



THE



UNSPOKEN



AS



HERITAGE



HARRY
HAROOTUNIAN



THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE



AND ITS UNACCOUNTED LIVES



THE UNSPOKEN AS HERITAGE

BUY

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

HARRY HAROOTUNIAN

DUKE

**UNIVERSITY
PRESS**

THE
UNSPOKEN
AS
HERITAGE

THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE AND

ITS UNACCOUNTED LIVES

DUKE

Duke University Press Durham and London 2019

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

© 2019 DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS. All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞
Designed by Courtney Leigh Baker
Typeset in Warnock Pro by Copperline Book Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Harootunian, Harry D., [date] author.

Title: The unspoken as heritage : the Armenian genocide and its unaccounted lives / Harry Harootunian.

Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2019. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019006360 (print) | LCCN 2019012084 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478007029 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478005100 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN 9781478006282 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Harootunian, Harry D., [date]—Family—Biography. | Armenian Americans—United States—Biography. | Armenian massacres survivors—United States—Biography. | Armenian massacres, 1915–1923

Classification: LCC E184.A7 (ebook) | LCC E184.A7 H376 2019 (print) |

DDC 956.6/20154—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019006360>

COVER ART: Harootunian family members, late 1920s.
Courtesy of the author.

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

For the memory of Sena Harootunian
and to Victoria Pedersen

DUKE

**UNIVERSITY
PRESS**

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ix

ONE. THE UNREALIZED EVERYDAY 1

By Way of an Introduction

TWO. UNNOTICED LIVES/UNANSWERED QUESTIONS 17

THREE. TRACES OF A VANISHED EVERYDAY 37

FOUR. HISTORY'S INTERRUPTION 87

Dispossession and Genocide

FIVE. HOUSE OF STRANGERS/DIMINISHED LIVES 114

EPILOGUE. RETURNING TO ANI 149

Notes 161 Bibliography 171 Index 175

A gallery appears following page 86.

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe great thanks to an army of friends who read various drafts and versions. I would like to mention Kristin Ross, who read the first draft and encouraged me in this project and throughout its completion; Nancy Armstrong, who introduced the idea of turning to a form of life writing and who read an earlier version; and Leonard Tennenhouse, who participated in the discussions we had on life writing and also read an earlier draft. I want to acknowledge Anne Allison, who read an earlier version and offered consistent encouragement, as well as Rey Chow, Larry Fuchser, Tanya Fernando, Helen M. Kearney, Carol Gluck, Kim Brandt, Marilyn Ivy, Jonathan Strong, Adrian Rifkin, Denis Echard, Michael Dutton, Michèle Longino, Laura Neitzel, Holly Hudak, John Hudak, Claudia Karagianis (especially for help with the photos), Chris Nelson, Ken Kawashima, Andrea Arai, and my two sisters, Sena Harootunian and Victoria Pedersen, to whom I have dedicated this book. Sena died before the book was published but had read and corrected an earlier draft. I want to thank Anne, Charlie Piot, and others who arranged for me to discuss a draft of the manuscript at Duke University in 2017, where I learned a lot of what I should be doing, and a number of anonymous readers who made extremely valuable suggestions and comments, which they will recognize in the text. Thank you to my editor, Ken Wissoker, for sticking with this; to Susan Albury, project editor; and to Joshua Tranen, editorial associate.

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

All of us, without suspecting it, are the carriers of an immense embryological experiment: for even the process of remembering, crowned with the victory of memory's effort, is amazingly the phenomenon of growth. In one as well as the other, there is a sprout, an embryo, the rudiment of a face, half a character, half a sound, the ending of a name; something labial or palatal, sweet legume on the tongue, that doesn't develop out of itself but only responds to an invitation, only stretches out *toward*, justifying one's expectation.

An Armenian fairy tale from the ancient city of Ashtarak: "Three apples fell from heaven: the first for the one who told the tale, the second for the one who listened, and the third for the one who understood."

—OSIP MANDELSTAM, *Journey to Armenia*

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

ONE. THE UNREALIZED EVERYDAY

By Way of an Introduction

When I was younger I read and heard stories about the ancient Armenian city of Ani and even dreamed I walked among its discarded ruins. Ani was the capital of the Bagratid kingdom in eastern Anatolia (“Higher Armenia”) that had been a powerful fortress as early as the third century but by the ninth century was the center of a large kingdom that covered a good part of the region of eastern Anatolia. Known for its architectural and artistic brilliance and as the city of 1,001 churches inhabited by a population estimated at 100,000 and even higher, larger than any medieval European city at the time, it stood at the strategic crossroads of several trade routes between east and west. In the thirteenth century it was overrun and sacked by the Mongols. A century later it was completely destroyed by an earthquake, reduced to the rubbles of ruin, where a small village that eventually disappeared was erected on the site. I never realized my youthful desire to visit Ani’s ruins, but years later it occurred to me that the image of the city’s remaining stone wreckage retreating back into the nature from which it was cut and pried loose captured the moment of the fateful and sorrowful destiny of the Armenians’ struggle between the unyielding grasp of both nature and history, indelibly inscribed in the ruins of Ani. Perhaps more fabled and subject to romantic fantasy once it was released from history, Ani’s particular fate seemed a fitting reminder to Armenians whose successive history often came perilously close to repeating its disappearance of a lived actuality. The Turkish genocide’s determined

