Female Trauma and the Pursuit of Self in Fethiye Çetin's *My Grandmother*

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Abstract:
In 1915, the first genocide of the twentieth century was committed in the Ottoman Empire. Ever since, the Armenian Genocide has been denied by the Turkish government and excluded from Turkey's official historiography. Contemporary Turkish society has brought about the issue of so-called "leftovers of the sword", mostly female survivors of the genocide, who have been assimilated into Turkish society. Among the descendants of these survivors is human-right's activist and lawyer Fethiye Çetin. This article examines cross-generational, post-genocidal trauma transmission in the exemplary case of her memoir *My Grandmother*. Hypothesising that trauma can be overcome by means of narrative, this article focuses on the pursuit of self in the aftermath of traumatic experience.

"In life, as in this book, her first aim is to give voice to those whom history has silenced."

(Freely in Çetin xi)

1 Writing about genocide is always a highly political issue. In Fethiye Çetin's case, it is even a dangerous one. For nearly a whole century Turkey has not only been denying the Armenian Genocide, but actively prosecutes civilians who use the term to refer to the ethnic cleansing of 1915. The effect of this policy is the continuance of the genocide "on a psychological level" today (Boyajian in Voski Avakian 207), as it is preventing the development of a culture of remembrance.

2 In 2004, Çetin dared to publish her memoir in which she recounts the life of her grandmother, who – after decades of hiding – revealed herself to be an Armenian Christian with the name Heranush and not, as believed, a Turkish Muslim named Seher. Her grandmother is just one example of so-called "leftovers of the sword" (Bilefsky 2010), mostly female survivors who were saved from the death marches by Turks and Kurds. Although saved, these women were forced to assimilate into Turkish society. Giving up their identities as Armenians, some of the female survivors were forced to become servant girls in Turkish or Kurdish families or even prostitutes in order to survive. Heranush, Çetin's grandmother, who was torn from her mother's arms by a Turkish military officer during the death marches, became a servant girl, married a Turkish man and vanished from the surface of the Armenian post-genocidal narrative.

3 Why are these Armenian women of interest to a gender studies discourse? First and foremost because the execution of the genocide was clearly gendered. Derderian emphasises the gender-specific aspects of the Armenian case, stating that after the "murder of the

Armenian leadership and men of military age", women and children were sent on death marches in the Syrian deserts where they experienced "kidnapping, sex slavery" and in the case of women "forced re-marriage" (1). Turkey's policy of denial affects precisely and most severely exactly those survivors Çetin discusses in her memoir. Women, who did not and could not seek refuge abroad but were assimilated into Turkish culture, have been non-existent in diasporic narrative for decades and even suffered from discrimination among the Turkish as well as the Armenian communities. Derderian quotes an Armenian male genocide-survivor referring to the phenomenon of Armenian women marrying Turkish men:

> Now there are many Armenian women among the Turks. They were taken in and remained with them and bore their children. They are all Turkicized [sic] now—gone from our blood. The children don't know their identity, only their mothers do. . . […] Everyone used to look down and find it shameful when an Armenian married a Turk. (13)

4 The trauma of these women is not merely rooted in the physical experience of genocide since the psychological consequences of their loss of identity are tremendous, ultimately rendering their voices extinct in Armenian diasporic communities throughout the world. Çetin's memoir not only thematises these forgotten women but also targets an issue rarely talked about – the trauma of the women's descendants and therefore Çetin's own. I argue that the revelation of being partly Armenian causes a crisis of identity of successive generations which is traceable in the narrative of her memoir. Thus she writes about her grandmother's trauma "in the midst of [her own] trauma" (Caruth 8). Based on Narrative Psychology, I suggest that her narrativisation serves as a by means by which she can work through her trauma and retrospectively reconstruct her and her grandmother's disrupted identities.

