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Mnemonic Intersections: Renegotiating Turkey's Contested Past through Familial Memory in Fethiye Çetin's *My Grandmother*

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ABSTRACT

The Turkish state's denialist framework, which enforces national homogeneity under the veil of Turkification, sustains a dichotomy that positions Armenians as external threats and Turks as the rightful inheritors of the nation. Within this mnemonic binarities, Fethiye Çetin's My Grandmother disrupts the fixed categories of victim and perpetrator through exposing the entanglement of history and memory. The revelation of the grandmother's concealed Armenian identity fractures the epistemic structures of state-sanctioned narratives, exposing how assimilated subjects within the construct of Turkishness bear the traces of their repressed past. Rejecting the zero-sum paradigm of competitive memory, the memoir illustrates the entanglement of belonging, where national identity is not static, rather shaped by erasure and enforced oblivion. By documenting the lived experiences of those who occupy a liminal space between survivor and assimilated subject, the memoir resists the hegemonic mnemonic order, refracting Turkish history through familial memory. Turkish society is marked by its social polarisation, and Çetin's memoir advocates a mode of working through difficult pasts that fosters a dialogic space where histories do not emerge as mutually exclusive but as entangled narratives in perpetual negotiation. The study adheres to a qualitative mode of inquiry, drawing on Michael Rothberg's 'Multidirectional Memory' and Astrid Erll's 'Locating Family in Cultural Memory'. It reveals how My Grandmother reconfigures memory as a relational entity, advancing a reconciliatory framework that reimagines transitional justice within Turkey's historical consciousness. This inquiry contributes to Turkish scholarship by conceptualising familial memory as a site of negotiation, where institutional interventions remain insufficient.

Keywords: entangled histories; family narrative; intergenerational memory; oblivion; reconciliation

INTRODUCTION

The reconstruction of Turkey's national history remains highly contentious, having been shaped by competing narratives and conflicting frameworks, which in turn complicate the cohesiveness of the national identity. The historical redefinition marks a clash between a collective denial of the Armenian Genocide and alternative accounts that strive for recognition. This tension is rooted in the catastrophic events of 1915, "when 1.5 million Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire were eliminated from their historic homeland of Armenia and Anatolia through deportations and massacres, a consequence of the politics of the Committee of Union and Progress, also known as the Young Turks" (Galip, 2018, p. 1). The systematic denial and the suppression of the historical events of 1915 represent a deliberate, state-orchestrated effort to cultivate the culture of oblivion in Turkey. According to genocide historian, Uğur Ümit Üngör (2011), "The massive disruption of

the first decades of the twentieth century was disposed of through silence, amnesia, and repression, instead of reflection, discussion, processing, and memorialisation" (p. 223). In an attempt to forge a secular national framework, a series of political and legal reforms was established. The Alphabet Reform, brought in through the script reform of 1928 and the language reform of 1932, replaced the Arabic script with the Latin alphabet, and the Surname Law mandated all citizens to adopt Turkish surnames (Ozyurek, 2007, p. 5). Further, a state-enforced collective amnesia was institutionalised through a legal framework that deemed recollecting events that contradict the state-sanctioned history punishable. As Muge Gocek (2011) observes, "their use of historical material is selective and skewed, since it favours and highlights only those sources that are in agreement with the official interpretation while overlooking and thus silencing those that are not" (p. 108). These measures served to reframe and redefine Turkish identity, while erasing aspects of its multicultural past. As a result, "Turkish academia has been central to the application and dissemination of state denial and Ottomanist ideology" (Galip, 2018, p. 2). However, in the recent decades, scholars have noted a paradigm shift in the academia which implies "a denationalisation of Turkish scholarship and a growing criticism of 'official history'" (Salmaner, 2014, p. 10). While Salmaner attributes this to the emergence of testimonials and fictional works about hidden ethnic minorities in Turkey, other factors have also played their part. One significant reason for the shift is "the discussion of the recognition of Armenian Genocide in a number of parliaments, which brought the issue to the attention of Turkish politics, media and public" (Galip, 2018, p. 4). Another critical factor is the hundredth commemoration of the 1915 events, which motivated the Turkish scholars and authors to address this historically and politically sensitive subject.

Memoir writing emerges as an act of resistance that documents the lived experiences of ethnic minority communities who have been systematically erased. Kiranoglu (2017) states, "as a non-fiction mode of knowing the self, memoir has been the primary means for articulating the experience of discrimination and redressing the collective amnesia concerning ethnic minorities" (p. 316). These accounts fill gaps in the nation's historiography and can be seen as an attempt to call for a diplomatic negotiation between nations, especially between Armenia and Turkey. Thus, Tugal (2007) states that memoirs are "politically important because they are used as evidence in the diplomatic, academic, and popular discussions on the existence or absence of genocide" (p. 140). Further, memoir writing becomes a contested space where ethnically diverse narratives destabilise official histories, thereby raising concerns about the nature of collective memory prevailing in Turkey. Kaya (2015) states that "personal testimonies reveal the truth not only about individual citizens, but also and more importantly about the Turkish collective self" (p. 692). Memoir writing from an ethnic subject position brings marginalised perspectives to the public consciousness, confronting long-held silences. As Tugal (2007) states, "memoirs play a role in making the construction of the nation possible through 'remembering' violence, the lost heaven, the longing for the future utopia and the other" (pp. 154-155). Further, these memoirs often disrupt monolithic national narratives by foregrounding obscured histories through recounting family memories.

