




# The Armenian Weekly

Home
Front Page
Commentary
Columns
Politics
Community
Feature
Youth
Calendar

About us
Contact us
Subscription

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 Print article

## AND THOSE WHO CONTINUED LIVING IN TURKEY AFTER 1915

By Arpine Konyalian Grenier

And Those Who Continued Living in Turkey After 1915 (Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, 2008) by Rubina Peroomian, the second of Peroomian's trilogy, is a timely treatise, well researched, revelatory and quite touching for any reader, Armenian, Turkish or other. It provides information and lays the groundwork for what, hopefully, is yet to come (perhaps already on the way)—an open ended evolution of the ethnic, cultural and socio-political identities of Armenians and Turks. An evolution that melts away the insistence, the maximizing and the minimizing on both sides, re-forming mindsets through a humanizing that focuses on the impermanence and insignificance of all things human, except the need to connect, just because. The first of the trilogy is a follow up to Peroomian's Literary Responses to Catastrophe: A Comparison of the Armenian and the Jewish Experience. According to the author, the last shall be on the historical memory of the Armenian Genocide in Soviet Armenian literature. Bibliography, index and a brief summary in Armenian follow the English text of this well articulated volume.

This volume is not about what happened but what happened after what happened—the interplay of historical memory and the political and psychological forces forging identity, the “lifelong compunction” for the compromise, the regret, the guilt, the “dialogue of the self with the collective past in the context of the present.” One’s exposure to post Genocide Turkish Armenian writers is a treat, especially to those who do not know much about the literary scene in Turkey after 1915. The parallels between documented fact and the written word, as well as their juxtapositions create art to life as in life to art relationships between the Diasporic and the Turks. The information gap between Turks and Armenians continues to narrow. The author’s words: metamorphosis, continued living, identity are integral to this process.

It is apparent that both Armenians and Turks have metamorphosed monolithically because of the Genocide, both suffering from unhealthy intergenerational connections, fear, shame, repression, survival angst. They share a trauma, differently. This trauma, further heightened by erasing, repressing or insisting on a collective memory of choice, has molded identity in such manner as to redeem and safeguard the self and create homogeneity. To create homogeneity is to avoid risk, while risk is in the very essence of life. No memorable art or literature can follow. Culture is in the demise. The soul is weeping.

Shattered souls, distorted outlook. The answer is neither silence nor clinging to an “over-determined sense of Armenianness” or Turkishness for that matter. Ah, the shades of grey we must embrace in identity and life. Peroomian’s work makes us think twice, thrice, no—more times. Clarities and awareness come from such good read. One contemplates to realign. Yes, “The brigade of the sturdy” (p.136) is heart-sinking. And yes, the dehumanization described in this work reminds one of similar practices depicted in Naomi Klein’s recent publication, The Shock Doctrine. One may think that not much has changed since the Yeghern of almost a hundred years ago. Yet, the author successfully “loosens the knot” between the personal and the collective experiences of all post Genocide Armenians: Christian, Islamized, hidden, other, as well as all Turks. Towards the end (p.172), Peroomian asks two questions, we answer. Yes, we can go forward with a new mindset; and no, it is not possible to let go of the memory of what happened. Here’s metamorphosis indeed, and continued living with renewed identity, facilitating dialogue.

Exclusion is a disease that hinders renewal, and Armenians do not want to be called "gavur" or "rejects of the sword" anymore than the Turks want to be proclaimed "murderers." We need to evolve to survive, and identity evolves through culture—the poetry of life—and the mutuality created thereof. A mutuality fostered through art, literature and music. Yes, Peroomian, "A new reality is in the making."

Arpine Konyalian Grenier's poetry and translations have appeared in numerous publications including Columbia Poetry Review, The Iowa Review, Parabola and Sulfur. Her work has been described as a mosaic of narrative that takes us out of our provincial concentration on American life to encompass broader social and geopolitical issues with a decidedly urban and postmodern sensibility. She lives in Tucson, Ariz.