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

attempt in the early twentieth century to make the Armenians as extinct as Ani was a continuing episode in this sad narrative. Yet the ruins still offered the trace of a historical existence, a shattered silhouette of what it had once been and thus the prospect of a pathway for returning to home and a new start.

The Armenian genocide of 1915–16 was planned, implemented, and executed by the dominant political group in Turkey's Ottoman Empire, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP, *ITTIHADIST PARTY*), or simply the Unionists or Young Turks. It was neither surprising nor coincidental that in 1915 the Young Turks were an elite party, most of whose members were born and educated in Europe, principally the Balkans, the Aegean Littoral, and Constantinople. Despite its enthusiastic embrace of the tradition of the European Enlightenment or because of it, it was this cohort that committed the resources of an empire to the total destruction of the Armenian population and, paradoxically, of itself. As the German military attaché in Constantinople pronounced in 1918: "the (Turkish) government . . . wishes to destroy all Armenians, not solely in Turkey but also outside of Turkey."¹ The massive program of destruction aimed at Armenians and other Christian minorities in Anatolia like the Greeks and Chaldo-Assyrians used the occasion of World War I and Turkey's alliance with the Central Powers as both the moment to inaugurate the grim labor of mass murder and the masquerade to make what clearly was a genocidal intention appear as merely collateral damage and even a sideshow to the Great War. While the genocide constitutes the inducement for this memoir of my parents and their perilous escape from Anatolia and eventual migration to the United States, I am not concerned with writing another narrative of the history of the event for a number of reasons explained later in the text.

Not long ago I began to think about how my parents separately survived the Armenian genocides of the early twentieth century and how once they were able to find their way to the United States, they encountered the unwelcome prospect of facing another challenge of survival. This had not been a question that occurred to me when I was younger and growing up with my two older sisters in Highland Park, an industrialized autonomous enclave within the precincts of the city of Detroit, at the time the home of an early and one of the larger Ford assembly plants. For me, those years were marked by a kind of voluntary indifference to anything related to Armenian life, which increasingly appeared irrelevant and would have precluded asking questions of our parents' survival when growing up; these

questions now need to be explained. A contributing explanation might have been the force of the Americanizing process to which we were subjected in the schools and in daily life, the effort to make us all look like Americans or some version of WASP America but not quite. This process of disidentification required breaking down whatever identity we had and aimed at making us eager to look like Americans; it also seemed to override any consideration to retain the thinning threads of an ethnic identity. Paradoxically, the appeal to whiteness today is precisely the template of Americanness in which my generation of immigrant children had been socialized into a national and nationalist identity. But the necessity to ask such questions we neglected as children has gradually come back like an unscheduled revenant demanding compelling urgency, especially in the years I was growing older and beginning to recognize in the migrant life we lived not the glowing image so often portrayed in histories and circulated in public schools of a land of plenty and infinite opportunity, as represented in school history texts and civics classes designed to make the children of immigrant families into Americans. Instead I began to see the United States as a place that grudgingly accepted large numbers of immigrants from the late nineteenth century on but only as reservoirs of cheap, unskilled labor, and more often than not badly treated, to staff the growing industrialization that marked those years immediately before and after World War I. For most immigrants, living in their own enclaves, America was an oversized “mean streets,” a vast configuration streaked with multiple forms of unevenness and deeply engraved precincts of permanent inequality, traversed by boundless combinations embracing the capitalist new with diverse cultural practices brought by different ethnic groups as a way of navigating the new terrain. There was little in the country’s early history that pointed in the direction of what it would become. In fact, that early history showed it was moving the other way.

When the question arose of actually trying to investigate and account for my parents’ survival and subsequent struggle to stay afloat in a new environment, it gradually pressed upon me and became an imperative in late adulthood. I rejected the idea of taking the familiar route of writing another historical account or narrative of the large-scale event of Turkey’s involvement in World War I, retracing the complex historiographical controversies over the origins of the genocide, and continuing arguments over whether it qualified to be named as a genocide and the long decline of the Ottoman Empire the genocidal event it was designed to stem. There was already a mountain of scholarly literature dedicated to elucidating these