As Astrid Erll (2011) notes, "families serve as a kind of switchboard between the individual memory and larger frames of collective remembrance" (p. 315). In this context, Assmann and Czaplicka (1995) define cultural memory as "the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity" (p. 130). Examining memory within the framework of the family reveals that memory is often shaped by interpersonal conversations, shared experiences and narratives that hold personal significance yet challenge the public discourses. Barclay and Koefoed (2020) state, "retelling national history within the frame of a family history actualises

history and structures of history for society today" (p. 3). Family histories with Turkish-Armenian lineage offer memories of Armenian victimhood that contradict the national discourse, highlighting the violence and sufferings of Armenian ancestors while simultaneously occupying a Turkish identity. Erll (2011) states, "official, national, and even transnational memory is continually refracted through acts of remembrance taking place within small communities, such as families" (p. 312). This refractive process, in turn, enables the descendants to construct a version of history that reinterprets what is meant to be both an Armenian and a Turk.

A re-examination of the dominant national narrative, which categorises historical actors into rigid roles, namely, the Turks as the defenders of the nation and the Armenians as disruptive forces or victims, has been the result. The presence of interethnic ancestry within Turkish families challenges the victim-perpetrator dichotomy that has long dominated state-sanctioned historiography. This intersection of Armenian and Turkish heritage disrupts such rigid binary categorisations, exposing the limitations of a polarised historical narrative, calling for a nuanced understanding of Turkey's past.

Fethiye Çetin is a Turkish lawyer, human rights activist and writer who critically interrogates the politics of identity in Turkish-Armenian history. Çetin's memoir *My Grandmother* stands as a seminal text in the discourse of contested and silenced history that disrupts the longstanding notions about the Turkish nation. Birch (2008) states, "A lawyer, Ms Çetin, is the author of perhaps the most striking example of recent efforts inside Turkey to sidestep the taboos surrounding 1915" (para. 2). The memoir reveals that Çetin's own grandmother, whom she had always known as a Turkish Muslim, was in fact an Armenian Christian survivor of the 1915 genocide. This disclosure brings to the forefront the latent presence of Armenian heritage within Turkish familial lineages, which eventually leads the Turkish readers to confront the existence of hidden ethnic histories within their own genealogies. Salmaner (2014) states that it was only after the publication of Çetin's memoir that "the question of Armenian-Turkish identity became the source of general anxiety within the Turkish population" (p. 8). This begins to fracture the national narrative of Turkishness, which is marked by a singular, homogeneous ethnic and religious identity. The anxiety about the hidden ancestry further points to the larger process of collective memory making and unmaking, offering reconciliation with a revised understanding of the past. As Amarasekera and Pillai (2016) note, "memories are crucial in determining the knowledge of what has been done in the past, in order to understand the current state of present as well as future" (p. 21). In this context, the memoir catalyses discussions about the erasure of Armenian history by opening space for broader, inclusive accounts of the Turkish past. The intersection of identities within a family raises critical "questions such as 'who are we?" "Is there a hidden Armenian or any other ethnicity among my ancestors other than 'Turk'?" and it "began to circulate on a more popular level at the turn of this century in Turkish society" (Salmaner, 2014, p. 10). The dual identity forces one to acknowledge the process of negotiating with two different identities that have been historically positioned as oppositional in the national narrative. Familial memories which contain both victim and perpetrator accounts provide ground for individuals to reconcile with their conflicting historical roles and inherited narratives. This reconciliation would potentially lead to what Kaya (2015) describes as the "therapeutic language of memory," where "coming to terms with the past" would challenge "official Kemalist history by bringing to light repressed memories" (pp. 682). As such, "the restoration of a people's history can begin a process of healing" that would mend historical wounds (Smith, 1994, p. ix). Thereby, it would help in reimagining "the nation as a collective 'we' that is able to reckon with its past and proceed toward a promising future" (Kaya, 2015, p. 694). The study is guided by two key objectives: to examine how the revelation of Çetin's