5 By using a female focaliser and reconstructing the life of her grandmother, Çetin articulates a feminist statement. In her memoir, as this article will show, she manages to reconcile the image of the victimised female with a powerful and confident female matriarch. She creates through her narrative a way of overcoming the pain that these forgotten Armenian women, and herself, had and still have to endure. In an interview, she states: "When they recounted the truth of the past, it was always to other women, to female grandchildren, as only other women could really understand the pain" (in Ozinian 2012).

Female trauma and the fragmented self

6 Growing up a Muslim Turkish woman, Fethiye Çetin "was in a state of shock for a long time" (in Bilefsky 2010) when her grandmother revealed her secret of being an

Armenian genocide-survivor. For decades she was unable to articulate her confusion and shock since understanding and comprehending her grandmother's past proved to be a traumatic experience in itself. Trauma, as defined by Freud and rephrased by Caruth, refers to "a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" through an "event that […] is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness" (4). Çetin experiences precisely this wounding of her mind in one of her grandmother's storytelling sessions. In her memoir, she admits to being deeply disturbed and on the verge of a breakdown when she is confronted with recollections of the atrocities her grandmother had to endure: "It was hard to keep myself from running out into the streets to cry and scream. I would never have believed any of this, unless it was my grandmother telling me" (65). This extreme emotional conflict following the traumatic testimony of her grandmother is so severe that the recollections are not "available to consciousness" (Caruth 4). The traumatic revelations leading to the emotional turmoil are as follows: the confrontation with the genocide as factual, her Turkish identity denoting identification with the perpetrator, her ethnic background being partly Armenian and the atrocities committed during the genocide against the people she learns she partly belongs to.

7 Thus she is not only "on the receiving end of a traumatic testimonial" as Chahinian states in her review of the memoir (Chahinian 2008) but in Çetin's reaction we can read "the story of the way in which one's trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with an other, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound" (Caruth 8). The denotation of Caruth's statement is clear. In the experience of listening to the traumatic testimony of Çetin's grandmother, she herself suffers a trauma. Her grandmother's stories about genocide are so atrocious, she has to phrase her instantaneous reaction to them in a very figurative language, struggling with the inadequacy of words to describe the traumatic revelations her consciousness cannot process: "What she told me did not fit with anything I knew. It turned the known world on its head, smashing my values into a thousand pieces." (66)

8 Values are fundamental for the integrity of self. The relevations following her grandmother's testimony, however, lead to a disruption of Çetin's sense of self. They are arguably of such an extent that they might even be interpreted as reasons for a deconstruction of it. Judged from the perspective of Narrative Psychology, Michelle Crossley adopts Charles Taylor's definition of self in his essay *Introducing Narrative Psychology* as a notion which is intrinsically connected to temporality, interactions with others, and ultimately, morality. It is Taylor's main contention that concepts of self and morality are inextricably intertwined – we

are selves only in that certain issues matter for us. […] This connection between our sense of morality and sense of self, according to Taylor, means that one of our basic aspirations is the need to feel connected with what we see as 'good' or of crucial importance to us and our community. (3) In the case of Çetin, who identifies as a Turk, the revelations of her grandmother distort her perception of self due to a distorted view of her moral integrity. As a Turkish Muslim woman, she feels the guilt of the perpetrator. In an interview with *Weekly Zaman* she states:

> In fact, we were all perpetrators, perhaps no blood on our hands, but we hid things, we remained silent, we systematically denied. Anyone who was at all involved in these events, even those who might have carried off just one small glass to their home from Armenian houses that were looted, all of these people were partners in this. (In Ozinian 2012)

9 The paradox of being ethnically tied to the perpetrator and likewise ethically and ethnically tied to the victimised people causes a deep crisis of identity. Identifying with a nation, defining her*self* as an integrated part of a nation responsible for a genocide directed at parts of her family, smashes her "values into a thousand pieces" (66). Hence Çetin faces a dark chapter in Turkish history, she is unable to reconcile with her sense of morality, and ultimately with her sense of self. This causes an inner emotional turmoil she cannot overcome for the moment being:

