terror organization Ergenekon (most of whose members have ties to military and security forces) as legitimate reasons to target for assassination those people known to have made claims of genocide.[7]

These sanctions regarding discussion of the 1915 events were not only approved by courts of law and ultra-nationalist extremists. More significantly, they have affected public discourse and imagination about "outsiders" and "traitors." The "Armenian genocide" has gradually become an indexical event, referred to by citizens of various ethnic, social and religious backgrounds in order to express their positions concerning the discourse and practices of the Turkish state.[8] This has led to a disturbing increase in protests and verbal attacks by people who claim to be members of civil society organizations and who make use of their affiliations to stridently criticize prominent individuals they claim oppose official Turkish discourse. At the same time, it has also led to the production and circulation of alternative discussions and initiatives criticizing the denialist perspective, recognizing the Armenians' loss and attempting to create spaces for voicing and sharing the agony of, as well as the responsibility for, the events. The online campaign launched by intellectuals, activists and journalists in December 2008 that invited people to acknowledge the atrocities of the 1915 Armenian massacres and to apologize to the Armenian community was crucial for initiating a serious public debate concerning the confrontation with the past atrocities in Turkey.[9]

This article does not aim to contribute to the current hegemonic battle over recognition or negation of the definition of the events of 1915 as "genocide" or to pave the way to reconciliation between the victims, witnesses and perpetrators. Nor does it attempt to provide supporting evidence for the historians' debates on the interpretation of the factuality of the events. Rather, I seek to question the totalizing, colonizing and

distancing aspects of the hegemonic discourses surrounding the discussion of the events of the 1915 and thereby to take the interpretation of a catastrophic event beyond the confinements of the logic of proof, document and archive.[10]

Drawing on the intertwined and contradictory narratives of Syriac Christians, Arabs and Kurds— the descendants of victims, witnesses and perpetrators—the article invites the reader to look into a gray area where the boundaries of polarized, hegemonic discourses become blurred through forms of expression used to narrate the traces of the event itself. It invites the reader to reflect on the notion of "truth" in a cosmopolitan border city that bore witness to the catastrophic events in the nation-building process of Turkey.[11]

The bulk of the material in this article is drawn from fieldwork I conducted in Mardin and its surrounding villages and towns in southeastern Turkey. Located close to the Syrian border, Mardin was literally and figuratively situated at the margins of contemporary Turkey. Here, the margin does not refer merely to a geographical location. In this context, it also denotes a borderline position with spaces of fluctuation between normality and emergency, continuity and discontinuity, order and disorder, legality and illegality.[12] Mardin, as a margin, is a murky sphere endowed with residues of critical events, such as the events of 1915, early Kurdish uprisings, blood feuds, and the more recent military conflict between the Kurdistan Workers Party (Partiya Karkarên Kurdistan, PKK) and the Turkish army.[13]

During my ethnographic field trips to Mardin between 2001 and 2009, in which I focused on the process of transition from emergency to normality during lulls in the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish armed forces, I often found everyday conversations to be fraught with accounts of the events of 1915 and the "Kurdish problem" (*Kürt sorunu*).[14] People refer to both events in order to reflect on the experience of suffering and marginality and to establish the causes and effects of violence. This does not mean that local references to the 1915 events in Mardin are not affected by the official taboo against claims of "genocide." In the political contingency of a city under martial law, the inhabitants are very sensitive to the official discourse of Turkish nationalism and its legal and moral sanctions.[15] Their talk consists of repetitive, fragmented narratives that alternate between violent acts of the past and survival strategies

of the present. Yet, they resist being recorded in the form of a document.[16] Unlike the oral history narratives, autobiographies and memoirs that have recently proliferated in Turkey, the narratives of this ethnography do not function as expressions of religious or ethnic minority identities regarding their responses to repressive state practices and discourses.[17] They function neither as testimonies to the truth of the event nor as reflections of the nostalgia for the cosmopolitan past of the city or the desire for reconciliation with the victims. Rather, they comprise fragmented forms of implicit knowledge that describe the ways in which the experience and imagination of a taboo-like event are brought into everyday life through daily encounters and practices in a cosmopolitan, militarized border city that is devoid of the discourse and practice of public mourning for the losses.

In other words, the main aim of this article is to reach beyond the hegemonic representations by state officials, historians, legal experts and political actors, and to explore the idioms, tropes and signs that have been developed in response to violence and trauma. How can such a tabooed event be articulated when social biographies are contaminated by the destructive effects of violence? How does the memory of such a "critical event" affect the gaze of the self on the other in present-day Mardin, scarred as it is by the experience and imagination of the 1915 events? How is it incorporated into the structure of everyday relations of Mardin's inhabitants? What bonds exist between the families of perpetrators, victims and witnesses?

I first discuss the fragmented narratives of Kurds, Arabs and Syriac Christians that reveal modes of collectively remembering *and* forgetting the 1915 events in Mardin. I then show, on the one hand, the hidden connections between the hegemonic discourses and the local narratives about the events, and on the other, the presence of other bodies and spaces that permeate daily life in the form of residual appearances of the events.

TRUTH METAMORPHOSED

The truth about the Armenian genocide is simply not discussed by Mardinites, who regard it as the common fate that haunts them all. Linking Turkey's northern provinces with cities in Syria, the city of Mardin witnessed the deportation and extermination of the Christian, predominantly

Armenian, population in 1915. Most of the Armenians vanished from the cityscape while those who remained clung to life by converting to Islam or feigning to be members of the Syriac Christian community. Some of the women and children were abducted by villagers and sold to prominent local Muslim families. Most of the property belonging to Armenians and Syriac Christians, including houses and churches, was either appropriated by the state and turned into military posts, hospitals, schools and prisons or distributed to Muslim migrants who had been expelled from their hometowns during the Balkan Wars. Property was also sold to local leading families. This was justified under the law of *Emval-i Metruke* (literally "abandoned properties"), which legalized the appropriation of Armenian and Syriac Christian property if the owner did not return within a certain period of time.[18]

Although Mardinites commonly acknowledge the 1915 events as their shared experience, they refer to it by different names: Kurds and Arabs call it *ferman* (order [i.e. government decree]) while Syriac Christians refer to it as *seyfo* (sword). Syriac Christians see themselves as victims and view the Muslim communities (Kurds and Arabs) as the perpetrators of their suffering through their complicity with the Ottoman state.[19] The Muslims of Mardin, particularly the Arabs, strenuously reject these allegations, claiming that they were witnesses to the events and/or protectors of the Christians, not perpetrators.