grandmother's concealed identity complicates victim-perpetrator binaries within the post-genocidal Turkish context, and to analyse *My Grandmother* as a mnemonic intervention that refracts official memory through the prism of familial remembrance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural memory, as Assmann and Czaplicka (1995) argue, operates by constructing identity through exclusion, drawing "a sharp distinction made between those who belong and those who do not, i.e., between what appertains to oneself and what is foreign" (p. 130). In Turkey, this logic underlies the cultural memory of the nation, where the Armenian Genocide is systematically omitted, relegated to the domain of the abject and incompatible with the nation's image. As Cevik (2022) notes, "acknowledgement and apologies for past mistakes are a very complex task for nations, especially when these issues are tied to their national identities" (p. 175). Further, Akcam (2004) states that modern Turkey has inherited dual historical legacies: "the story of the partition of the Empire among Great Powers" and "the story of persecutions, massacres and, especially in the case of the Armenians, the annihilation of different ethnic and religious groups" (p. 1). These intertwined narratives thus perpetuate a cycle of denial and resistance to democratisation. Akcam (2004) argues "without dealing with both aspects of this issue," the ambiguities inherent in Turkey's national politics would remain incomprehensible (p. 1). Muge Gocek (2011) observes that scholars have often emphasised the role of Western imperialism in intensifying the suffering experienced by both Turks and Armenians. It also sheds light on the need to examine nationalism as a key social factor in contextualising both Turkish and Armenian narratives of the past and present (pp. 114-115). It is nationalism that has "polarised the Armenians and the Turks and caused them each to challenge the other's existence" (Muge Gocek, 2011, p. 115). This polarisation transcends its historical origins, persistently permeating contemporary discourses on memory and identity.

As Kiranoglu (2017) notes, "the first decade of the 21st century Turkey started as a period where more and more authors of ethnic minority communities could record their experiences of discrimination in memory narratives" (p. 315). One of these is Fethiye Çetin's *My Grandmother*. Within the existing scholarship on Çetin's work; Altınay (2006) states *My Grandmother* "opens up a space of historical critique and reconciliation among Turkey's citizens who are not Armenian (p. 130). Building on this, Salmaner (2014) notes "the 'revelation' of hidden ethnic identities and the issue of Armenian-ness created a shocking effect especially after the publication of memoirs such as Fethiye Çetin's *My Grandmother* and unsettling the heavy truth of the official discourse on history" (p. 10). Further, Altinay (2014) states "the stories of Armenian converts who spent their lives in Muslim families or Muslim towns open up the pandora's box of gender and national identifications for both Turkish and Armenian nationalists as well as for scholars of genocide" (p. 12). Through presenting her grandmother's lived experiences, Çetin presents a figure who embodies both victimhood and survival, revealing complex entanglements of personal and collective histories. Ozdemir (2024) states, "individual memory is not something to be [put] aside, but rather a complementary and active level of collective memory phenomenon" (p. 3). This underscores the dialogic relationship between individual and collective memory, where the individual memory disrupts the dominant narratives within a society. Among "the different versions of memories of the military past, which form a plurality and heterogeneity of stories in Turkey," Çetin's counter-memory points to the erasure perpetuated by nationalistic

historiographies (Gunay-Erkol & Senol-Sert, 2017, p. 3). As Bezirgan-Tanış (2019) notes, "the representations of counter-memories" are often observed as a threat "to national security" (p. 329). This alternative genealogy challenges "the selective representation of the past," which, as Bezirgan-Tanış (2019) notes, "contradict counter-memories and propagate hegemonic patterns of remembrance and/ or forgetting of past crimes" (p. 329). Therefore, the erasure of the survivor narrative is not incidental but rather a deliberate mechanism that sustains hegemonic narratives. Connerton (2008) calls this a repressive erasure "employed to deny the fact of historical rupture as well as to bring about a historical break" (p. 41). Through its act of reclaiming a silenced narrative, Çetin's work reveals the shared entanglements of Turkish and Armenian histories.

The memoir creates a space for dialogue and what Kaya (2015) calls "coming to terms with the past": in other words, it helps to "rewrite national history through the temporality of trauma and prioritises memory as the ultimate key to collective redemption" (p. 682). Çetin's memoir offers an alternative genealogy of Turkish and Armenian coexistence through reframing her grandmother's suppressed Armenian past, which in turn positions her text as a postscript to Turkey's official historiography. In situating familial memory as a site of mnemonic negotiation, the complexities of historical accountability and intergenerational trauma are brought to light. The memoir represents a dialogic space that challenges the amnesic tendencies of nationalist historiography by deconstructing the rigid dichotomy between the persecutor and the persecuted while positing memory as an ethical imperative for reconciling with ahistorical injustice. The following section outlines the theoretical framework informing this analysis.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The memory politics of Turkey are embedded within competing political, ideological, and historical narratives. The foundational myths of the Turkish Republic are threatened by the different social groups' histories of victimisation. As Gunay-Erkol and Senol-Sert (2017) note, "Rothberg's definition of multidirectional memory is a reaction against comparative and competitive tendencies in memory studies" (p. 4) Against interpretations that frame memory as a competitive process especially one that produces "winners and losers in the struggle for collective articulation and recognition," Rothberg (2009) advances the notion of memory's multidirectionality which underscores a “more supple social logic” (p. 5). Further, Rothberg (2009) considers "memory as multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative" (p. 3). This advocates a model that emphasises the interaction between various historical memories, which in turn would foster solidarity. Gunay-Erkol and Senol-Sert (2017) argue that Rothberg’s concept of multidirectionality makes a significant contribution to the expanding field of memory studies, which focuses on how collective images and representations of trauma shape specific forms of memory (p. 4). This theoretical lens allows us to examine the overlapping legacies of trauma, where divergent memories are not exclusive but rather placed in dialogue. As Gunay-Erkol and Senol-Sert (2017) assert, "in contrast to a competitive model that would weigh victims of each occasion", multidirectional memory "suggests a new and challenging look at how memories converge and foster each other" (p. 4).