> Whether my eyes were open or closed, certain images would not go away: the crowd huddled in the church courtyard, and especially the pupils of the children's eyes; the babies who'd been thrown in the water; the moment when Heranush was snatched from her mother's arms . . . and then, after seeing all these things, I would remember the poems I recited for national holidays […] 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. (66)

10 Her grandmother's stories cause a distortion, even a "crisis of self-perception", since an "external event occurs that clearly violates the preferred view of self" (Baumeister, Dale & Sommer 1082). Baumeister, Dale & Sommer argue that "it is necessary for the self to have some mechanism or process to defend itself against the threatening implications of this event" (1082). In the case of Turkish society, the defense mechanism applied was and still is the scapegoating of the Armenians – or in other words – a projection of guilt onto the people whose stories harm Turkey's "glorious past" (Çetin 66). In a *New York Times* interview, Çetin states that history books depict Armenians as "monsters or villains or enemies" in Turkish society (in Bilefsky 2010). She, however, cannot scapegoat the very people she knows her grandmother, and ultimately herself, to be a part of. Incapable of using a defense

mechanism to protect her self, she must feel the guilt of the perpetrator. In her memoirs, this sense of guilt is omnipresent. When she witnesses the funeral of her grandmother and her relatives are asked to give Heranush their last blessings, she is struck by guilt. She cannot stop herself and cries out: "'Let her give us her blessing,' I cried. 'May she forgive us – forgive you, forgive us, forgive us all'" (49). It is precisely in this outburst that we can identify the notion of trauma, a "story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in an attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (Caruth 4). Çetin, defying Turkey's policies of denial, is desperate to express the truth of genocide and consciously faces the truth, yet again, in her memoir.

11 But the self is, as stated by Taylor, also connected to what we consider to be "of crucial importance to us and our community" (in Crossley 3). Identifying as a Turkish Muslim, her insight into the factuality of the genocide is in stark contrast to the Turkish state's policy of denial. The dilemma of knowing a historical event to be true whereas the rest of her surroundings are in denial causes a tremendous internal struggle. Her grandmother's revelations are thus the catalyst for a traumatic event and consequently a disruption of identity, triggered by a disturbance of not solemnly her sense of morality but just as much of her sense of communal belonging.

12 Although Çetin identifies herself as a perpetrator in historical contexts, stating that "we were all perpetrators, […] we hid things, we remained silent, we systematically denied" (in Ozinian 2012), she at the same time experiences the painful consequences of genocide from the perspective of the victim. Torn between feeling the guilt of the perpetrator and the powerlessness and anger of the victim, her integrity of self cannot be preserved, leading to a contradiction in identity. In the course of events, we witness Çetin's attempt at overcoming the crisis of identity that has unraveled in her life due to her traumatic experience. In the following, a closer look will be taken at the nature of Çetin's trauma. For this purpose, the interrelatedness of the terms trauma of detachment and trauma of departure will be discussed. Understanding the notions of detachment and departure is essential to comprehending why Çetin writes – to put it into Caruth's words – "a history from within" (12).

Writing "a history from within" (Caruth 12)

13 Caruth sees history as a means by which an event can be retrospectively revisited and processed (cf. 12). Writing "a history from within" a traumatic experience thus can be understood as an encounter of an author, himself "in the midst of trauma", with past traumatic events (8). On the basis of this hypothesis, she analyses Freud's reinterpretation of

the Exodus story *Moses and Monotheism* as a story which reveals Freud's own trauma by comparing it to the circumstances in his present life. Drawing on her analysis, I argue that we can interpret Çetin's memoir likewise as a recount of trauma "in the midst of trauma" (8).