According to James Young, the act of naming frames knowledge of events and creates particular significations and interpretations about how to understand them.[20] Clearly, *ferman* and *seyfo* signify the different dispositions of the different groups. Veena Das describes these kinds of signification as "internal language" through which the signs of injury are constructed, thereby occupying and inhabiting the world again and again. In her view, this reiteration does not necessarily happen through acts of "eternal forgetfulness" but rather through acts that have been absorbed into everyday life. The subjects of this ethnography have been formed through complex relations to the events which permeate everyday life and are internalized in such a way that they cannot be pushed "outside." In other words, what is spoken becomes a kind of translation from an unknown language, and the narratives expressed through this language, whether silently or in acts of speech, simultaneously contain *and* dissolve

the antagonisms that are predicated on truth and condition the latter's existence.[21]

The following ethnographic examples are concerned with these forms of reiterations, showing how they occupy everyday life and affect the social interactions between various communities in Mardin. They illustrate how discourses and imagination surrounding the secrecy of the 1915 events are produced and mediated in the form of "public secrecy"—by families of both survivors and witnesses/perpetrators. In this context, it is useful to consider Michael Taussig's formulation of the distinction between "secrecy" and "public secrecy." Much inspired by Elias Canetti's work, *Crowds and Power*, Taussig argues that a "secret" is an invention that exists within the "power of fantasy," a "thing in itself," imbued with a "Godlike" character and controlling people's lives.[22] He discusses secrecy as a site of power where social and political relationships are disguised in the form of fetish. Power operates through the fetishization of secrecy by people who construct it as a "hidden and momentous thing" and who imagine its exposition as being destructive and explosive.[23] In his view, public secrecy derives from people's complicity in disguising the power relationships behind the fetish. In Taussig's words: "there is no such thing as a secret. It is an invention that comes out of the public secret, a limit-case, a supposition, a great 'as if' without which the public secret would evaporate." He regards "the public secret as fated to maintain the verge where the secret is not destroyed through exposure, but subject to a revelation that does justice to it."[24] Curious about the nature of this revelation, he asks: "Yet what if the truth is not so much a secret as a *public* secret?… Then what happens to the inspired act of defacement? Does it destroy the secret, or further empower it?"[25]

In his project on deconstructing secrecy, Taussig provocatively plays with the notion of defacement in order to make the reader think about the consequences of despoiling and tearing the object, which is the fetish, as an act of disfigurement: "defacement spoils the face as the figure of appearance, however as it does this, it may also animate the thing defaced, the mystery may become more mysterious."[26] Positing secrecy as the fetish, Taussig explains defacement as a figurative and metaphoric concept that characterizes the movement from "secrecy" to "public secrecy." He describes this circular movement of public secrecy as a "reconfiguration of repression in which depth becomes surface so as to remain depth."[27]

Stemming from this proposition, he extends the sphere of public secrecy, suggesting that it be considered not only as the limit-case of "what not to know" but also of "that which is generally known but *cannot be spoken*."[28] In defining "public secrecy" this way, Taussig seeks to understand how secrecy as a fetish manifests itself in language. In other words, if public secrecy leads to a series of revelations that are followed by concealments, how are these revelations expressed through language? What becomes of the language of defacement? Incorporating Taussig's concept of public secrecy into this ethnography, I explore how people speak of *ferman* and/or *seyfo* as public secrecy without allowing it/them to be fully exposed. What are the images, tropes and idioms used to deface this secrecy?

As an ethnographer, I never questioned anyone about the events of 1915. With my focus on the historical and political transformation of the city in the post-emergency process, I had been interviewing members of extended Kurdish families from Mardin in order to understand their changing position and influence on present-day city politics. In one of my first formal visits to the daughter of a well-known Kurdish *agha* (tribal leader), as we talked about her family's history, Nazire provocatively asked me: "You are really interested in the Armenian issue, aren't you?" I was discomfited by her question and doubted my intentions: Was that really the case? Was I, too, controlled by the secrecy of the events? I firmly responded that I had not asked *any* questions about *that*. Nazire did not seem convinced, but she did not pressure me. After our first encounter, we met two or three times a week to pursue the conversation. Each meeting began with her revealing a new topic that subsequently opened up spaces for an ongoing dialogue about her life. Talking about her family, Nazire explained to me:

> There is an Armenian-ness rooted in the origin of every Kurd. In every house, there is an Armenian no one knows. There were so many mysterious women in the Akkas neighborhood. They would have recognized each other. Poor souls.… My uncle's wife was Armenian. She was originally from Diyarbakir. Her name was Sofi, but it was changed to Ayşe after she became a Muslim. Her two daughters and her [first] husband were killed during *ferman* times. Her first husband's name was Yusuf. Years later, she gave his name to one of her grandsons. When she was married to my uncle, she had a child

by him and was pregnant with a second one. Her mother-in-law did not want the newborn baby, so they gave the baby away to relatives in Syria. My uncle and Ayşe moved to Qamisli [in northeastern Syria] to escape from the blood feuds. Having arrived in Syria, Ayşe started to search for her daughter, and finally found her. But the child refused to see her. Years later, Ayşe's [other] children by my uncle contacted the girl again. From time to time, they visit each another.

One day, Nazire took me to the house of Ayşe's granddaughter, Sema, who lived close by in Mardin, so we could learn more about Ayşe/ Sofi. Nazire started by posing questions about Ayşe/Sofi with a mixture of curiosity and respect for her memory. At one point, Sema interrupted the conversation and left the room. She returned with a handcrafted piece that her grandmother Ayşe/Sofi had given to her as a wedding present. Nazire became emotional: "That is Syrian cloth— let me see how she expresses herself in the pattern." I asked Sema if her grandmother had left her anything else, and Nazire asked: "What do you expect an exiled family to have?" Then Sema volunteered: "She had some gold. Yet, she sold it before she left for Qamisli. She also had a pillow and a bed, which she brought with her to my grandfather's house. She took them with her everywhere."

