Istanbul Remembered: An Armenian Childhood

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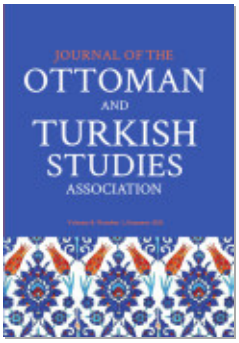

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ABSTRACT: Liji, as I have come to know her, told me she is content with her life. Anything she dreamt of achieving was always within her reach. Her silences told me otherwise. Her life story is one that both complements and contradicts the master narrative of the Turkish nation. In this essay, I explore her life story as she shared it with me one afternoon sitting in her summer flat on Büyükada. I have added quotes from her memoirs and used unique archival material to fill in some of the gaps, but I have left her silences be.

KEYWORDS: Istanbul, Armenian, Armenian Genocide, Modern Turkey, Women's History, Catholics in Turkey

Sometimes an essay begins with a conversation. With two women talking. Liji Pulcu Çizmeciyan was the upstairs neighbour of my auntie on Büyükada. "I am ninety years old," she told me looking down from her balcony. She sounded stern but the twinkle in her eye betrayed her. "If you want to talk about my book, hurry and come upstairs for tea and *kurabiye*."[1]

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Imagine writing your first book at ninety. At just this age, maybe a bit before, Liji Pulcu Çizmeciyan, a fan of Kemal Atatürk, a student of France's most revered nun, Sister Emmanuelle, a life-long reader of Proust, and arguably the only person alive to remember Pope John XXIII's ten-year stint in Istanbul, pulled out her old typewriter and started writing about *her* life in Istanbul.

It is now nearly 100 years since Liji was born and exactly ten years since *Lost Times in Istanbul* was first published. It is a strangely beautiful and complicated book. I suspect that some readers will find it a bit disappointing. For instance, if you were to turn to Liji's memoirs (as I initially did) to learn about

1. All translations from French, German, Italian, and Turkish are mine. For a fuller exploration of Liji's autobiography, see my essay about Liji in my forthcoming book *Reading Silences: Essays on Women, Memory, and War in Twentieth Century Turkey* (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2022).

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her thoughts on the Armenian genocide, you would be disappointed, for this history is mostly absent, as are her personal experiences of racial prejudice or discrimination. But you may think that this absence is what is most striking about her life story.

And yet in its own strange and unfamiliar way, it succeeds in giving us a clear answer to the question Jeremy F. Walton raises in his introduction to this volume. "There are images and symbols," Walton here quotes Orhan Pamuk, "that unify all cities—an urban silhouette is just such a symbol. There is also often a place, above the urban bustle itself, that unites a city, a place that everyone can see and through which everyone feels that they live in *that* city— but there is no such place in Istanbul." For Liji the answer is: What is Istanbul if not people who have made it?

Liji takes the long view. The long view is that in Turkey and in many other countries in the world, women have not had the vote for 100 years, or indeed for the ninety-seven years of Liji's life. As I write this, there are not many people still alive who have lived in Istanbul as long as Liji has. Ninety-seven years—that's one long life. Her memories of Istanbul are *memories shared in the first person*—one of the last surviving links to moments in our city's past that we will never be able relive again. We should not underestimate the importance these particular memories hold for us.

At a time when Armenian life has almost disappeared from Istanbul's streets, it is especially powerful to discover a voice like Liji's, describing her life as an Armenian in Istanbul—unapologetically claiming her place amidst its ruins and triumphs. And although, hers is not the only autobiography by an Istanbul Armenian, it is the only one by an Armenian woman. And the only one by a Catholic native of the city. Other first-hand accounts of Istanbul Armenians can be found in the works of oral historians, sociologists, anthropologists and artists, like Leyla Neyzi and Hranush Kharatyan-Araqelyan, Sossie Kasbarian, Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, Melissa Bilal, Talin Suciyan, Erdem Güven, Amy Mills, Helin Anahit and Silvina Der-Meguerditchian, who have interviewed Istanbul Armenians about their experiences of growing up Armenian in Turkey.[2] Reading and hearing such different first-hand accounts reminds us that each Armenian has a unique experience.