14 Caruth introduces the term "trauma of departure" (cf. 21) by juxtaposing her content analysis of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* with his life circumstances as he was writing the book, stating that due to his escape from Austria when the country was invaded by the Nazis, he suffered an unexpected trauma which he faces in his reinterpretation of the Exodus story. Hence she terms Freud's loss of home a "trauma of leaving, the trauma of verlassen" (21). And Freud himself acknowledges this loss which he thus processes in the narrative of his Exodus story. He interprets the Exodus from Egypt as a "story of departure" and not, as commonly understood, as a "story of return" to the lands of Canaan since the people of Israel never reached their destination and throughout their history remained the victims of religious persecution (14).

15 Departure is a very central term in her interpretation of the story and it cannot only be understood as a physical concept referring to Freud's departure from Vienna. Instead of merely referring to a physical distancing from a place, it is furthermore an implicit indication of a traumatised person, who stresses that in the departure from a traumatic event, he survived its deathly denotation. Caruth focuses on Freud's paradoxical evaluation of his enforced departure: "It forced me to leave my home, but it also freed me" (Freud in Caruth 20). The quote visualises that the departure, though traumatic because forced, prevented a much more threatening event in the form of the persecution by the Nazis. His statement of being forced but feeling freed is arguably a sign of stressing the ambivalence of departure – firstly as a physical concept denoting a kind of distancing but secondly as an acknowledgement of having survived a traumatic event, of being free and having departed from which could elicit even more pain.

16 This trauma of departure, in its ambivalent meaning of a physical as well as a psychological form, can also be identified in Çetin's memoir. Noticeably, Çetin's own mirrors her grandmother's. However, in Çetin's case, the trauma of departure comes in a different form. Instead of using the term trauma of departure, it would be more accurate to speak of a trauma of detachment. The terms departure and detachment both imply a kind of distancing from the familiar and from what is considered home. Çetin's detachment from herself, rooted in the perpetrator-victim conflict, is inherently connected with the process of distancing – departing – from the identity that is familiar. Likewise, Heranush's biography makes clear that she was not only physically forced to part with her mother and never

reunited with her (cf. Çetin 73), but also experienced a cultural alienation in the form of a departure from her own religion and identity. It is thus to be concluded that the trauma of departure is present in Çetin's life and reflected in the recount of her grandmother's trauma.

17 The ambivalence of departure as discussed in the case of Freud's paradox of being forced but feeling freed is also expressed in Heranush's traumatic testimony. Although little Heranush was forced to part with her mother, the most painful memory in Çetin's memoir, she then goes on to describe the garden the girls were brought to right after they had been kidnapped. In this recount, Heranush's wish to clarify that she survived the encounter with death and departed from it becomes apparent. She describes the garden in utopian and picturesque terms. It

> was brilliant green, like the gardens in our village. The trees were full of fruit. There was a stream passing through the middle of the garden and its water was crystal clear. […] They filled our stomachs with hot food, and they gave us permission to pick fruit from the trees. […] we played in the garden. We plucked pears and apples from the trees, drank the ice-cold water from the stream. (Çetin 65)

In the midst of a traumatic event, Heranush is stranded in a haven of beauty where the atrocious realities of genocide seem temporarily forgotten. Her language becomes almost lyrical and her words are melodic and harmonious. Particularly striking is the precision of Heranush's sensual recollection of the coldness of the water and the bright colours of the garden. Her description stresses this paradisian place, emphasising her departure from the traumatising event, and more precisely, her departure from death. The vivid pictures of fruit and water, the sincere simplicity of the garden in all its fecundity, construct not merely a haven of beauty but a picture of life. However, her memory of the garden is soon interrupted by the nightmarish memories of genocide, as she tries but fails to find her mother (cf. Çetin 65). However, being struck with full force by the horrific events of genocide, she experiences a short but striking moment of lightness and beauty. Although forced to leave her home, her mother's bosom and culture, she is feeling freed when she escapes the horror for a short moment.

18 The parallels between Çetin's and Caruth's interpretation of Freud are thus multifaceted. Conclusively, Çetin suffers a trauma of departure – more accurately a trauma of detachment – which she overcomes through narrative. Like Freud, Çetin writes a "history from within" traumatic experience (Caruth 12).