Sema remembered Sunday mornings when Ayşe/Sofi silently left the house to go to church with her Syriac Christian neighbors. "Everyone knew about it, but nobody ever said anything. Her son, my uncle, was so attached to her. Sometimes he would ask her to go on pilgrimage with him to Mecca. Then my grandmother would ask him to take her to Jerusalem." According to Sema, before Ayşe/Sofi died, in her last moments she wanted to convert to Islam. She took the Muslim oath and asked the family to read the Koran to her. She was buried in the family cemetery. But her family never forgot her past, always remembering her as the woman of *Armenian* origin named Sofi. Ayşe and Sofi existed together as converted identities. The secrecy was embedded in the transformation of Sofi into Ayşe, yet Ayşe was unmasked and turned back into Sofi through the revelation of public secrets in the fragmented narratives of her relatives, Nazire and Sema.

In Mardin the acts of such unmasking are captured in sequences of images and concepts. Referring to Canetti's discussion of secrecy in

his *Crowds and Power*, Taussig notes that "The outstanding thing about exposure is its speediness ('like lightning,' says Canetti).… [It leads] *from invisibility into explosive force*…."[29] In Mardin, the secrecy was also revealed "like lightning." Should a passerby who had converted be recognized, that person would be exposed. Hence, the image of the man in the shop, of the butcher or of the woman living down the street could all bring secrets to light in a flash. Looking down at the people in the market square from the balcony of her house, a middle-aged woman from a local Arab family explained:

> This woman's grandmother was also Armenian. They were two sisters and one brother. They lost their brother. Mehmet Agha married one of the sisters, the widowed one, and took her daughter and her younger sister under his protection. The sister never got married. She was always hostile toward Muslims. One day, my mother visited them to celebrate their *bayram* (Christmas). That day, she told my mother everything and showed her a photo of their brother, who was taken away and never returned. Although Mehmet Agha's wife's daughter married a Muslim man, she remained Christian and was allowed to go to church every Sunday.

Despite their common reference to kinship discourse, in Mardin Kurds and Arabs continue to position themselves differently vis-à-vis their memories of the events of 1915. As Michel de Certeau says, "secrecy forms a play between actors. It circumscribes the terrain of strategic relations between the one who is supposed to know and the one who is supposed not to know."[30] In Mardin, older Arab inhabitants are more reluctant than Kurds to speak about those events. They significantly distance themselves from the Kurds, regarding themselves as witnesses and protectors, while condemning the Kurds for being perpetrators. In the words of an old Arab man, this is because of the essential character of the Kurds, who are "ignorant and subversive" when dealing with authority. According to him, the real natives of Mardin—the Arabs and Syriac Christians—never subverted or challenged the Turkish state's sovereignty. It was always the Kurds who created problems.

Tension between Kurds and Arabs is rooted in historical conflicts and negotiations between nomadic tribes and landowning families. This led to spatial segregation and discrimination between the urban and the rural

(in Kurdish, *bajari* and *gundi,* respectively), the former being associated with the Arab and Christian populations and the latter with the Kurds. Under Ottoman rule, the Arab landlords predominantly consolidated their power in Mardin by collecting taxes and subsidizing the local army, which was the local representative of Ottoman authority, and by fighting against the Kurdish tribes that frequently attacked the city.[31] Following the establishment of the Turkish Republic, old Arab families regained their positions in the bureaucratic system and were entrusted with promoting and implementing the reforms of the new regime as well as surveying their efficacy in the public and private spheres.[32]

Like other cities in Turkey, Mardin received its first influx of migrants, mainly Kurds and Mahallamis from the villages and nearby towns, in the 1950s.[33] Despite discrimination by local Arabs, the newcomers managed to adapt to the conditions of life in the city. The emigration of the large Arab families started in the 1960s and accelerated in the 1970s due to economic reasons that were related to their loss of economic and political power in the city. With the intensification of the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish armed forces, everyday life worsened for Syriac Christians and Arabs. Seeking to avoid getting caught in the crossfire, Syriac Christians precipitously left Mardin. At the same time, displaced Kurdish villagers filled the vacuum left in the city. As they arrived, Kurdish families began to create fortified neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city and next to the city's old cemeteries. Meanwhile, Arabs and Syriac Christians mapped these areas as sites of poverty, terror and violence. In the social imaginary of elderly inhabitants, these areas were reminders of the absence and loss of the city's imagined qualities.

My research revealed Kurds to be more open than Arabs in expressing their involvement in the events of 1915. Within the political discourse of the pro-Kurdish party (BDP) and the PKK, *ferman* was referred to as historical evidence of the atrocities of the Turkish state toward its minorities. While they acknowledge their responsibility in the events of 1915, they claim that *both* Kurds and Armenians were victims of state genocide and it is a priori important to acknowledge the other's suffering and support their political struggle. Apart from this political discourse, there were other discursive spaces in which *ferman* was extensively referred to. Often children and grandchildren, without expressing acknowledgment or

denial of the events of 1915 as "genocide," would—through their family histories—reveal elder family members as perpetrators.

I witnessed a complex example of this kind of revelation during a meeting with a ninety-seven-year-old Kurdish man that was arranged for me by one of his grandsons. Ali wanted me to record his grandfather's life history. The old man's name was Osman Bey. Ali drove me to a village where we were greeted by a crowd of Osman Bey's children and grandchildren, some of whom had come for the day just to listen to the interview. After greeting the entire family, finally we moved into Osman Bey's room. His eldest son introduced me to him in Kurdish and the interview started with me asking questions about his family's history in the village. Osman Bey responded with long convoluted answers about the blood feuds the family was caught up in, about their involvement in the war for independence and their resistance to the new Turkish state, followed by their sudden, inevitable flight to Syria. In the middle of the interview, the eldest son mumbled incomprehensibly, whispering to his sisters and nephews and then he raised his voice, saying directly, "Dad, tell her what happened during the *ferman* times." Osman Bey ignored his son and continued with the story of his escape to Syria. His son insisted, reminding Osman Bey that he had omitted speaking about the *ferman* era. At this second interruption, Osman Bey lowered his voice, cast a meaningful glance at his son and unintelligibly uttered several names.