themes, and I could add nothing new to the diverse controversies. I was not trained as a specialist in Ottoman or Middle East history, could not read either Armenian or Turkish as starters, and did not have the inclination to approach the genocide from a historical perspective that would always end in the call for more evidence and documentary precision to definitively determine the cause, which would happen only in the last instance; and I knew that history, as such, could not address questions of memory and experience the victims lived through. The appeal to memory expanded experience and experience in turn, as hinted by Mandelstam, enlarges memory's compass, through growth and "stretch[ing]" outward "toward . . . expectation."² As a supplement to Mandelstam's earlier insight, Antonio Gramsci once described this kind of phenomenal operation as an "inventory of traces" and explained that "the starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory."³ Later on in the same passage, Edward Said reminded us that Gramsci emphasized the vital importance "at the outset to compile such an inventory."⁴ Said reports that the latter portion of this passage was not translated in the Hoare and Smith translation and appears in the Italian version.⁵ What I have thus tried to do in this memoir is to follow the pathways offered by these two perspectives and compile my own inventory of memory traces as they've grown and expanded.

I have never been convinced that the question of the Armenian genocide or any comparable instance of mass murder is reducible to mobilizing more historical evidence to support one or another interpretation. What the endless gathering of more historical documentation produces is deferment that often overlooks the fact that a large number of people were brutally killed in the effort of another group to eliminate them. Scholarship, it seemed to me, was not the answer but perhaps the problem since the more historical information amassed, the less the prospect of achieving some sort of resolution. The process of ceaselessly accumulating additional material and evidence appeared more as some sort of delaying tactic that would permanently displace the necessity of reaching a final conclusion or a minimal consensus yet fulfill some kind of symbolic role among the contesting parties that progress toward a resolution was being made. I have always been convinced that the history of the event that continues to demand representation is not the same as those memories of survivors who became the diaspora and who were said to have "experienced the event"

by later historians, even though they would not have known it at the time as historical. Yet it is the weaving of countless stories of unnoticed lives of the perished and survivors concerning what had befallen them and the questions they have raised but must remain unanswered that stubbornly comprise the subject not of a history, as such, but rather a recomposition of when such unanswered questions appeared in the interstices of the daily lives of survivors as they made their way to safety and a new afterlife. It is hard to know what they would have been thinking apart from how to get out. The appearance of such unanswerability at certain moments raises the question of what is prompting them, which is as unanswerable as the answers they offer. But it must say something about why these questions are asked throughout our lives. What I am concerned with is my parents' efforts to escape the threat of imminent death and a past that showed itself as an exhausted endgame that led to the moment of being forced to reinvent themselves in a new present and environment. In this journey they sought to repress through silence what probably refused to go away. My sisters, Sena and Victoria, and I inherited this repressed silence, which, I believe, was imprinted on our subsequent formation into adulthood. Just as I am not interested in recycling the history of the genocide as a subject of historical inquiry, I have no interest or competence to provide a psychological accounting of how the return of the repressed in our parents affected our individual formations.⁶ I have found in constructing this recomposition the habitual barriers of expectation that inevitably seek to turn this retelling into the groove of the genocide's history, as if there is no other story and no other way to tell it. Because of this constant collision with habitual barriers, I believe it is important for me to pursue the question of why the experience of surviving became the subject of our parents' collective silence and our inheritance.

My decision to undertake this project thus originated not from the lure of historical scholarship but rather from an intensely personal concern in the long and multigenerational afterlife of the genocidal moment that has remained at the heart of the Armenian diasporas. For Armenians of successive generations like mine, this concern has itself become a form of heritage that obliges each, in its own way, to find adequate form to express this continuing testimony as a necessary condition of preventing the defining memory of the experience from falling into permanent indifference and forgetfulness.

In the world of immigrant studies and diaspora, making it to the shores of the United States or elsewhere meant realizing success in surviving

whatever people were running away from but also receiving their ticket to mobility and a secure life. This seemed once to be the established story line. But I suspect that in most cases, like the first generation of Armenian diaspora, immigrants to the U.S. confronted challenges of survival often as great as the ones that drove them out of their natal habitat and into the land of golden opportunity. In this regard, the Armenian experience could claim no exception and was no different from what countless other immigrants endured. Where they may have differed from those migrants who came for a better economic life was posed by the problem of genocide itself, which inducted them into a life course of determined silence to never speak of the calamity and loss that befell them and from which they barely and often accidentally escaped.