“Always in emergencies we invent narratives” (Broyard 21)

19 The pursuit of self, of resolving her contradiction in identity, is at the very core of Çetin’s story. As much as it is a story of trauma and pain it is also a story of reconciliation. The stories of her grandmother have confronted her with contradictories such as the perpetrator-victim conflict, evoking the imperative need of storytelling and narrative. Narrative can be seen as an “organizing principle for human action” which means “that the concept of narrative can be used to help account for the observation that human beings always seek to impose structure on the flow of experience” (Sabin in Crossley 3). The way in which Çetin chronicles her memoir serves to restructure the sequence of events with the clear intention of reconciling her inner conflict between the perpetrator and the victim, as well as her paradoxical perception of her grandmother as a victim and a matriarch. Thus, through her narrative she imposes a structure on her grandmother’s past and overcomes the trauma of genocide and its implications of death.

20 This is accomplished through a non-chronological plot which frames the storyline with two events that metaphorically mark the process of reconciliation. The starting point of Çetin’s story is her grandmother’s funeral, whereas the end point is marked by the eagerly awaited encounter with her grandmother’s relatives in America. But Çetin makes sure to give a second introduction to the story. The two chapters following the opening sequence deal with Heranush’s and Çetin’s earliest childhood memories. Thus death might be the starting point of the story but not the main theme of the memoir. Rather, death – the encounter with genocide – is seen as an obstacle that has to be overcome. This might be the reason why Çetin decided to fragment the funeral scene, scattering it throughout the whole memoir but not marking it as the end point (cf. Çetin 35, 49, 81). The fragmented funeral scene is framed by Çetin’s childhood stories, childhood stories of her grandmother and memories of their time spent together in her adulthood. These alternations as well as the reconciliation scene at the very end of the memoir, serve as a metaphorical overcoming of the deathly denotation of genocide which is depicted by Heranush’s funeral.

21 Divided between the positions of perpetrator and victim, of Turkish Muslim and Armenian Christian, the experience of confronting herself with the guilt of the perpetrator and the powerlessness of the victim is omnipresent and unsolved throughout the memoir and Çetin does not unite the strings of memories until the very end. Hence she “impose[s] structure on the flow of experience” (Sabin in Crossley 3) from a retrospective point of view. Visiting her family in America, Richard, a member of Çetin’s relatives, states:

> 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 out that you were part of our family but Turkish at the same time. Now I love all parts of this big family and I'm desperate to meet my other cousins. (Çetin 113)

Her long lost Armenian relative welcomes her into his family in spite of her Turkish nationality. As a consequence, Çetin can come to terms with the guilt of the perpetrator. In an interview with *Weekly Zaman* she states: "I was both Armenian and Turkish, with one side of me victim, the other side perpetrator. […] But this is not a role I wanted. I did not want to leave this load on my shoulders for later generations" (in Ozinian 2012).

22 This process of coming to terms with the perpetrator-victim conflict is not only dealt with in the reconciliation scene at the end of the memoir. Çetin marks the reconciliation between perpetrator and victim by stressing the importance of food and music in both cultures. Çetin states about growing up in her Turkish family: "There might not have been enough money to make ends meet, but there were two things never lacking. The first was love, the second was food" (17). When she gets to meet her grandmother's sister in America, she notes: "Like her older sister, Auntie Marge loved to cook and entertain visitors. We ate royally throughout our time together" (111). The culture of eating can even be associated with a certain kind of homecoming. Feeling detached from herself and her communal belonging, Çetin experiences in her aunt's home in America a hospitality that is very alike to that of her Turkish family. Thus, the importance of food serves as a metaphor for Çetin's accomplishment of overcoming the detachment from herself by finding the familiarity of food in an unfamiliar place.