2. Leyla Neyzi and Hranush Kharatyan-Araqelyan, *Speaking to one another: personal memories of the past in Armenia and Turkey: wish they hadn't left* (Bonn, 2010); Sossie Kasbarian, "The Istanbul Armenians, Negotiating Coexistence," in *Post Ottoman Existence: Sharing Space in the Shadow of Conflict* edited by Rebecca Byrant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Lerna Ekmekcioglu, *Recovering Armenia* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2016); Melissa Bilal, "Lullabies and the memory of pain: Armenian women's remembrance of the past in Turkey," *Dialectical Anthropology* 43, no. 2 (2019): 185–206; Talin Suciyan, *The Armenians in modern Turkey: Post-genocide Society, Politics and History* (London: Bloomsbury,

Liji's unique experience is framed by her multiple identities of being Armenian and Catholic. But it is her being a woman that brings the book together. The paved roadway underneath her writing. If we consider what Tillie Olson once wrote of the relationship of circumstances (including class, color, sex; the times, climate into which one is born) to the creation of literature—and, indeed, the production of any kind of written narrative—Liji's memoir is a nearly impossible feat, forcing us to consider not only what was (written) but what might have been; what has been remembered and what has been forgotten.[3] To write, one must remember. And this is what Liji has done.

By the time Liji pulled out her typewriter and began typing, her previous ninety years had already covered the creation of two Bosphorus bridges connecting the European and Asian continents, women's suffrage, Turkish Christians and Jews deported to remote Anatolian labor camps in Aşkale, the 1955 Istanbul Pogroms, the rise of Turkish tea production, the subsequent invention of the Turkish tea glass (no publicity campaign was ever more successful!), and the call to prayer recited in Turkish instead of Arabic—all of which, and much more, she witnessed personally.

She was born Liji Pulcu in 1924 in Istanbul, a year after the founding of the Republic of Turkey. She would later learn that the caliphate was abolished the year she was born. The Hat Law of 1925, that discouraged veiling of women and removed the obvious visual differences between women of different faiths, was passed when she was still in her cradle. The new civil code ending Islamic polygamy and introducing civil marriage was introduced as she was taking her first steps. Liji was proud of her mother for taking the mandatory literacy course following the 1928 reform that replaced the Arabic script with the Latin alphabet. She was disappointed not to have Atatürk as her teacher—"What would I give to go to the school where the Gazi teaches on the blackboard"—but was excited to watch him talk "from Necmettin Molla's house" in Sariyer. "He talked; everything that I understood was that he loved us and that he worked for the nation."[4] Followıng her father's death, she would never return to his artist studio and design workshop in the historic *Hazza Pulo Pasajı* in the Beyoğlu district of Istanbul. She was heartbroken when she, her

2015); Erdem Güven, "Kuzguncuk as a village of mutual respect and harmony: Myth or reality?," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 10, no. 3 (2011): 365–382; Amy Mills, "The Place of Locality for Identity in the Nation: Minority Narratives of cosmopolitan Istanbul", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40, no. 3 (2008) 383–401; Helin Anahit as seen in https://www.depoistanbul.net/en/event/exhibition-where-fire-has-struck-an-exhibition-on-the-20th-anniversary-of-the-human-rights-foundation-of-turkey/; https://www.silvina-der-meguerditchian.de/

3. Tillie Olson, *Silences* (London, 1978), xv.

4. Liji Pulcu Çizmeciyan, *Istanbul'da Kayip Zamanlar* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2014), 4.

mother and her sister Irma left their wooden villa in Sariyer on the Bosphorus, but was happy in their small house at 233 Tavukçu Fethi Street in the Osmanbey neighbourhood of Istanbul—a house their father built before he met their mother. This all before she started school.

With school, her life transformed from something familiar and insular into an existence that felt expansive and more common. School was Notre Dame de Sion. The first ever school for girls in Turkey, founded in 1856 by a group of eleven adventurous travelling nuns from France. When Liji pulled out her typewriter in 2006 and started typing, the 150th anniversary of her beloved school was her writing prompt. Asked to contribute to the anniversary issue, she wrote all that she could remember from her school years. "I loved writing my memoir; it was as if I would live those memories again."[5] Then she wrote another page, and another, and another … thus beginning her life as a writer.