What undertaking this project has provoked was the growing conviction that my sisters and I knew little or nothing of the individual experiences of our parents—Ohannes der Harootunian and Vehanush Kupalian—escaping the terror of Turkish massacres. While we knew some objective facts about where our parents came from and something of the tempos of such village lives in premodern Anatolia, we never knew or heard them articulate the actual experience of living through and escaping genocide, what they thought, felt, or believed would happen to them. We were deprived access to any experiential knowledge or even the recollection of crucial memories of that moment. All we could recall were the uncertainties they met as they made their way through the depression years of the new American environment, because we lived it with them. Once embarked on this writing project, lacking any clear-cut direction or even sense of purpose, I increasingly felt how difficult it had become. But the difficulty was also compounded by the sudden realization that I really did not know my parents, much less myself. What this practice taught me was the need to find some mode of communicating a relationship between the two registers of history and the everyday of their lives, between the conceived and the lived, as Kristin Ross has put it, and the difficulty in doing so, given the privilege accorded to the former as a natural national narrative and the transient unreliability of the latter.⁷

The problem I have had to confront is that both parents remained consistently silent on their respective experiences, rarely showing any willingness to share their memories with us and, apart from glimpses gleaned from anecdotes, never directly speaking about them to my two sisters and me. In response to the absence of extensive correspondence between each and their relatives, no family archive of photographs from that time, and a

general reluctance to impart the experience of this episode in their lives, I have had to resort to a recomposing of what they might have gone through on the basis of what the three of us were able to recall or thought they had endured from the afterlives of the genocidal moment. This recomposition often resembled an archaeological exposition, sifting through fragmentary traces in order to get a clear idea of how to imagine the totality of a life-form from the remaining, incomplete pieces. While the memoir is concerned with what they must have encountered, felt or imagined, and thought, the account can make no claim to historical authority, as such, since it is about the fragmented memories of an experience of survival, reflected in their split lives, that stayed with them and us throughout the rest of their lives and ours. In this sense, the act of memoration is also one of imagination. Even though my parents rarely spoke of those earlier years when we were growing up, it is evident that the experience of genocide, loss, and escape shadowed their efforts to rebuild their lives in a new and often unwelcome environment and posed a second challenge of survival made even more difficult when they confronted the world depression. Yet, as I have tried to look back on those years, the shape or negative imprint of the earlier experience always remained present in their struggle to navigate through the times of economic and social uncertainty.

The essential point of the memoir is an “encounter with the void,” in the sense of political destruction and postdestruction survival. It is driven by the “persistence of unanswered questions lasting from childhood,” as well as “imaginings that have tried to satisfy them,” about our parents’ pasts, what they endured, feared, and even repressed; and it is trailed by an irony of how “genocide becomes reproduced on the everyday level in the form of the victims’ silence.” We confront the namelessness of relatives we never knew since the past was not allowed to be spoken of, and yet we recognize that “the power to name something animates it into existence.” Above all else, the memoir is about the lasting effects of destruction in the lives of my parents that inadvertently became an inheritance passed on to us (my sisters and me) through their practiced silence: “the unspeakable as a heritage.”⁸ What was destroyed were memories of family relationships of relatives we never knew or experienced and the figure of their everyday lives in Anatolia, which I can only try to reimagine. Yet what was unspeakable, demanding a daily regime of muteness, raised a host of questions that would be repetitively asked the rest of our lives but never answered. What I have tried to do is to organize when and where these unanswered questions appeared, which was in the various phases of everyday life my

parents lived from village life in Anatolia, turning inside out into its unimaginable negative; to an everyday filled with the terror of death marches to a desert inferno where those who survived the unscheduled daily marauding and ambushes would surely perish; and finally to the everyday life of permanent exile in new lands for those who managed to escape the Turkish exterminations.

When Sena died in 2017 and I attended a service for her, with my children and grandchildren, it struck me how little I knew of her. I felt like a stranger to even the place I had come to and wondered who was this person who returned to this far-flung suburb of Detroit, which when we were children would have seemed as remote as China, to pay a last respect. I had not seen much of Sena over the years, even though I had managed to visit her with my oldest daughter and her husband a year or so earlier to tap her memory of our parents. But Sena appeared to me as a mystery, like our lives, perhaps even more so than Victoria, who in the intervening years I had seen even less. The reason for this was that when I was a child I had seen and spent more time with Victoria, who had been involuntarily assigned to take me to the movies and watch over me. (On one occasion, she actually saved my life.) In later years, I saw as little of Victoria as I had of Sena. It occurred to me that the lack of contact between Sena, Victoria, and me might have reflected the work of our unwanted legacy, perhaps even stemming from it. Our years as a family unit were quite short, as I recall them, though Sena continued to live with Vehanush and Ohannes after Victoria and I left, caring for them as they aged. How the legacy of void worked was in its capacity to forgo intimacy and even the periodic warmth family relationships are said to engender and inculcate. Our parents were cruelly torn from their own families and deprived of the lasting effects of the quality that cements family life in affect and warmth. This, it seemed to me, is what genocide obliterated as definitively as it did of both of their families and a collective history. The absence of affect and warmth became part of the heritage handed down to the three of us, where, I suspect, it ended. My own children, I have noticed, were better parents than I had been to them. But this should not be taken as a last-moment confession or appeal to apology. We do not choose our legacies and heritages; they choose us, and, like history, they are always the unwanted and unwanted presence shaping our lives, without our knowing it until it is too late to do more than recognize this inheritance. What our parents were forced to forfeit in return for their survival was bequeathed to us to make our way in a land they never understood once they had seen their way to raising us.