Fethiye Çetin’s memoir *My Grandmother* represents a revisionary gaze on the past, as it seeks to counteract the reductionist nation-centred discourse which emerges from ideological divides. Further, Çetin's text pursues memory's multidirectionality, which aids in "thinking of the public sphere as a malleable discursive space in which groups do not simply articulate established

positions but actually come into being through their dialogical interactions with others" (Rothberg, 2009, p. 5). Furthermore, the state's erasure of the history of the marginalised may stem from its attempts to adopt a competitive framework that enforces hegemonic sites of memory to sustain a unified national identity. While the embodied and the lived aspects of the memory reflect the personal experiences of individuals who have borne witness to these traumas, the constructed nature of memory echoes the sanitised history by erasing divergent identities. In contrast, Çetin, through displaying her grandmother's dual identity, reveals the entanglement of personal memory with the broader sociopolitical history of denial, repression and erasure.

As Erll (2011) asserts, family memory "is an indispensable framework, which mediates between national sites of memory and the actual people who do the remembering within social groups" (p. 311). Çetin's narrative bridges the personal and the political by demonstrating how family memory serves as a crucial intermediary that refracts national history through intergenerational exchanges. As Halbwachs (1992) argues “just as every family quickly acquires a history, and as its memory becomes enriched from day to day, since the family’s recollections become more precise and fixed in their personal form, the family progressively tends to interpret in its own manner the conceptions it borrows from society” (p. 83). In the society marked by historical revisionism and erasure, familial microhistories have the potential to shape the national macro histories. Barclay and Koefoed (2020) state, "family memory is not only about families. It is intertwined with national memory, where families use it, or silence it, retell it, and change it, in the process of inheritance" (p. 6). It is through grandmother's experiences of the survival of the Armenian Genocide, which had been concealed for decades, that the potential of family memory in bridging the gap between individual trauma and sociopolitical history is reflected. It is by the exchange of memory passed across generations that descendants are able to access a history that the state sought to erase. In this context, Marianne Hirsch's (2008) notion of postmemory is used as a supplementary concept where the second generation inherit trauma through “stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up" (p. 106). The memoir involves a renegotiation of memory where family serves as a mnemonic intersection that aids in resurfacing the suppressed histories. As Erll (2011) notes, "family memory is not a monolithic, stable entity, but an ongoing process shaped by the multidimensional 'cadres sociaux' of family members" (p. 306). By placing family memories not as subordinate reflections of national history but as active sites of collective and cultural memory, Çetin memoir sheds light on how histories can be entangled in a larger matrix of identity formation that challenges hegemonic historical constructions.

The study aims to address two key research questions: (i) how does the revelation of Fethiye Çetin's grandmother's concealed identity destabilise victim-perpetrator dichotomies and recontextualise ancestral wrongdoings within the framework of the Armenian Genocide? (ii) how can Çetin's memoir be read as a postscript that refracts the national history through familial memory as a mnemonic intersection, particularly concerning memories of the difficult pasts? These inquiries are situated within the theoretical framework of Michel Rothberg's 'Multidirectional Memory' and Astrid Erll’s 'Locating Family in Cultural Memory', which would in turn provide a lens to reinterpret historical trauma.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The renegotiation of the past in Turkey is complicated due to the nation's complex historical trajectory, where competing narratives shape the collective consciousness. The dialectical relationship between official historiographies and familial remembering becomes a crucial site of inquiry. The study engages with Michel Rothberg's concept of 'Multidirectional memory' and Astrid Erll's insights on 'Locating family in cultural memory' to conduct the critical textual analysis of Fethiye Çetin's memoir *My Grandmother*. The theoretical framework demonstrates how memory narratives are not static, rather, they intersect with diverse cultural recollections. The study adheres to a qualitative mode of inquiry and situates the memoir within the broader debates on cultural memory. Through presenting the memoir from the second-generation perspective, the memoir provides a fertile ground for analysing the transmission and enactment of painful pasts. The study interrogates the ways in which family memory operates as a counter-memory, disrupting dominant representations of the past. Further, this research highlights how micro memories of everyday life challenge the homogenising tendencies of state-sanctioned historical narratives. By borrowing a range of critical perspectives from scholars who have contributed to shaping the discourse surrounding cultural memory, this article attempts to position Çetin's work within the intellectual landscape of memory activism in Turkey.