23 Çetin finds a familiarity in her aunt's home due to food but also due to music. A specific song, "Hingalla" (Çetin 112), functions as a metaphorical instrument of mediation between perpetrator and victim. It occurs at the very beginning of the memoir and reoccurs yet again in the reconciliation scene at the end of it. In the earliest recollections of her grandmother's childhood, Çetin narrates

> Heranush was a child who learned fast, and she also had an ear for music. Because she loved to sing, her repertoire was growing, and she would also try to teach her sisters, brothers, and cousins. But there was one song she loved more than any other, and she would return to it as often as she could. (7)

It is this song Heranush sings when Çetin finds her Armenian-American family and announces to her that a reunion might be possible. Not long after Heranush's death, Çetin discovers the song to be Turkish as well as Armenian in a conversation with Aunt Marge.

Their instantaneous reaction to this discovery is that they begin to dance together in the kitchen.

24 The act of dancing together to a song which is rooted in Armenian and Turkish culture can be interpreted as another kind of homecoming. Çetin states in her memoir that her grandmother's parents used to dance together whenever they could: "Hovhannes and Isguhi loved to dance, and if there was a celebration in the village, they would be there; they would become one with the rhythm of the music and dance the halay for hours on end" (10). Thus dancing and music serve as a way of reconciling generations within the Turkish-Armenian family. Consequently, Çetin finds a possibility to overcome her trauma of detachment and embrace her roots in the encounter with her grandmother's Armenian family. This reunion is not only limited to her own finding of self, however, but serves as a way of carrying her grandmother's story to completion. Through her authorial competence and the restructuring of events, she marks her homecoming at the very end of the memoir. Rooted in Armenian and Turkish culture, she finally manages to find a home in both.

The implicit imperative of storytelling

25 The victim-perpetrator conflict, however, is not the most troublesome obstacle, as Çetin must face the paradoxical life of her grandmother in the most complicated fashion. In the encounter with her grandmother's fragmented identity, she faces tremendous hardship. She finds it impossible to get all the answers needed to truly comprehend her grandmother's double life. It is no surprise she asks herself: "So why, when it came to the question of her true identity, did she feel so helpless? Why could she not defend her identity, or the family into which she had been born?" (78). When she asks her grandmother why she did not convince her husband to let her visit her family in America, she answers: "How should I know?" Çetin recounts: "Whenever she did not want to explain something, whenever she wanted to avoid an argument, my grandmother would always give the same answer: 'How should I know?' Every time she said these words, it seemed to me that she was saying: 'You're right, I so longed to go; but I was helpless, so what could I do?'" (78).

26 Her grandmother's alleged helplessness is inexplicable to her, thus Çetin must reevaluate her perception of Heranush. As Chahinian states, "the author finds it difficult to reconcile the powerful and loving character of her grandmother with the story of a past full of suffering and loss" (Chahinian 2008). Aware of the impossibility of reconciling the strong woman Seher with the perceived genocide-victim Heranush, Çetin feels burdened. She must shoulder "the burden of the listener on the receiving end of a traumatic testimonial"

(Chahinian 2008) but feels powerless in the face of the cruelties of genocide. But the burden she shoulders cannot only be limited to

> the transference of pain. It also consists of the imperative to act upon receiving the story. As much as the survivor is compelled to tell, the listener is compelled to act. In Çetin's case, this imperative is mandated by her grandmother's specific request to be reunited with her Armenian family members living in America. (3)

I would like to suggest, however, that another implicit imperative can be identified. It is the request of her grandmother to have her story told. Caruth sees traumatic testimonials as a "plea by an other, who is asking to be seen and heard" and a "call by which the other commands us to awaken" (Caruth 9). Heranush's alienation from her own roots and ultimately, her incapability of carrying her own story to completion, demand from Çetin to resolve Heranush's contradiction in identity. From the perspective of an omniscient narrator, Çetin fills the gaps in the memory of her grandmother by reconstructing Heranush's history – moments of suffering and loss as well as moments of strength and power.