Soon thereafter, the meeting degenerated into an argument between Osman Bey and his children, with me in the middle. They were trying to force their father to break his silence while, at the same time, urging me to make him speak. I withdrew uncomfortably from the discussion while Osman Bey's eldest son took over conducting the interview, asking his father over and over again in both Turkish and Kurdish, "Dad, Dad, do you remember? Tell us what happened to the children of the Christians during *ferman*." Osman Bey refused to break his silence. He stared vacantly, turned his back to us, and went to sleep. After we left the room, his children carried on the narrative by relating fragments of Osman Bey's untold story—incidents in which he had been both "murderer" and "abductor." As if emphasizing the point he was making, the eldest son said to me: "My mother was Armenian."

I stayed in the village for three days, mostly spending time with the young women of the house while I waited for Osman Bey to feel ready

to continue the interview. His children's attempt to force him to reveal his personal involvement in it had created an unpleasant feeling, and after that occasion, his children neither joined in our conversations nor made any other comments about their father's involvement in *ferman*. Why had Osman Bey's children tried to force him to reveal the loathsome secret parts of his life in front of a stranger? Why had they wanted those revelations to be part of the family's recorded history? Was it the burden of the events of 1915 that made them try to force their father to reveal his actions? Finally, when his children were no longer present, Osman Bey went on with his life story, presenting himself as an influential tribal leader. He made no reference to *ferman*.

Nevzat was a young Kurdish man from a town near Mardin. His knowledge of the massacres was based on stories about two Armenian women in his family who had been abducted and—after they had converted to Islam—had been married to his great-uncles. The first time I visited him at his place of business, he was engaged in a discussion with two Syriac Christian men about a project to repair the ruined houses in the abandoned Christian villages. Most of his customers were Syriac Christians he had befriended—from Mardin, nearby towns and villages and from abroad. Not only was this kind of acquaintance exceptional and risky, it also occasioned many rumors accusing him of hunting for treasure in the ruins of Christian houses and villages. But this did not trouble him. In his view, this attitude was typical of people in a "mixed" (*karışık*) place.

In fact, Nevzat's office was one of the few spaces in town where one could witness unexpected and unique social encounters. There Nevzat initiated conversations in which he asked his Syriac Christian friends to draw comparisons between Islam and Christianity. He himself was not a religious person, he said, but he was curious to understand the effects of religion on culture. His Syriac Christian friends did not hesitate to respond with long, repetitive explanations about the unifying, humanistic and peaceful effects of Christianity on Syriac Christian culture, while at the same time condemning Islam for its violent ideology and destructive effects. Their narratives were filled with images of atrocities and incidents of humiliation and exclusion at the hands of Muslims, particularly Kurds. Although the explanations were highly detailed, the narratives were often anonymous—without any mention of names, places or dates. They were token stories that affirmed the fixed historical view of the Kurds as perpe-

trators and the Syriac Christians as victims. Nevzat patiently responded to his guests, with only silent, affirmative gestures. In his words:

> My Syriac Christian and Armenian friends express their anger and hatred for Kurds all the time although they know that I, too, am a Kurd. I am so tired of being held responsible for everything they went through, but I also feel that I must listen to what they say, even if it is the same old story. This is the burden of *ferman* on my shoulders. This is the shadow of the past on my present. I cannot escape that.

Nevzat's position was unusual. He had created a social space in which he allowed for the revelation of his Syriac Christian friends' bitter stories, while at the same time he disavowed expression of his own predicament. This does not mean that Nevzat transgressed the rule of maintaining the public secrecy. He once pointed out to me that I, as an anthropologist, only have the right to write about his reflections on *ferman,* not about his narrative of the actual events. He said that one day he himself would write a book about *ferman*, narrating the stories he had heard from his two Armenian female relatives. Even if he did not find the courage to write a book, he would try to make a film based on those real stories. In his view, "this is the only way to get rid of the burden of this event."

INVISIBLE VICTIMS

According to Syriac Christians, even though their suffering equaled that of the Armenians, they are the *invisible* victims of the *seyfo* of 1915. In some instances they had survived either because of last-minute interventions by local governors or by escaping to Syria. Later, the majority of the Syriac Christian population returned to the city. However, their churches and houses were appropriated by the state along with property belonging to Italian and American missionaries. While the buildings of the Syriac Catholic Patriarchate were turned into gendarme stations in the first years of the Turkish Republic, the Italian mission buildings were gradually demolished, first because of road works initiated by the Germans in 1915, then during a second wave of construction in 1923. The monastery was flattened in 1930 and the empty lot was used for a public

Fig. 1. Statue of Atatürk, founder of the Republic of Turkey, in the Square of the Republic, Mardin. The square was built on the site of a former Syriac Christian monastery. The wreaths had been placed by local political parties and official institutions during the 2001 commemoration of Turkey's independence. Photo by author.

park before being turned into the Square of the Republic with a massive statue of Atatürk in the 1960s (figure 1).

Syriac Christians started to leave Mardin in the 1940s following enactment of a law (*20 Kura Yasasi*) ordering the recruitment of Christian citizens into the army. With the memory of the events of 1915 still vivid in their minds, most of the Syriac Christians escaped to Qamisli, Syria, which was already a place of exile for Syriac Christian and Armenian survivors of 1915, as well as for protagonists of Kurdish uprisings and blood feuds. Syriac Christian migration increased in 1974 due to the harassment they suffered locally during the Cyprus War. The acceleration of the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish armed forces in the 1980s led to the last wave of Syriac Christian emigration.

While Armenians were referred to as victims of the 1915 events, and thus sought recognition as victims of "genocide," at the official level the Syriac Christians who had remained in Turkey withdrew from this contested ground, choosing to remain silent in order to continue to live under the sovereignty of the Turkish state.[34] Despite their apparent submission to the official discourse, in Mardin they claim to know the truth of the critical events precisely because of their experience of the violence, both as victims and as witnesses/survivors. Marie Theresa Hernández describes such a state of being as "delirio," which results "when reality cannot be placed in a coherent location; when repeated moments in history are situated in hidden or inaccessible places."[35] In Mardin, "delirio" can be detected in the eyes of Christians who are overcome by anxiety and fear. The knowledge they try to locate is embedded in their narratives about houses and converts. Here, "conversion" refers to being concealed as a Muslim, being camouflaged and forced to mimic the other. After the violence of 1915, some Syriac Christians remained Muslim while others re-converted to Christianity years after the "Kurds were sent into exile," the "Kurdish leader of the tribe died" or "after they escaped from the village to Syria." The memory of the 1915 events became a community secret, thereby assuring their survival, while at the same time it produced a contingent imaginary in which every Muslim subject was regarded as possibly being a convert of Syriac Christian origin. In this respect, the hidden past belonged not only to the Christian community but also to their Muslim neighbors.