ENTANGLED HISTORIES AND THE ONGOING LEGACY OF TRAUMA

Fethiye Çetin's mnemonic representation of her grandmother's lived experiences foregrounds the palimpsestic nature of memory in post-genocidal societies, where the past's temporal remnants and the reconstructed present persist through the mechanisms of repression. The memoir documents the experiences of Ottoman Armenians who survived the 1915 genocide through forced Islamization and the post memories of their descendants. Altinay (2014) states "one of the deep silences of the Republican Defensive Narrative is the silence over Islamized Armenian survivors. Not only does their existence remain unmentioned in canonical works" but these survivors are also "treated as a non-entity in the 'number-crunching' regarding the total Armenian population and casualties, which is central to this narrative" (p. 5). Çetin's discovery that her grandmother, Seher, was originally an Armenian child named Heranus and was abducted by a Turkish family reflects the historical reality in which survival often necessitated assimilation into Turkish Muslim households, leading to the erasure of Armenian identities within the structures of the newly formed Turkish Republic. This form of coerced assimilation not only silenced the direct experiences of survivors but also created concealed histories, which in turn re-emerge in the memories of their grandchildren.

As Altinay (2014) notes "in the case of Fethiye Çetin, the fears, anxieties, and careful silences that shaped the stories of her grandmother had obviously left deep marks on the post memories of the 'revolutionary' granddaughter" (p. 4). This insight aligns with Marianne Hirsch's concept of 'Postmemory' which "describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (Hirsch, 2008, p. 103). At the very beginning of the memoir, Çetin's narrative begins with the death of her grandmother, an event that triggers a confrontation with the suppressed history of her family's Armenian identity. In an emotionally charged moment, Çetin recalls "but that's not true! Her mother's name wasn't

Esma, it was Isguhi! And her father wasn't Huseyin, but Hovannes!" (Çetin, 2012, p. 2). This declaration marks a refusal to erase her grandmother's Armenian roots, where renaming and obscuring of Armenian names were means of denial and identity reconstruction. This signals the beginning of reclaiming suppressed identities and resisting the strategic forgetting which characterises the Turkish national history.

This act of reclamation needs to begin with remembering events related to the Armenian Genocide, the infamous Death March, which functioned as a tool of annihilation and a decisive rupture in Armenian's historical, cultural and familial continuity. Çetin (2012) recounts it thus: "They had no chance to contemplate what to do next. The gendarmes came back to the village, announcing that all those present were to be sent into exile, including bedridden women. They ordered them to assemble at once. So began the long, agonising death march" (p. 54). This resulted in both the physical destruction of Armenians and the erasure of their ancestral ties. Through reconstructing the Armenian legacy of her grandmother, Çetin records how her grandmother's survival is entangled with a history that erased explicit accounts of the death march. The revelation of the grandmother's true identity disrupts the imposed historical amnesia. This mnemonic resistance is evident in her assertion, "my name was Heranus. My mother's name was Isguhi, and my father's name was Hovannes" (Çetin, 2012, p. 62). At the same time, the grandmother's reflection on how her adopted family gave her the name Seher and how she learnt Turkish at their insistence reveals how she was forced to assimilate into the very structure that had obliterated her identity, positioning her as both a survivor and a product of the perpetrator's assimilationist efforts (Çetin, 2012, p. 68). Ironically, this coerced assimilation on the part of the Turks, where they adopted an Armenian other, also subverts the notion of the nationalist project of creating a pure and authentic Turkish identity. This underscores how cultural assimilation would potentially lead to entangled identities that complicate the rigid victim-perpetrator dichotomy. Çetin's (2017) attempt in her memoir is "to be simultaneously Armenian and Turkish, to have a perspective that questions the ethno-nationalist bias of the Republic without being imprisoned by the dilemma of us and them", making "a language possible-one that does not exaggerate or overtly focus on guilt or innocence (p. 477). This reflects multidirectional memory, which moves beyond competitive memory by fostering inclusive remembrance, allowing diverse histories to coexist without framing recognition as an opposing resource. Feindt et al. (2014) state, "the premise of memory's entangledness presents itself as a hermeneutic corrective, resistant to both reifying essentializations and the quest for new holisms" (p. 44). The grandmother's experiences refuse to be reduced to a singular narrative of suffering; instead, they resist the oversimplified categorisations of historical actors. This disruption exposes the limitations of the zero-sum paradigm of memory, which frames recognition of one group's trauma as a threat to another's identity. Further, this entanglement of historical narratives aligns with Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory, which emphasises the fluidity of memory. As Rothberg (2009) notes, "the model of multidirectional memory posits collective memory as partially disengaged from exclusive versions of cultural identity and acknowledges how remembrance both cuts across and binds together diverse spatial, temporal, and cultural sites" (p. 14). The shift from Heranus to Seher, from an Armenian child to a Turkish Muslim woman, embodies a multidirectional process of memory, where the recollection of the past cannot be restricted to one collective trauma.

