Foreword

Richard G. Hovannisian

RubinaPeroomian is in the process of creating a broad multivolume panorama of the Armenian Genocide as reflected in a variety of literary genres. Her initial work, Literary Responses to Catastrophe, focused on the ways in which Armenian writers down through the ages have responded to calamity and have attempted to find explanations for and to moralize on the tribulations of the nation. This subsequent valuable study explores new horizons in searching for the subdued voice of the small Armenian minority left in Turkey, primarily in Istanbul, following the genocidal years. She turns attention even to the silent or hidden Armenians. It is generally accepted that literary approaches are as effective, if not even more so, as detailed historical research in capturing and personalizing critical moments and extraordinary, perhaps unfathomable, human experiences. This has been demonstrated by the entire range of post-genocide Armenian literature.

Immediately after World War I, in a moment of freedom and

opportunity in Constantinople or Istanbul, surviving Armenian intellectuals began to try to comprehend what had occurred both on a personal and on a collective level. Their writing constituted the first step in an attempt to reconnect the disrupted Armenian cultural continuum. This movement was cut short in 1922, however, when many of the intellectuals, along with the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, were forced to emigrate hurriedly to foreign lands in the face of the impending occupation of the city by the triumphant Turkish Nationalist forces of Mustafa Kemal Pasha.

The Armenian community left behind the forbidding walls of Republican Turkey had only limited contact with the diasporan communities. There was, indeed, even a certain suspicion among the disinherited survivors scattered abroad regarding the Armenians remaining in Istanbul, in part because of their silence, their obligatory self-censorship, and sometimes it seemed their willingness to defend or rationalize the actions and policies of the Turkish authorities. They did, after all, continue to live with Turks on a day-to-day basis and considered this to be natural, in contrast with the dispossessed diasporans who were confronted with an iron curtain that ruled out any possibility of maintaining a physical connection with erstwhile homes, villages, towns, and cities.

The overt discrimination and violence of the 1940s and 1950s prompted much of the established and still-Armenian-speaking community of Istanbul to emigrate, its place being filled with Kurdish-speaking and Turkish-speaking hidden Armenians from the interior provinces who clustered around the Armenian Patriarchate in search of their lost identity and often of material assistance. On my first trip to Turkey in September 1955, shortly

after graduating from the university, I became a personal witness to the devastation wrought by the organized mobs in riots that extended from the Christian neighborhoods of Istanbul to the very tip of the Bosphorus. It seemed reminiscent of the actions of the organized mobs that had fallen upon the Armenian city quarters and villages during the widespread massacres under Sultan Abdul Hamid in 1895-96. The horror of September 1955 compelled many Armenians to abandon their beloved city to begin life anew in distant lands, retaining nonetheless their special familial and emotional connections with Turkey, the Turkish language, and Turkish culture.

RubinaPeroomian carefully traces the impact of all these developments on Armenian literary output, identity, and culture in Turkey. She discovers that in time there was a gradual elevation in the sound level of formerly only whispering voices. For example, previously Armenian newspapers had consistently refrained from publishing editorials reflecting on the great national calamity or expressing any opinions at variance with official state positions. Rather, the press in a defensive, self-protective strategy tried to keep its readership informed by simply translating, without commentary, excerpts from the Turkish media relating to Armenians. This practice began to change at the turn of the twenty-first century. A new generation of more integrated Turkish Armenians became bolder and more outspoken. They were participants in Turkish civic and political movements, interacted with Turkish intellectuals, and sought innovative ways to reach the increasingly assimilated Turkish Armenian youth. Hrant Dink and his bilingual newspaper,Agos, best represent this generation.

The Armenian rediscovery of a voice did not, of course, oc-

cur in isolation but rather was an integral part of a much broader phenomenon in Turkey,that of questioning established norms and narratives. The more spirited of the Armenian writers could dare to shed the mantle of oblique universal themes for contents having specific relevance and reference to the traumatic experiences of the Armenian people. Topics that had been taboo for so long cautiously made their entry into the public arena, stimulating a conscious revival of Armenian identity.

Historical memory, too, gradually resurfaced both on the side of the victims and the side of the perpetrators of 1915. This development extended to the secret, hidden Armenians as well as to Islamized and often entirely unaware Armenians who had to overcome the shock of learning of their Armenian bloodline, a stigma against which they had been carefully guarded by the older generation. FethiyeÇetin, with her story of Heranush in My Grandmother, perhaps best exemplifies the amazing process of self-discovery by a perplexed but steadily transforming generation.

Despite the widespread attempts at camouflage, there is outside the strictures of official history an enormous reservoir of memory in regions from which the Armenians have been virtually eliminated. On a personal note, for many years I declined to travel to these areas, not wanting to see what I knew would be the case, that is, a vanishing Armenian landscape. Yet when I did begin my journeys in the eastern half of Turkey in the twenty-first century, I was surprised to discover just how much memory had survived and was perpetuated through transmission from generation to generation. The Kurds, who now populate much of that land, were ready to admit with remorse their role in the Armenian massacres, to point out the former fields, shops, and

homes of Armenians, to relate stories about a close relative having been born Armenian. In more than one place I was taken some distance simply to see a very aged Kurdish-looking woman who as a very young Armenian girl in 1915 had been taken in by Kurds and eventually married to a member of the Kurdish family. Nearly a century after the great calamity, persons who had long since converted to Islam and who knew not a word of Armenian were still recognized and identified as Armenian. Under more favorable circumstances, this reservoir of local memory may be tapped far more deeply and productively.

Dr. Peroomian draws these diverse themes of literature and memory together in this volume, which is a second revised printing of And Those Who Continued to Live in Turkey after 1915. It is fortuitous that the release of this volume comes shortly after the publication of her third book on the subject, titled The Armenian Genocide in Literature. That study explores and assesses Armenian literature produced by the exiled survivors of the genocide, by the bewildered orphan generation, and by the pessimistic self-demeaning, yet romantically nostalgic, writers in acculturating and assimilating Armenian communities, as in the case of the cluster of intellectuals in Paris. Peroomian will next assess the literary manifestations of the second and third generations, who are now writing not only in Armenian but also and even more so in the languages of their countries of birth. Her work is far from being descriptive alone, as it attempts to analyze—to grasp—the depths of emotion, the trauma, and the complex psyche of the survivor and orphan generations. She enters the pages of her writing and often acts as a direct observer, commentator, and critic. With this and its preceding and subsequent companion volumes, RubinaPeroomian will have produced an encompassing and enduring contribution to the field.