Remembering in the First Person

Fifty little girls, all of whom were from poor Christian families, either Greek or Armenian, were in the class room of *L'Ecole*, the small elementary school attached to and two doors down from Notre Dame de Sion, when the Belgian-born nun, Sœur Emmanuelle, entered with her much older assistant. Liji remembers her "as tall, wearing a narrow-pleated skirt, rosy faced, with blue eyes, and most probably blond."[6]

Sœur Emmanuelle had not been one of those typical candidates for a life of faith and service. She was born Madeleine Cinquin in 1908 in Brussels to a family of lingerie manufacturers. As a young woman during the Parisian *années folles*, she was torn between a craving for immediate pleasure, especially dancing into the night with nice-looking boys, and a union with God. But she became a nun by conviction: "My mother used to ask me, 'you want boys to like you, accept you, approve of you, surround you, and admire you? And when you become a nun …?' I told her: "For God, I will leave the pretty boys alone."[7] Being a nun gave her purpose, and, in her old age, a public profile and large fan base. Istanbul was a steppingstone for her later work:

> I taught in Istanbul for over twenty years. I was passionate about teaching and wanted to give these young girls the best of myself, to help them make the best of themselves. I often took them to the poorest neighborhoods of Istanbul. Opening their eyes to the world was essential for me. To show them the poverty around them was to encourage

5. Ibid., ix.

6. Çizmeciyan, *Istanbul'da Kayip Zamanlar*, 49.

7. Sœur Emmanuelle, Jacques Duquesne, "La souffrance, je ne lui trouve pas de qualités,"*J'ai 100 ans et je voudrais vous dire* . . . (Paris: Plone, 2008), Kindle Edition.

> them to act later, and to make them act. Now I realize that those long years in Istanbul have helped me a lot afterwards to work and live in the slums.[8]

At sixty-three, she would see the poverty in Cairo's slums and begin working among the Zabbaleen—the garbage collectors of the Ezbet El-Nakhl slum on the outskirts of Cairo. At an age when most others contemplate retirement, she began living among them, commencing the most important work of her life. She lived with them for over twenty-two years, earning her the title, "Cairo's Mother Theresa." It was then, she wrote Pope John Paul II defending the use of contraception, telling him about the slum-dwelling Egyptian girls she knew who, "were marrying as young as 11 or 12 and having babies every ten months losing, on average, half of their babies."[9]

Seventy-six years after Sœur Emmanuelle stepped into the classroom where she met her first class of first and second graders, Liji among them, she sat down in her room in the peaceful retirement home run by her order, the Congregation of Our Lady (Notre-Dame) of Sion, in Callian, a medieval village in the South of France between Montauroux and Fayence, and started dictating her memoirs to Jacques Dufresne. In the same year, across the Mediterranean, Liji sat down in her little summer flat on Büyükada, an island off the coast of Istanbul in the Marmara Sea, and started writing her own memoir—at the same table where we were now sitting and drinking tea. Two women, one ninety-seven the other eighty-two. Perhaps some things take living long enough to write about, and longer even to forget.

When Sœur Emmanuelle came to Istanbul age 22, she had been a nun for only a year:

> As a young nun, I was sent from Paris to Turkey, I went there with my cross, full of ardor: I was obviously going to conquer all of Turkey! …our congregation had two schools in Istanbul, one for the poor children of the neighborhood, the other was attended by the children from upscale families, daughters of ministers. The greatest men in the country. However, the day before the start of the school year, when I was about to make my debut as a teacher, the Superior called me into her office. I see this scene in front of me again. She said to me: 'My little Emmanuelle - she spoke to me like that - tomorrow, you will have in front of you students among whom there will be a few Catholics, very few in number, the same for Protestants, Orthodox, Jews, but above all, there will be Muslim girls, in fairly large numbers. Well, you should never tell them specifically about Jesus Christ! . . . These girls will not be yours. Their religion is not up to you. You must respect their faith, that of their parents, deeply. Many parents trust us on this, giving us their daughters for years to come because they are

8. Ibid., "Obéir à des ordres raisonnables," Kindle Edition.
9. Ibid., "Le monde est difficile pour les femmes," Kindle Edition.

> sure we will not try to convert them. In fact, as soon as the first missionaries left for other continents, Rome emphasized this rule: Children do not belong to missionaries.[10]

Her debut in the classroom that day was a disaster. "I was too inexperienced, too giggly." But she got better at it, she wrote: "While learning how to teach, I made up my classes with dance and song … I would plunge a doll into a bowl of water and soap it vigorously, and then I comb her hair. 'Do you see how pretty she is now? Who will come tomorrow equally neat?' Small fingers were raised with enthusiasm amidst cries of joy …."[11] In her own book, Liji would write, "I started liking school a lot better when Sœur Emmanuelle brought the doll."[12]