Our lives, in this way, bore the mark of a genocide we never experienced and rarely knew or heard about when growing up. Yet, I am convinced, the event and its immense interruptions were always there, accompanying the three of us, as it still is: lives formed on the basis of a void of the silence of unanswered questions.

What I have written is a memoir of mixed forms, not a history. The result is a recomposed account relying on memory and experience, occasionally punctuated by swatches of historical narrative to place the whereabouts of my parents. In this imagined landscape, I have tried to grasp the lived experience of unnoticed lives eclipsed by the larger narratives and how it has shaped us, its inheritors. It is for this reason that I have had to resort to the form of a construction, rather than a reconstruction, which explains my decision to engage in what must be both an act of coaxing memory from its concealment into the light of our time and a commemoration of the heroism displayed by our parents' unaccounted and unnoticed lives in overcoming the immense cultural cleft and economic demands of the almost impossible transition from a premodern traditional order steeped in the reproduction of a natural economy with kin social relationships and unimaginable political oppression to a modernized society dedicated to capitalist production and "possessive individualism." I use the category of transition very loosely, since it invariably implies a distinct linear narrative and is far from the change in environment and everyday life-forms my parents experienced as they moved out of Anatolia and into the United States. Their "narrative" of transition was more like a photo montage or collage composed of different moments thrown together without suggesting any overriding causal linkage. As I now look back upon the trajectory of their lives, I cannot help but think it was frozen into an unrealized transition constituted of unconnected temporalized episodes. It is for this reason that the form of this construction should resemble a montage, whereby episodes and experiences are strung together, implying no single causal relationship but rather reflecting their broken connectedness and the offer of plural interpretative possibilities. In taking this route I have departed from the familiar narrative that predictably progresses on schedule to arrive at its foretold destination. But I will want to try to maintain the tensions of unevenness between the everyday I have imagined lived in different places by my parents and a more distant world history that eventually encroached upon it, loosely resembling the theme of Satyajit Ray's wonderful film *Distant Thunder* (1944), a history preoccupied with remote large-scale events like war and genocide, and the

way they finally reach down to alter and lastingly change the village experience of everyday lives forever. The other alternative implied by history is simply to discount this register as too subjective and unverifiable, messy and irrelevant. Yet it is precisely the unverifiable family history unsteadily caught within the orbit of convulsive world historical changes that reveals the inventory of unanswered questions demanding a solution to the adequate form to tell this story. What such a compiling of what Antonio Gramsci has identified as a necessary “inventory of traces” has produced is a series of unconnected tableaux of unspoken scenes, where the principal actors have remained silent.

Reflecting on the theorization of the everyday, the French literary theorist Maurice Blanchot observed that “the everyday escapes. This is its definition. . . . The everyday is always unrealized in its very actualization,” which no event, however important or significant, can ever produce. In fact, the everyday, for him, was “difficult to discover,” initially unperceived, “what is never seen for the first time,” and always unfinished and capable of escaping closure. In many ways the everyday is the event’s other. If we miss its presence, it is because “it belongs to a region where there is still nothing to know . . . not yet information.”⁹ The everyday rarely produces events—unlike history, where events are its principal staple and everything happens. In the everyday there is only namelessness, anonymity. For the poet Fernando Pessoa it is the office, the street, cafés, homes, churches and town squares.¹⁰ We must remember that we are speaking about a pre-modern or precapitalist society still retaining an uneven combination of the new and old, where people lead lives remote from their conquerors but never are permitted to forget that they had been conquered. By the same measure, if there is a subject of the everyday, it is undoubtedly the village as a whole that speaks. For me, it is everyone who inhabits the village precinct. Nothing ever happens in the everyday, Henri Lefebvre once reported, except “everything changes.”¹¹ In the Anatolia of the Ottoman Empire, it must be asked: For whom was nothing happening? Who are we talking about? Interaction between Armenians and Turkish folk would be limited, unless one was living in a large urban area. In this environment, minorities like Armenians spoke both Armenian and Turkish and communication was grounded in rumor, conveyed by the village grapevine; everything was said and heard endlessly without ever being confirmed. In the eyes of the Turkish authorities, the everyday of the Armenian was seen to be safely under the jurisdiction of the priest, who led the *millet* system, which supposedly was to make sure that nothing would be permitted to

happen. In this world empire, the minority communities like the Armenians were, for stretches of time, self-enclosed enclaves, centered on the church, until confronted by unscheduled administrative intrusions demanding revenue and pogroms by neighboring Islamic Kurds or Circassians aiming to settle land disputes by force.