Further, Çetin's confrontation with her grandmother's hidden Armenian identity contributes to what has been described as "the ongoing debate in the Turkish public space on whether 1915 was genocide or not, where human beings are often reduced to numbers and the 'archival documents' are fetishised, with human stories that present particular persons with their names,

photographs, place where they lived as well as with their pain and other emotions" (Altinay, 2006, p. 130). This highlights how bureaucratic records are reflected in the national historiographies by depersonalising historical trauma. This conflict is pronounced in Çetin's recollection of her school years, when she actively participated in the performance of nationalist memory. "I would recite these poems about our 'glorious past' at the top of my voice, and with such passion; but now I could not remember this without seeing the children's eyes opened wide with terror, and their heads disappearing into the water, and the river that ran red with blood for days" (Çetin, 2012, p. 66). Çetin's realisation that "much of what we had thought to be true turned out to be false" points to the state's epistemological structures of denial (Çetin, 2012, p. 62). As Cayir (2014) notes “on the one hand Turkey is trying to solve the problems of the different ethnic and religious groups that make up its society, while on the other hand the narrative of national identity” that is found in “the textbooks is based only on history of the Turks and is presented in a way that is essentialist and exclusionist" (pp. 9-10). The distortion of the narrative that Çetin had internalised about the Turkish glorious past, reflects the political violence of enforced ignorance. Çetin (2012) states "my world had been turned upside down, my distress ran very deep, and I was trying to pull through it alone" (p. 62). This personal crisis arises when one confronts the disconnect between the official documented histories and the lived experiences of the marginalised ethnic communities. In this light, Rothberg's (2009) assertion regarding "a work toward a rearticulation of historical relatedness beyond paradigms of uniqueness" is crucial, as this would serve in understanding coexistence over polarisation (p. 14). The resurfacing of silenced histories through embodied family memories reconfigures historical consciousness, resisting the linear narratives of official historiography. Çetin's grandmother's past enacts a mnemonic articulation, in which familial memories disrupt hegemonic remembrance, demonstrating the entanglement of intimate histories with larger political frameworks.

FAMILY MEMORIES: RESURFACING FROM THE OBLIVION OF TURKEY’S CONSTRUCTED PASTS

Family memory operates as a critical site of mnemonic configuration, possessing the potential to destabilise, reform and expand national memory by pluralising historical narratives. As Barclay and Koefoed (2020) state, "family histories are never made in isolation from wider culture, but in relation to other narratives…" (p. 3). The intimate transmission of memory within families can sometimes contest official historical discourse. These memories can be called "peripheral memories," which are often described as "small, local, or regional memories" that were "neither the focus of national or transnational (transcultural) memory culture nor a privileged subject of research" (Boesen, 2012, p. 8). The act of remembrance within the familial sphere reveals how omissions in dominant narratives persist through the intergenerational transmission of embodied memory.

Halbwachs (1992) notes how the foremost in family memory "are relations of kinship" (p. 63). However, Çetin's memoir reveals what happens when relations of kinship are themselves compromised. Çetin's memoir highlights this disruption. Çetin's grandmother's abduction as a child by a Turkish officer signifies the coerced reconstitution of kinship, where family becomes a site where national narratives of denial are enacted. Çetin's abductor was Corporal Huseyin, the commander of the Cermik gendarme headquarters, who wanted to raise her with his wife, Esma. This indicates how the personal space of the family becomes a contested space, where national

narratives are inscribed upon individual lives. Further, Esma's nephew, Fikri, who was left motherless and fatherless with no prospects, and was a lazy, irresponsible boy who could not hold down a job, was married to Çetin's grandmother, thinking she would know how to handle him (Çetin, 2012, p. 72). Within the imposed domestic space, the grandmother was subjected to a process of reidentification, where she was structurally positioned as other, but was compelled to adopt the role of the self. This tension reveals the conceptual limitations of a zero-sum framework of memory and instead advances a multidirectional understanding of remembrance that destabilises oppositional logic. Çetin's mother states how when she would get into fights "with the other children in the neighbourhood" they would call her "convert's spawn" (Çetin, 2012, p. 79). This reveals the paradoxical duality of a forcibly assimilated identity, where their identity is framed as an aberration within the nationalist discourses. This hybrid identity within the contested space aligns with Homi Bhabha's notion of interstices, where he states, "it is in the emergence of the interstices- the overlap and displacement of domains of difference-that the intersubjective and collective experiences of 'nationness', community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2). Despite her forced assimilation, Çetin's grandmother sought to reconnect with her biological family once she learnt they had relocated to America. However, her attempts were obscured by bureaucratic barriers and familial hesitation. As she recalled, "I had no birth certificate and no passport. They said it would be very hard for me to leave the country" (Çetin, 2012, p. 76). Instead, family photographs were exchanged, "a medium of postmemory" that "clarifies the connection between familial and affiliative postmemory…" (Hirsch, 2008, p. 115). Her son's brief visit reestablished contact; however, due to misunderstandings, he deliberately discarded their contact details, leading to a rupture.