In addition to converts, houses also trigger fear and curiosity relating to the memory of *seyfo*. In Mardin, Christian dwellings and cemeteries in particular have been regarded as spaces to be excavated in quest of the unknown, the "hidden treasures" that once belonged to the Christian families.[36] It is strongly believed that the Christians had buried their valuables (mainly gold coins and jewelry) before they left the city during the *ferman* times. Since this idea first seized people's imagination, the eager search for hidden treasure has driven people to dig up their own or empty houses and cemeteries. Basements are the first places to be excavated, but the defilement does not stop there. Sooner or later the quest for hidden treasure leads people to suspect that the thick stone walls of the houses hold secret items and therefore to undertake many small-scale excavations.

Nothing is found, but holes in walls, basements and courtyards are the marks of their obsessive search for remnants of the hidden past.

In Mardin, particularly for Arab families, stone mansions represent honor, prestige and power, embodying the families' social and economic capital, while, for Syriac Christians, the houses are appropriated proof of their original—and amputated—urban roots. In their fragmented narratives, the Syriac Christians express their sense of belonging to Mardin by describing what had once been in the place that is now empty and by identifying the houses they had once occupied.

While walking to a recently vacated house with two Syriac Christian friends, Daniel and Mihail, I mentally entered into their recollections of the city as they described the history of old stone mansions that had belonged to Syriac Christian families. Daniel vividly recalled stories that he had been told about the dwellings in Mardin. His interest in the history of the Syriac Christians and his commitment to church activities made him a popular young person in the Syriac Christian community. He had spent most of his life in Mardin and, like all Syriac Christian children, he had been brought up hearing about the horrors of *seyfo* and stories of abducted women and children. He and his peers were taught to show strict obedience to the state, the church and the community. In his view, Syriac Christians are submissive because, as ancient and true Christians, they still adhere to the ancient injunction to "turn the other cheek when struck."[37] However, notwithstanding his strong belief in Christianity, he was convinced that young Syriac Christians should make every possible effort to regain what was taken from their forebears. He was conscious that many people of his parents' generation and his own had fled Mardin because of their painful memories of *seyfo* and because of fears of abuse and humiliation. Most of his friends and relatives were living in the diaspora where they suffered from having lost their "culture" and from the sense of existing in permanent limbo. For him, the only way to remain an authentic Syriac Christian was to continue living in Mardin.

As we walked, Daniel pointed out the elementary school building as well as two stone mansions, both of which had belonged to Syriac Christian families. There were many stories about Syriac Christian homes and churches that were haunted by ghosts. One church in the northern part of the city had been converted into a mosque at the beginning of the 1920s and for a while was used as it was. Later, to differentiate it from the nearby

church and identify its new use, one of the Muslim family foundations decided to add a minaret to the building. This was never completed, however, because the minaret kept collapsing during construction. For Daniel, this was proof that the church itself resisted being converted. The minaret was only finished in 2003. Even then, the mosque did not find peace: according to local rumor, since the minaret was finished, a mysterious beam of light has illuminated it every night. Finally, after a long walk through the valley, we came to the mansion that Daniel and Mihail wanted me to see. It had been built by two Armenian families whose leaders had been exiled and killed during the events of 1915. Subsequently, their widows had sold the mansion to two families: an Arab family and a prominent Syriac Christian family. Later, the Syriac Christian family had bought the whole house and lived in it until the 1960s. After that, Muslim families had occupied parts of it until finally, after a long dispute, it was vacated.

Taking out a key and opening the huge chain lock on the door, Daniel added jokingly: "My great aunt says the occupiers of the house are terrorists." Mihail ran ahead of us into the courtyard to see if anyone was in the house. Peering through the windows, he checked to see if the neighbors were illegally siphoning off electricity or water from the house. "It's impossible to stop these occupiers. Even if they vacate the house, they continue to use water and electricity."

We passed from the courtyard into the big common room. Daniel went upstairs to check other parts of the mansion while Mihail and I identified details we were familiar with from other houses. Daniel rejoined us, filling the empty room with his historical imaginary of a Syriac Christian home, interpreting illegible—and invisible—details including the decorative carvings around the windows, the size and color of the doors, the shape of the door knockers and door handles, the special patterns on the ceiling in the main room and the hidden doors and passages that connected the rooms. Daniel explained that this spatial arrangement and interior decoration are signs of particular tastes, habits and customs that require knowledge of a particular lifestyle that is unknown to *gundis* (villagers). According to him, these dwellings indicate an urban culture that had been created in Mardin by its Syriac Christians and had vanished with their forced flight and emigration.

Although the Muslim (mainly Arab) elites of the city find the Syriac Christians' cynical remarks troubling, they prefer to remain silent about

the histories of their houses and their possible connections to the Syriac Christian or Armenian families who had once lived there. From the perspective of some Arab elites, the Syriac Christians have been fabricating "facts" in order to make claims on the city's cultural heritage. The attitudes of other local inhabitants, in particular those of the Kurdish families, differ from Arab families regarding appropriated houses and churches. In general, they remain indifferent, both to cynical remarks by Syriac Christians and to outsiders' curiosity. On some occasions, they welcome anonymous visitors who want to visit the house. When asked about a house's history, they occasionally acknowledge having known the original owners, but more often they merely point out the distinctive Christian aspects of the house, such as icons, tunnels and basements.

A Kurdish family who had settled in an old Armenian church seemed to have gotten used to visitors. Passing through the hallway to the garden, the children of the family would first take visitors to the cemetery and point out the inscriptions about the priests buried in its walls. Then, under the gaze of family members, visitors would walk through the rooms of the old church that had been transformed into the rooms of a family home. During these visits, a male member of the family would point out the broken icons or distorted images on the walls and ceiling of the old church. When there were female visitors, occasionally young or middle-aged women of the family would accompany the tour and share their gendered knowledge of the interior of the house. Leaving the young men and children behind, the women would lead the female visitors to the intimate corners of the house and point out residual features of the church—niches with pigeon- or grape-shaped sculptures, crosses, candleholders and murals hidden by carpets, piles of pillows, blankets, family photos and kitchen towels belonging to the present occupants (figure 2).