Blanchot, especially, reminds us that as inhabitants or occupants of the everyday, we have “no more access to its confines” than to any moment in history “that could be historical.”¹² If this observation allows us to loop back to the absence of eventfulness in the everyday—driven by a sense, particularly in precapitalist societies, that such precincts have no beginning or end, unless its inhabitants are obliterated—we know that no event, however great, can produce the actualization of the everyday. Yet events, as signified by a moving “distant thunder,” can gradually overtake the precincts of everydayness. In this regard, the everyday stands apart from history, outside its eventfulness, yet strangely institutes it without knowing it has. By the same measure, history has been lifted to stand above the parochial rootedness of the everyday as its noisy eventfulness points to the spreading drama of world historical movement and meaning, where things of importance happen and begin to spill over into everydayness. Once occupying this register, history denies its relationship to the everyday and becomes a kind of “blind spot,” which opens the pathway to overcoming by a process of forceful elimination. In this regard, a French observer of the Armenian genocide, Etienne Copeaux, was probably close to the truth when he proposed that the mass murders were similar to cutting off legs and limbs.¹³ My difference with this is that what seemed to hold my attention is not the figure of imperial dismemberment the genocide most surely carried out but rather the wish to show that the event did not necessarily end one hundred years ago and has continued to persist as an afterlife in every present since the inaugural moment. For me, the issue was how to say something about everyday lives that no longer existed. In this regard, this desire derives from my own failure to raise certain questions with my parents while they were still alive. The heritage I wanted to unveil is the image of ordinary everyday life lived by Armenians until they were uprooted through mass acts of murder and destruction. It was this experience, not of the eventful history as such, that the diaspora has tried to recuperate in countless places the survivors have found refuge. This prior Anatolian everyday life has remained somewhat invisible down to the present, apart from its anecdotal existence recounted in Armenian households of the diaspora. In most cases, it was crowded out of the his-

torical accounts that concentrated on the larger narrative of World War I, Turkey's involvement in it, and the collapsing fortunes of a dysfunctional empire. In this world historical narrative of eventfulness, there was no room for any consideration of the everydayness lived by countless Armenians or indeed other oppressed minorities of the empire. There was no fund of ethnographic reports, and few contemporary descriptions of the lives led in Anatolia. There was little subsequent attempt to rescue this everyday life that had virtually disappeared, and most intellectual energy was, and still is, poured into providing historical evidence of Turkey's direct initiative and involvement in the massacre as a product of the circumstances of World War I.

Not too many years ago, on a trip to Istanbul, I met and spoke with a number of Turkish anthropologists who asked where I came from, as if I were the man who fell to Earth. What they wanted to know was how my parents managed to escape and what their lives were like. I had the sense that none seemed to have much interest or ethnographic knowledge of Anatolia's murdered minorities: the Armenians, Greeks, Assyro-Chaldeans. At the time, I felt that it was almost as if they were persuaded that Armenians were an invention of diasporas, that the migration experience conferred upon them their identity, which originated elsewhere but not in Anatolia. I may have been too quick in refusing to take a trip to explore the possibility that documents related to my father's family still existed in Harput, but I still should have taken the offer to see the region in which he lived his early life.

In the end, finding a way to construct this cloaked everyday life, whose pale and often abstracted contour appeared in diaspora life, left little choice other than to reimagine it. Through the exercise of an imaginary recomposing of the memory of our parents' lives, not by means of empathic entry presuming the possibility of standing in one's place, or shoes, as hermeneutics believed conceivable, I thought it might be feasible to construct and memorialize at the same time. It is probable that this pathway of imagined recomposing is also accessible through an act of Socratic anamnesis, the rediscovery of a knowledge of the past that is within us. This would entail a form of self-excavation, digging out what we might know or has been embedded there all the time, without actually knowing it. The Dutch psychoanalyst and historian Eelco Runia suggests a similar perspective for performing a personal archaeological procedure when he advises digging into the present for the presence of the past, which coexists but remains unseen like Poe's "purloined letter," or hidden, perhaps closer

to the psychoanalytic model than the Socratic method.¹⁴ But this book's epigraph from the poet Osip Mandelstam suggests memory is about the slightest hint of recognition and growth.

The difficulty of a form of life writing that attempts to account for how my parents managed to evade a genocide and make their way to a new land was especially made evident even before I decided to undertake this project. I knew there simply was not enough material to work with, given the absence of the most basic facts they may have made known to us in daily life as we were growing up. But there were other reasons for my reluctance. It was not a subject I had ever thought about researching and writing on. As a historian, I had made a prior decision to specialize in another region of history. I had no ambition to try writing another history of the collapsing Ottoman Empire and the genocide. Apart from lacking the necessary qualifications such an undertaking requires, I was convinced that such histories reveal very little about the lives of the victims, apart from discounting them. Their existence was already outside the narrative histories and their deaths erased as instances of collateral damage resulting from World War I.