Family memory, as "typical inter-generational memory: a kind of collective memory that is constituted through ongoing social interaction and communication between children, parents and grandparents," becomes a means for transmission of suppressed histories (Erll, 2011, p. 306). In Çetin's memoir, this transmission is evident in the tale of Sister Pizez, a story about a winged beetle that rejected suitors who would harm her, but ultimately drowned at the stream due to betrayal by the chosen Mister Rat. This story is narrated by her grandmother to children from every generation. The cautionary tale is an overt expression of Armenian identity, and such folktales encode collective values and histories that would survive the silencing of official narratives. This transmission extends beyond oral tradition, especially when Çetin and her friend Hasan discuss how quietly Armenianness was preserved through food, especially through the preparation of Corek. Muti and Gurpinar (2023) state, "the transmission of language, memory and culture through material components such as words, food or a lullaby, helps distinguish certain inherited elements of identity. (p. 174). However, "these elements intertwine with lived experience, everyday life, and unexpected challenges", so that "heritage becomes a continuous process of negotiation" (Muti & Gurpinar, 2023, p. 174). Hasan recollects how he was disappointed when he was offered the same corek in all the houses he visited, but later came to realise "what all these houses" he "visited had in common" - they were all Muslim converts (Çetin, 2012, p. 101). It is evident that, though Armenian women were abducted and converted, they had kept their culture alive. Further, Çetin (2012) states "they might have hidden it from their children and grandchildren, but these women had carried in their traditions in secrets; they'd not forgotten their holy days, and would visit their neighbours and celebrate together" (p. 102). Therefore, food and folktales serve as an unthreatened means of memory transmission where "an exchange of 'living memory' takes place between eyewitnesses and descendants" (Erll, 2011, p. 306). Families use material culture to reconstruct and reimagine their pasts through which they insert "their familial microhistories into global

macrohistories" (Evans, 2020, p. 1). The memoir's historiographical intervention reconstructs silenced histories while exposing its enduring cultural and psychological effects on Armenians and their descendants. As LaCapra (2004) states, "the intergenerational transmission of trauma refers to the way those not directly living through an event may nonetheless experience and manifest its posttraumatic symptoms," particularly "the children or survivors… who tend to relive what others have lived" (p. 108). The memoir reveals the need for historical accountability so that there can be reconciliation and healing.

THE ARMENIAN AFTERMATH: WORKING THROUGH DIFFICULT PASTS

Fethiye Çetin's memoir can be seen as a form of restorative memory work as it attempts to reconcile fractured familial ties, while simultaneously confronting the ethno-nationalist frameworks that erased the Armenian past in the Turkish historiography. Kaya (2015) states, "coming to terms with the past is polyvalent, unfinished, and constantly shifting discourse, especially due to ongoing power struggles in Turkey among actors and groups with a stake in issues of memory and justice" (p. 682). As a member of a minority community trying to bring a long-forgotten past incident to public attention, Çetin tries to break the collective silence built over decades (Kaya, 2015, p. 683; Passerini, 2003, p. 245). This leads to reconfiguring the idea of national belonging. After all, nations are "imagined communities" where the act of imagining is disseminated through shared narratives that dictate inclusion and exclusion within the national consciousness (Anderson, 1983, p. 6). As Bezirgan-Tanış (2019) states, "the remembrances of minoritised groups challenge hegemonic myths preoccupied with historical acts of violence" (p. 332). To locate her grandmother's lost Armenian family, Çetin turns to her friend Asya, demonstrating memory's persistence despite enforced displacement. Horan, the grandmother's brother, and his daughter, Virginia, still remember the past, which underscores how Genocide, though actively erased from national historiography, persists in familial consciousness. Horan's illness and subsequent death before he could reconcile with his sister reinforce the irrevocable loss inflicted on the genocide survivors. Grandmother's anticipation of a call that never arrives results in grief, which reflects the experiences of these survivors who long for recognition and justice. Her words, "may those days go away and may they never return," indicate the paradox of remembrance where, though there is a necessity to bear witness to the past, the recollection is enmeshed in pain (Çetin, 2012, p. 90).