The Armenian families in Mardin do not describe their fate as having been any different from that of the Syriac Christians: they made comments similar to those of the Syriac Christians about the abduction of women and the confiscation of their property. However, the Armenian families who had left Mardin in the 1950s and settled in Istanbul are extremely critical, not only of the local Muslims of Mardin, but also of the Syriac Christians whom they regard as having been silent collaborators. This is due to the fact that unlike Armenians, Syriac Christians had not been forced to leave the city. Moreover, like the Muslims, they had used the opportunity to adopt

Fig. 2. The interior decoration of a living room in a Kurdish home that once belonged to a Syriac Christian family. Photo by author.

Armenian children, incorporating them into their families by re-baptizing them and assimilating them into their community. In addition, many of the monuments, churches and stone mansions that have been reclaimed by Syriac Christians had originally belonged to Armenians. The latter consider that the Syriac Christians benefited from official condemnation and disavowal of the Armenians' cultural and historical presence in order to take over that heritage and become the only "authentic" Christian community within contemporary, cosmopolitan Mardin.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Through the ethnographic material presented here, I have attempted to show how memories of the events of 1915 have moved from secrecy to public secrecy, and how acts of defacement are enacted through narratives about the converted (*dönme*) Christians and their abandoned property. As both victims and perpetrators of the events, the inhabitants of Mardin have never allowed their secrets to be fully exposed. They have maintained them as public secrecy, which functions as a mobile and perpetually renewing

interface between the various groups in Mardin. In that respect, public secrecy in Mardin is not only the standard for what should not be *known* but also for what should not be *discussed*. In presenting the phenomenon of public secrecy in Mardin, I show the language of defacement through the narratives of kinship, conversion and appropriation that blend the known with the unknown, producing rumor and ambiguity along with the storytelling. As Taussig notes, being the conveyor and mediator of public secrecy, "a person is compromised in a complicated emotional and epistemological manner into the system...."[38]

Throughout my interviews, the Syriac Christians continually unmasked objects and subjects of secrecy. However, despite their resentment and anger, they have acquiesced to the fetishization of secrecy and the production of public secrecy because of their fear of renewed abuse and violence on the part of the Muslim communities (which could once again be endorsed by the state). Kurdish and Arab complicity results from different personal and collective histories, finding their own modes of defacement through kinship tropes which serve to reveal the presence of Christian family members who had converted to Islam, and of appropriated Christian property. The Arabs view themselves merely as witnesses, while the Kurds recite personal and collective histories of violent acts their ancestors had committed and also engage in political discourse that condemns the Turkish state for its atrocities against both the Kurds and the Armenians. Kurdish narratives conceal another order of secrecy, which is the complicity of Muslim families and the Turkish state in the violence of the "inclusive exclusion" of the Christian families and properties.

This article has attempted to carve out ways of tackling the Armenian crisis that stands at the center of the past and the present of contemporary Turkey. With these ethical concerns in mind, I have considered the multiple representations of a "critical event" in relation to the transformation of an official taboo. What is most important in the midst of this tangle of interpretations, metaphors and metaphysical assumptions is to become aware of our own projections onto texts and realities. Self-critical interpretation should take into account all possible conditions of agency and all kinds of reference. Nevertheless, the main and final concern of my article is to facilitate the kind of interpretation that allows for a plurality of meanings and opens a space to evaluate these meanings. With awareness of the ways

in which knowledge is produced, can we use our methods and techniques to break with the collective suffering and pain?

NOTES

This article is based on my doctoral and post-doctoral research conducted in the city of Mardin, its surrounding villages and towns, as well as in Istanbul, in July–October 2001, October 2002, August 2003, September 2004 and February 2007. The material is drawn from informal meetings and semi-structured interviews I had with inhabitants of Mardin. All the interviews were conducted in Turkish or Kurdish and translated by my research assistant or members of the host families. The name of the informants as well as the names of towns, villages and neighborhoods have been changed for reasons of confidentiality. Earlier drafts have significantly benefited from the comments of Yael Navaro-Yashin, Jane Cowan, Caroline Humphrey, Zafer Yenal, Biray Kirli, Umut Yildirim and Alice von Bieberstein, and the editorial help of Jane Tiene. A small section of this article appeared in an earlier piece published in *New Perspectives of Turkey*, no. 35 (2007).

1. Selim Deringil, "In Search of a Way Forward," *Armenian Forum* 1, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 65–73.

2. Veena Das uses "critical events" to refer to any event that redefines traditional categories or leads to new forms of actions acquired by a variety of political actors. See her *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (London: Verso, 1995),

3. For the Turkish thesis, see Stanford Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey: Reform, Revolution and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Bilal N. Şimşir, *Osmanlı Ermenileri* (Ottoman Armenians) (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1986); Kamuran Gürün, *Ermeni Dosyası* (The Armenian dossier) (Ankara: Bilgi, 1988); Türkkaya Ataöv, *The Armenians in the Late Ottoman Period* (Ankara: TTK, 2001); Yusuf Halaçoğlu, *Ermeni Tehciri ve Gerçekler (1914–1918)* (Armenian deportations and truths) (Ankara: TTK, 2002). A comprehensive list of publications of this genre is available at www.ermenisorunu.gen.tr/english/references/index.html. For the Armenian thesis, see Richard G. Hovannisian ed., *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics* (London: Macmillan and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992); Vahakn N. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1995); Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and*

the Destruction of Ottoman Armenians (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Taner Akçam, *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide* (London: Zed Books, 2004). For critical discussions between Turkish and Armenian scholars on the political, historical and ethical aspects of the use of the concept of genocide, see the articles in *Armenian Forum* 1, no. 2 (Winter 1998): Deringil, "In Search of a Way Forward"; Ronald Grigor Suny, "Empire and Nation: Armenians, Turks and the End of the Ottoman Empire," 17–51; Engin Deniz Akarlı, "Particularities of History: A Response to Ronal Grigor Suny," 53–64; and Vahakn N. Dadrian, "The Armenian Genocide and the Pitfalls of a 'Balanced' Analysis," 73–130. See also Fatma Müge Göçek, "Reading Genocide: Turkish Historiography on the Armenian Deportations and Massacres of 1915," in Israel Gershoni, Amy Singer and Hakan Erdem, eds., *Middle East Historiographies: Narrating the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 101–27; and Hülya Adak, "The Protracted Purging of the Tyranny of Nationalism: Turkish Ego Documents and the Possibilities of Armenian Turkish Reconciliation," in Hans-Lukas Kieser and Elmar Plozza, eds. *Der Völkermord an der Armeniern, die Türkei und Europa: The Armenian Genocide, Turkey and Europe* (Zurich: Chronos, 2006). See also Hans-Lukas Kieser, "Armenians, Turks and Europe in the Shadow of World War I: Recent Historical Developments," in ibid., 43–59.