In terms of genres, I had never been an enthusiastic reader of biography, which I always saw as a fictional form that moved according to the coordinates of an orderly linear trajectory, as if anybody's life were organized so conveniently.¹⁵ How could precapitalist Anatolian peasants be grasped within a culturally specific and temporally bound framework steeped in the formation of a specific subjectivity? Worse still, biography was usually a favored form among historians, especially, to get at the microscopic dimension of the larger history. Most biographies invariably try to address a larger subject or event or temporal referent as if the individual life will, in some metonymically magical way rarely explained, illuminate it. The usual result is to displace the very event the biography supposedly illustrates. Acts of biographical enshrinement are often misrecognized as prescient illuminations. The perspective that seeks in a biography the key to the larger contours of historical events and currents attempts to account for the relationship between the world historical level of eventfulness and a missing mundane everyday, marked by repetitive routine events, without actually articulating the connection. While Pierre Bourdieu dismissed biography as ideologizing a life, Jean-Paul Sartre discounted the genre as a genetic fallacy, but this was before he wrote his interminable account of Gustave Flaubert.¹⁶

Hence, all that seemed reasonably promising was an effort to record

those lived aspects of our parents' lives that we (my sisters and me) were still able to recall, long after the catastrophic event brought them eventually to the U.S., carrying unwanted memories and experiences they had decided not to share with their children. Such an approach would require moving backward from what had experienced and seen, without fully understanding, to imagine the negative imprint of a memory of their earlier life and experience—its presence in the present time. Under such circumstances, it was necessary for me to assume the fictive figure of an uninvited intruder in their thoughts and try to probe and pry them loose from their silent confinement, or imagine what they might have been, where they had been deposited for so long. This tactic comes close to Antonio Gramsci's observation that sediments and traces of a historical process are deposited in each individual, without leaving a fixed inventory. Such an approach, lacking an account of the stock, would have to look for the fragmentary signs in the thick displacements employed to conceal tracks to locate where some residue might have been left. The things remembered relate to our parents' survival in the U.S. (not the genocide), a struggle involving my sisters and me that represented, in its own way, perhaps as great a challenge to staying alive as what they faced in the midst of massacre. It seems likely to assume that the earlier experience and fears the genocide engendered were always close to them in the new environment, as if it had become a form of second nature now serving a new function. In other words, the vague figure of the genocide was always present in and shadowing the new struggle to make a secure life in the U.S., not necessarily the burden of collective guilt for having been among the survivors. It never seemed to any of us that either our mother or our father was weighted down with unrelieved guilt, even though my father's loss of an entire extended family and home were inestimable. And, in reality, I never knew what he actually felt, what memories he cherished of his lost family and vigilantly watched over and how he managed to negotiate or navigate through depths of despair to continue living. I never asked these questions, or even knew how to ask them, much less envision how they might be answered. But these unasked and unanswered questions would provide the negative print of the silence both parents had embraced. Just as we were never persuaded that our parents internalized some form of collective trauma that inhibited them from speaking of the horror the rest of their lives, even though it might have been the case for individuals who had been in positions to provide direct testimony—people such as the priest Grigoris Balakian, who nonetheless recorded what he saw on his death march. Balakian himself

did not appear to be afflicted by trauma-induced paralysis but rather was driven by the necessity of staying alive, as if to provide later witness and testimony to the existence of what he knew would be denied again and again throughout the decades following the event. But it is undeniably true that the relationship of expressions of silence and a willingness to speak of trauma are not always clear-cut. Silence need not simply signify the presence of trauma, and the speech of a witness like Grigoris Balakian need not denote the absence of trauma. The gravity of our parents finding their way in American life would have taxed their collective energies and subsumed whatever guilt for surviving they may have harbored, and it assisted them to overcome whatever despair they must have experienced and endured. What they experienced separately when young seemed to have no place in a later life in an entirely different environment led together with children.

While the memoir's chapters seek to return and recompose experiences and memories of my parents at certain moments, in the manner of a photomontage without presuming causal relations, chapter 4, "History's Interruption: Dispossession and Genocide," is an attempt to show the direct relationship between massive theft and murder, what Karl Marx variously called "so-called primitive accumulation" or "original accumulation" (*ursprüngliche Akkumulation*) of capital. For Marx, primitive or original accumulation referred not to the moment of the movement of the actual process of the accumulation of capital as such, with the existence in place of the whole system of capitalist production, but rather "an accumulation which is not the result of the capitalist mode of production but its point of departure." The duration of such an accumulating process did not lead to the transition of a completed capitalism, as once believed by an older Marxism; instead, this process inaugurated the necessary presuppositions and conditions for the installation of a capitalist production program dedicated to the accumulation of surplus value. Marx saw such a time filled with "conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, mass rape, in short, force play(ing) the greatest part." Not a blissful time but "from the beginning . . . the sole means of enrichment, the methods of primitive accumulation are anything but idyllic."¹⁷ Thus, in Marx, primitive accumulation made visible the history of violence, bloodshed, and massive displacement of the population from its means of subsistence that ultimately accounted for capital's appearance. In *Grundrisse*, he referred to this event as the moment of separation and divorce of the producer from the means of production and subsistence. But primitive or original accumulation is not a one-time big-bang event but rather a process that is repetitive, tempo-