Retrospective empowerment: Reconciling the victim and the matriarch

27 It is remarkable how Çetin manages to reconstruct little Heranush's stories of pain and sorrow without reducing her entirely to her victimisation. By resituating her grandmother's genocide experience in her happy childhood, stressing her lively attitude, her ability to lead groups, to serve as a mentor to other children, Çetin learns that Heranush was not changed entirely by the genocide experience but maintained her strength and confidence. Little Heranush "was usually the one to start games; she was the leader, the one who showed the way, and the other children were happy to go along with her" (7). Çetin proceeds and recounts: "In this crowded and colourful multitude the clever, mature and responsible Heranush stood out, winning much admiration" (11). She thus manages to relativise the image of the victimised child and recognise her grandmother's strength in her perception of young Heranush. Hence, she can draw a line to her grandmother's strong character:

> The sections where Çetin recounts her childhood memories read like long dedications to her grandmother, in admiration of her strength, her outspokenness, her compassion, and her protectiveness of her grandchildren and their ambitions. Aside from her role as the matriarch within the familial household, Çetin presents her grandmother as a respected figure – guide, mentor, and mother for the larger community within the neighborhood. (Chahinian 2008)

28 This impression is given due to an abundance of stories referring to her grandmother's admirable qualities. Although Heranush was married to a Turkish man and living in a patriarchal system, she is still depicted as the only woman to confront the patriarch in the

household: “Then she told my grandfather, ‘Don’t bring that ignorant hoca’s idiotic words back into this house again.’ Having taken the matter in hand and silenced my grandfather, she then nodded for me to continue” (33). And even the Turkish patriarch, her husband, would call her “Sergeant Seher” due to her admirable resourcefulness when it came to solving problems (Çetin 25). Consequently, Çetin’s narrative renders visible that young Heranush is not merely a victim but a person who would remain strong and confident throughout her life.

29 Although Çetin perceives her grandmother to be a strong and powerful woman, she still has problems understanding why Heranush remained hidden and passive for such a long time: “So why, when it came to the question of her true identity, did she feel so helpless? Why could she not defend her identity, or the family into which she had been born? Why couldn’t she stand by her own wishes” (78). She assumes that her grandmother is helpless in the face of discrimination. However, it does not take long until she realises Heranush’s supposed powerlessness, if scrutinized in detail, is in fact the strength of a genocide survivor who tries to protect her family. Due to the discrimination of converts, as well as of so-called “convert’s spawns” (79) in the aftermath of the genocide, Heranush kept her Armenian identity a secret for a long time.

30 “Convert’s spawn” refers to the children of survivors who converted to Islam late in their lives. When Çetin’s mother tells the story of how neighbourhood children used to call them “convert’s spawn”, it is apparent how protective Heranush is of her children. Knowing that being partly Armenian could cause serious damage to her childrens’ lives, she “argued, reasoned, sometimes spoke sweetly, and sometimes lost her temper” to make the children stop using the term to refer to her children (79). Heranush knows she must hide her identity or otherwise, her children would face discrimination. Even the slightest mentioning of Heranush’s true identity could ruin life chances, since her son was refused at a military school due to the fact that Heranush’s birth certificate had the word “Muhtedi”, meaning convert, written on it. “When I asked my grandmother about the military school refusing my uncle, I noticed that she was still distressed about it. […] The pain hadn’t gone away” (80).

31 Hence Heranush did not die a victim but left her granddaughter a legacy of voicing and reconciling her disrupted self by reconstructing long lost memories and imposing a narrative structure on the chaos resulting from traumatic experience. However, Fethiye Çetin’s case is just one among many, since there are “by some estimates, as many as two million Turks who have at least one grandparent of Armenian extraction” (Freely in Çetin ix). The trauma of genocide survivors and their descendants, as exemplified by Fethiye Çetin and her grandmother, clearly establishes the imperative of genocide-recognition.

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