4. See, for example, Vahakn N. Dadrian, "Ottoman Archives and Denial of the Armenian Genocide," in Hovannisian ed., *The Armenian Genocide*, 280–311; Ara Sarafiyan, "The Ottoman Archives Debate and the Armenian Genocide," *Armenian Forum* 2, no. 1 (1999): 35–44; and Selim Deringil, "Geç Dönem Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Ermeni Sorununu Çalışmak ya da 'Belgenin Gırtlağını Sıkmak'" (Researching the Armenian crisis in the late period of Ottoman history or "strangling the document"), in idem, *Simgeden Millete: Ikinci Abdulhamitten Mustafa Kemal'e Devlet ve Millet* (From symbol to nation: Abdulhamid II to Mustafa Kemal. Collected articles) (Istanbul: İletişim, 2007), 219–49. For a philosophical critique of the relationship between the archive, the facts and the Armenian genocide, see Marc Nichanian, *The Historiographic Perversion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

5. For a comprehensive analysis of the recent debates, see Ayşe Gül Altinay, "In Search of Silenced Grandparents: Ottoman Armenian Survivors and their (Muslim) Grandchildren," in Kieser and Plozza eds., *Der Völkermord*, 117–33.

6. Cited in Taner Akçam, "Facing History: Denial and the Turkish National Security Concept," *Armenian Weekly*, April 25, 2009, 6.

7. Ibid.

8. For an ethnographic analysis on the political struggles of different minority communities for the recognition of 1915 as genocide, see Zerrin Özlem Biner,

"Multiple Imaginations of the State: Understanding a Mobile Conflict on Justice and Accountability from the Perspective of Assyrian-Syriac Communities in the Diaspora," *Citizenship Studies* (forthcoming, 2011).

9. The campaign (www.ozurdiliyoruz.com) and public and official responses to this initiative deserve special analysis. For recent example of critical debates on the meaning of the apology campaign, see *Armenian Weekly*, April 25, 2009.

10. I owe the clarification of my views on this sensitive discussion to the excellent critique of Nichanian, *The Historiographic Perversion*, on the failure of history and law in interpreting the implications of such a catastrophic event. As an Armenian scholar, he writes against the authority of historians to decide whether the events were acts of genocide and against the project of presenting the testimonies as documents of proof for the recognition of the events as genocide. According to Nichanian, "genocide is not a fact" (1). For him, this provocative statement is not about negating the genocidal nature of the event but rather an invitation to reflect on the notion of the fact, "on the consensus holding that facts must be founded on testimony and guarded by historiography" (13). His views on the role and meaning of testimony present a different perspective on the emotional, political and ethical aspects of the interpretation of the event itself. See particularly chap. 4, "Testimony: From Document to Monument," 91–117.

11. For recent examples on the destructive and constructive policies of the nation-building process, see the articles in Nikos Sigalas and Alexandre Toumarkine, eds., *Demographic Engineering—Part 1*, special issue of *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, no. 7 (2008). See also Fuat Dündar, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Müslümanlari İskan Politikası (1913–1918)* (The Muslim settlement policy of the Union and Progress Party [1913–1918]) (Istanbul: İletişim, 2001); and Erol Ülker, "Contextualising 'Turkification': Nation-building in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1908–18," *Nations and Nationalism* 11, no. 4 (2005): 613–36.

12. See Veena Das and Deborah Poole, "Introduction: State and Its Margins: Comparative Ethnographies," in idem, eds., *Anthropology in the Margins of the State* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2004), 3–34.

13. Founded in 1978, the PKK initiated a clandestine movement in support of the right of self-determination and declared war on the Turkish state in 1984, which led to a large-scale conflict for 13 years that caused over 30,000 casualties, the evacuation of 3,000 villages, and thousands of displaced people. The war ended with a unilateral ceasefire on the part of the PKK with the arrest of its leader, Abdullah Öcalan. Yet, since 2004, there has been an acceleration of conflict with myriad acts of violence. For recent studies on the post-conflict process, see *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 32 (2005) (special issue on the Kurdish question). For a particular discussion on Mardin in this context, see Zerrin Özlem Biner, "Retrieving the Dignity of a Cosmopolitan City: Contested Perspectives on Rights, Culture

and Ethnicity in Mardin," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 37 (2007): 31–58. For a longitude study of the critical events in the same region, see Uğur Ümit Üngör "Recalling the Appalling: Mass Violence in Turkey in the Twentieth Century," in Nanci Adler, et al., eds., *Memories of Mass Repression: Narrating Life Stories in the Aftermath of Atrocity* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction, 2009), 175–98.

14. The names given to the conflict have changed in the region. At the beginning of 2000, it was often referred to as either the "events" (*olaylar*) or "terror" (*terör*). The term "war" was mostly used among political circles. In the course of the transition process, with the growing publicity of the reconciliation or conflict-resolution talks, the locals also adopted the terminology circulated by the conventional media. In this context, the "Kurdish problem" is a term used by all parties to the conflict.

15. In 1987, at the outset of the military conflict, the Turkish state enacted an emergency law in twelve provinces of southeastern Turkey including Mardin, enforcing martial law that authorized regular curfews, roadblocks, identity checks and the maintenance of the village guards, paramilitary forces acting as a local militia against the attacks of the PKK guerrillas.