rally mixed in its different directions, and continuing in diverse times and places down to our own present. In fact, it is because “primitive accumulation” will occur repeatedly that there can be no singular transition as a linear trajectory leading directly to the outcome of a developed capitalism. In this way, it conforms only to a temporal moment, instead of a designated stage in the putative “transition” to capitalism. Transition, according to one historian, permits us to envision a “prolonged process of change” in societies in which capital accumulation coexists with received economic practices from prior modes of production and “political formations not yet . . . capitalist.”¹⁸ We are rightly warned that to see transition as a stage leading directly to capitalism assumes that the social process moves along a linear developmental path. Moreover, such a perspective encourages historians to emphasize socioeconomic forces that structured the development of capital but overlooks the actual consequences of the social process and what happens to the reproduction of society. In our case, this refers to the complete destruction of Armenian everyday life in Anatolia. What distinguishes the implementation of a genocidal impulse serving the interests of large-scale expropriation of wealth from others and theft facilitated by mass murder is the process that aims to eradicate the everyday lived by those targeted for elimination. I shall return to this theme of genocide and its relationship to its fateful social process and its transition to mass death.

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

NOTES

One. The Unrealized Everyday

1. Mikael Nichanian, *Détruire les Arméniens: Histoire d'un génocide* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2015), 7. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

2. Osip Mandelstam, *Journey to Armenia*, translated by Sidney Monas (London: Notting Hill Editions, 2011), 71.

3. The phrase *inventory of traces* is from Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 324. See also Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1994), 162; Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 25.

4. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 26, 353–54.

5. The full passage appears in Said, *Orientalism*, 354n16. *Quaderni del Carcere*, vol. 2, ed. Valentino Gerratana (Turin: Einaudi Editore, 1975), 1363.

6. I have found useful J. M. Coetzee's own views on this problem, even though it occurred to me that psychotherapist and novelist were talking past each other. See J. M. Coetzee and Arabella Kurtz, *The Good Story: Exchanges on Truth, Fiction and Psychotherapy* (New York: Penguin, 2015). My thanks to Nancy Armstrong for alerting me to this study.

7. Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* (London: Verso, 2015), 1–9.

8. The observations in this paragraph are from Professor Rey Chow, personal correspondence, June 15, 2017.

9. Maurice Blanchot, "Everyday Speech," translated by Susan Hanson, in "Everyday Life," ed. Alice J. Kaplan and Kristin Ross, special issue, *Yale French Studies*, no. 73 (1987): 12–15.

10. Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquietude*, trans. Richard Zenith (Riverdale-on-Hudson, NY: Sheep Meadow Press, 1996), 9–20.
11. Henri Lefebvre, “The Everyday and Everydayness,” in “Everyday Life,” ed. Alice Kaplan and Kristin Ross, *Yale French Studies* 73 (1987): 10; see also Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*, vol. 2, trans. by John Moore (London: Verso, 2002), 41–63.
12. Blanchot, “Everyday Speech,” 19–20, in “The Everyday,” ed. Kaplan and Ross, *Yale French Studies* 73 (1987): 19–20.
13. Etienne Copeaux, “Turkish Nationalism and the Invention of History,” Part 2, in *Repair: Armeno-Turkish Platform* (October 2016), <http://repairfuture.net/index.php/en/contact>, no pagination.
14. Eelco Runia, *Moved by the Past: Discontinuity and Historical Mutation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).
15. See Pierre Bourdieu, “The Biographical Illusion,” trans. Yves Winkin and Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz, in *Identity: A Reader*, ed. Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans, and Peter Redman (London: SAGE, 2004), 297–303; as well as Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Search for a Method*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Vintage, 1960), where Sartre puts into question biography as an instance of the “genetic fallacy.”
16. Sartre, *The Search for a Method*, 140–66.
17. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), 873–74.
18. Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2009), 62.

Two. Unnoticed Lives/Unanswered Questions

1. Carolyn Kay Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987).
2. Helen McCready Kearney, “American Images of the Middle East, 1824–1924: A Century of Apathy” (PhD diss., University of Rochester, 1975), 1–30.
3. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), 103.
4. Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).
5. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 141–45.
6. Enzo Traverso, *Le passé, modes d'emploi: Histoire, mémoire, politique* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2005), 21.
7. Traverso, *Le passé*, 21.
8. Marie-Aude Baronian has also seen representations of the Armenian genocide in the figure of the photomontage form. See Marie-Aude Baronian, *Mémoire et image: Regards sur la catastrophe arménienne* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 2013).