Çetin's disappointment, when Asya loses contact with the Armenian family, reflects the fragility of memory transmission. The grandmother's eventual death reinforces the urgency of recording testimonial acts in the face of historical erasure. The publication of the obituary that Çetin had written leads her to her grandmother's sister, Margaret. Later, Çetin recounts that she "began to exchange letters with Margaret and Richard", and describes how she wrote "the story of what happened to Isguhi", her grandmother's mother, and what transpired "after she had been separated from her daughter" (Çetin, 2012, p. 103). Margaret mentions "a piece of paper folded up" in her father's wallet, a letter written by her grandmother and Maryam, her uncle's daughter, while her father was in the United States. (Çetin, 2012, p. 104). The letter, preserved after his death in 1965, symbolises how material memory acts as an enduring link across ruptured genealogies. As Derrida (1998) states, "there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratisation can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation" (p. 4). The

memoir challenges archival control by a dominant group by revealing documents that serve as a counter-archive. The final exchange Çetin has with Richard, Margaret's son, sheds light on the contradictory emotions that emerge when confronting the past. He admits, "All my life, I've been afraid of Turks. I nurtured a deep hatred of them. Their denial has made things even worse. Then I found that you were part of our family, but Turkish at the same time. Now I love all parts of this big family…But I still hate all those who deny what happened; these people I shall never forgive" (Çetin, 2012, p. 113). Richard's ability to embrace Çetin as family, despite his ingrained fear of Turks, reflects the fluidity of the binary and the potential for reconciliation when historical truths are acknowledged. His resentment towards those who deny signals the enduring obstacle that historical revisionism poses to genuine reconciliation. His confrontation with the inherited trauma reclaims forgotten memories, which would eventually foster healing. As Kaya (2015) states, "with this temporal reconfiguration, the past becomes a time of suffering, trauma, and silence, and the present an ideal moment in which to launch a collective process of remembering and healing that opens the door to a future of restored health and well-being" (p. 682).

The path to healing goes beyond narrative interventions, as Çetin undertakes the renovation of Habap fountains, a site deeply connected to her grandmother's Armenian roots. As Dissard (2021) states, "in August 2011, Çetin convened a team of architects, artists and students from around the world to launch a renovation project" (p. 56). In the documentary film, 'Habap Fountains: The Story of a Restoration' directed by Aydin (2012), one of the student volunteers, states, "the process of renovating the fountains also heals people…this is a healing work. People get healed slowly by working here, watching this happening, contacting us". The act of rebuilding becomes an embodied form of memory work that allows individuals to engage with the past that transcends textual commemoration. Dissard (2021) states, "the two monuments had been silenced for years, very much like the country's hidden Armenians, but their renovation provided them with a voice of their own, which dispersed, at least momentarily, the village quietude and allowed unspoken truths to be told" (p. 58). Through bringing to light the spaces of erasure, Çetin's memoir and renovation project function as a postscript to the Armenian Genocide, transforming absence into a tangible act of remembrance.

CONCLUSION

The ongoing debates in Turkey surrounding the Armenian Genocide remain rooted in its nationalist historiography, where the state-sanctioned narratives emphasize denial and strategic ambiguity. The official discourse reinforces this ideology through educational curricula, public commemorations and legal restrictions on genocide acknowledgement, which constructs a rigid binary that obscures the complexities of lived experiences. This binary sustains counterclaims of Turkish victimhood, while negating Armenian suffering, thereby producing a polarised mnemonic landscape. However, recent scholarship and resurfacing of familial testimonies, particularly through the narratives of descendants, have begun to disrupt these rigid categorisations. As Altinay and Turkyilmaz (2010) state, "the recently publicised stories of converted Armenian survivors have provided significant challenges to the 'war of theses' that shapes the national and international debate on 1915" (pp. 45-46). In this context, Fethiye Çetin's memoir *My Grandmother* serves as a critical intervention that resists the homogenisation of memory by revealing how intergenerational remembrance could potentially refract and unsettle the official history. By documenting her grandmother's concealed Armenian identity, Çetin destabilises the dichotomous construction of

genocide memory. In shedding light on the afterlives of trauma that persist within familial and intergenerational memory, the memoir stands out as a postscript to the Armenian Genocide. Çetin's narrative foregrounds memory as an ephemeral process mediated through mnemonic exchanges across generations. Çetin's memoir needs to be situated at the critical mnemonic juncture of family memory, a distinct form of collective memory which is relational, fluid and dynamic, reshaped by the process of intersubjective negotiation. The reemergence of suppressed histories through familial testimony problematises the reductive assumption that remembrance operates as a zero-sum game. In this light, Çetin's memoir generates a site of mnemonic dissonance, deconstructing the coherence of official memory regimes. Moreover, the genealogical link between generations indicates how private acts of remembrance become entangled with a broader historical discourse. By demonstrating mnemonic plurality, where conflicting memories coexist rather than cancel one another, Çetin's memoir becomes a crucial first step toward reconciliation. In post-genocidal and deeply polarised societies, mnemonic negotiation cannot be confined to institutional interventions alone. Instead, it demands an engagement with the lived experiences of those who have had to endure its repercussions across generations. Future research could further examine how contemporary Armenian and Turkish communities navigate inherited memories and shape contemporary discourses of reconciliation.

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