16. This comment applies to the nature of the narratives of this ethnography. In other words, I do not mean that such practices and discourses concerning collecting testimonies as documents of truth do not exist in Mardin. Indeed recently, they have proliferated both in Mardin and in the region among Kurdish political activists, intellectuals and members of the younger generation endeavoring to explore the hidden stories of their converted Armenian grandmothers. This trend cannot be interpreted in isolation from the current discourses on the Armenian issue and the Kurdish problem. For a brief analysis of the changing attitudes of Kurdish political activists and intellectuals in relation to their responsibility in the events of 1915, see Bilgin Ayata, "Critical Interventions: Kurdish Intellectuals Confronting the Armenian Genocide," *Armenian Weekly*, April 25, 2009, 27–29.

17. There is a growing academic and popular literature on memory, history and identity in Turkey with relation to the tensions between the official imagination of national identities and emergent counter-imaginations of political identities. For influential academic works of this genre, see Leyla Neyzi, "Remembering to Forget: Sabbateanism, National Identity and Subjectivity in Turkey," *Comparative Study of Society and History* 44, no. 1 (2002): 137–58; idem, "Exploring Memory through Oral History in Turkey," in Maria Todorova, ed., *National Identities and National Memories in the Balkans* (London: C. Hurst and Co., 2003); and Esra Özyürek, ed., *The Politics of Public Memory* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006). See also Hans-Lukas Kieser, ed. *Turkey beyond Nationalism: Towards Post-Nationalist Identities* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006). For influential examples of non-academic literature of this genre, see Mığırdıç Margosyan, *Gavur Mahallesi*

(Quarter of the non-Muslims) (Istanbul: Aras, 2000); Fethiye Çetin, *Anneannem* (My grandmother) (Istanbul: Metis, 2004); and Baskın Oran, ed., *"M.K." Adlı Çocuğun Tehcir Anıları, 1915 ve Sonrası* (Deportation memories of a child named M.K.: 1915 and aftermath) (Istanbul: İletişim, 2005).

18. Soner Çağatay, "Kim Türk, Kim Vatandaş? Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Vatandaşlık Rejimi Üzerine Bir Çalışma" (Who is Turkish, who is a citizen? A study on the citizenship regime of the early Turkish Republic), *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 98 (2003): 166–85; Kerem Öktem, "Incorporating the Time and Space of the Ethnic 'Other': Nationalism and Space in Southeast Turkey in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *Nations and Nationalism* 10, no. 4 (2004): 559–78; Arzu Öztürkmen, "Remembering through Material Culture: Local Knowledge of Past Communities in a Turkish Black Sea Town," *Middle Eastern Studies* 39, no. 2 (2003): 179–93; Üngör, "Recalling the Appalling."

19. For a classic study on *seyfo*, see Gabriele Yonan, *Asur Soykırımı: Unutulan bir Holokost* (The Assyrian genocide: A forgotten Holocaust) (Istanbul: Pencere Yayınları, 1999). See also David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia during World War I* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006); Uğur Ümit Üngör, "Center and Periphery in the Armenian Genocide: The Case of Diyarbakir Province" in Kieser and Plozza eds. *Der Völkermord,* 71–88; idem, "Recalling the Appalling"; H. Neşe Özgen, "The Ideology of Selective Forgetting: How a Political Massacre Is Remembered in Turkey: The '33 Bullets Incident," in Ildikó Bellér-Hann, ed., *The Past as Resource in the Turkic Speaking World* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2008), 85–107.

20. James E. Young, *Writing and Re-Writing the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

21. Veena Das, "Language and Pain: Transactions in the Construction of Pain," in Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das and Margaret Lock, eds., *Social Suffering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 67–93.

22. Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 57–58.

23. Ibid., 7.

24. Ibid., 7–8.

25. Ibid., 2.

26. Ibid., 3

27. Ibid., 5.

28. Ibid., 51 (original emphasis).

29. Ibid., 57 (original emphasis).

30. Cited in Marie Theresa Hernández, *Delirio—the Fantastic, the Demonic and the Réel: The Buried History of Nuevo Léon* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 205.

31. Suavi Aydın et al., *Mardin: Aşiret, Cemaat, Devlet* (Mardin: Tribe, community, state) (Istanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 2000).

32. For the early Republican reforms in Mardin, which included a change in the dress codes as well as sanctions on the use of the Kurdish and Arabic languages, thereby establishing Turkish as the official language, see Aydın et al., *Mardin*. In 1925, Kurdish uprisings against the new regime prompted new measures that generally targeted the Muslim (non-Turkish) population of the region, and Mardin in particular. See Martin Von Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Political and Social Structure of Kurdistan* (London: Zed Books, 1992). Many members of Mardin's influential Arab and Kurdish extended families were exiled, while some leaders of Kurdish tribal families were executed as a result of verdicts of the Tribunal Courts. See Aydın et al., *Mardin*. Some of the accused fled to Syria or Iraq to avoid execution, and returned to the city after the general amnesty of 1928. However, the Syriac Christians and the Armenians who fled between 1915 and 1919 were excluded from the general amnesty under a law that banned citizenship for subjects who had not participated in the war for independence and instead had left Turkey and returned only after July 24, 1923. See Çağatay, "Kim Türk, Kim Vatandaş?" 171.

33. The local term "Mahallami" (Arabic for "coming from a thousand neighborhoods") refers to an Arabic-speaking community which migrated from the villages around Midyat, a town close to Mardin. Mahallamis, according to Syriac Christians, were those Christians who had been forced to convert to Islam by the Ottoman leadership in the mid-nineteenth century. They were considered to be mild-mannered, a character trait taken as proof of their "Syriacness." However, local Arab elites accused Mahallamis of being urban bandits and held them responsible for creating chaos and disorder in Mardin.

34. Here it is important to distinguish between the positions of Syriac Christians in Turkey and those in the diaspora. Diasporic communities, particularly in Sweden and Germany, have been struggling to get *seyfo* recognized internationally as "genocide."

35. Hernández, *Delirio*, 260.

36. For an excellent ethnographic analysis of such "hidden treasures" of history, in the context of Greece, see Charles Stewart, "Dreams of Treasure: Temporality, Historicization and the Unconscious," *Anthropological Theory* 3, no. 4 (2003): 481–500.

37. Many young Syriac Christians made similar comments, on the one hand to explain the reasons for their subordination by the Muslim communities, and on the other hand to emphasize their difference from the members of the older generation.

38. Taussig, *Defacement*, 71.