Sœur Emmanuelle was inspirational. She taught for over twenty years in Istanbul—fourteen of them with Liji as a student. Her candor was her trademark.[13] And she certainly had opinions about Turkey. Of Atatürk she wrote, "That wonderful man had a terrible passion: alcohol. He drank every night to the point, it seems, of rolling under the table and being carried away by his servants."[14] But she also thought that he was a shrewd politician:

> During his lifetime, he decided to curb the influence the sheiks and imams had on the Turkish people. He could have had them killed but that would have made them martyrs …he could have had them thrown into prison but that would have made them heroes… But the Father of the Turks was clever. He simply took away their oriental prestige motive: their appearance. From 13 June 1935, a historical date for the Muslims of Turkey, everyone had to go out in civilian clothes. All religious attire was banned on the territory of the Republic![15]

She wrote how Atatürk made sure they would not be offended—his reason, she tells us, his adopted daughters went to their school. Hers is a rare account of what a Christian woman thought about the law that forbade the wearing of clerical dress outside places of worship:

> He took great care to reassure Mother Elvira: he was obliged to apply the law to everyone, but the sisters were urged not to abandon the country. We are in 1935.

10. Ibid., "L'éducation : aider quelqu'un à accoucher de lui-même," Kindle Edition.

11. Sœur Emmanuelle, *Confessions d'une religieuse* (Paris: Flamarion 2008), 69–70.

12. Çizmeciyan, *Istanbul'da Kayip Zamanlar*, 49.

13. In later life, she was known to support allowing clergy to marry, not to be fussed about homosexuality, and opposed those who lived lavishly—especially fellow Catholic clergy.

14. Sœur Emmanuelle, *Confessions d›une religieuse*, 81–82. To learn more about the missionary impact on modern Turkey as a factor changing education, health and standards of living, see Hans-Lukas Kieser's excellent article "Mission as Factor of Change in Turkey (Nineteenth to first half of Twentieth century)," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 13, no. 4 (2002): 391–410.

15. Sœur Emmanuelle, *Confessions d'une religieuse*, 81–82.

> Never, really never, did we ever meet nuns without the cornette. … Paris was scandalized at the thought of us wearing civilian clothes. … Mother Elvira decided to fight … and asked our cardinal protector in Rome for advice. This venerable man could not understand why one would close a prosperous business for this or that type of frock. A victory for Mother Elvira, one that Paris matched with a formal order: 'Do not give in to vanity!' Now, the big problem: how to re-dress 60 women aged from 25 to 65 without worrying about the fashion of the day and inventing for each a different (obliging to laicity!) and modest (to reassure our congregation!) outfit. … The result was, let's say, satisfactory. … Each of us looked funnier than the next.[16]

"I felt embarrassed when I saw them," Liji writes in her book with a mixture of concern, bewilderment and schadenfreude, "but the Sisters adapted pretty quickly. In the summer, they were even wearing these pleated skirts and robes, now they are walking around in skirts and with blouses".[17]

Eighty-one years later, as Liji sat typing these lines/sentences, across the city, an older student friend of mine was not able to start her position as research assistant at our university because she wore a headscarf, and other friends of mine wore hats and wigs to class to cover their hair. Liji never fully understood the severity of the law—the nuns had shown admirable pragmatism and flexibility in how they responded to it. This practical attitude Liji would later bring to the challenges of her own life. In accepting the law, it was as if the nuns put Turkey first. The law which had tried to curb religious influence on public life had also demonstrated that religion was not up for discussion, played for favors, there to divide.

Religion in the modern world—such as it was in a country reeling from its past, in a city that by definition is divided—is like a negotiation for the unknown land that is the future. And there was probably no one who understood this better than Monsignor Angelo Roncalli, future Pope John XXIII, who was the Apostolic Delegate in Greece and Turkey from 1935 until 1944. Scenes of his life in Istanbul reveal a man both humble and practical, good and full-hearted.

Imagine starting a new job in a new country, one that you have only visited once or twice before, and being told your work attire is now illegal. There was something in Roncalli that would not give up easily. A priest is, after all, a teacher. He was one who taught by example. "Even the trial of having to wear civilian attire has been accepted with resignation by all my clergy. I must, however, always set an example, with proper dignity and edifying behaviour," Roncalli wrote in his diary in December 1935.[18] "His waistcoat was too small

16. Ibid.

17. Çizmeciyan, *Istanbul'da Kayip Zamanlar*, 64.

18. Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, "Spiritual Exercises in Istanbul 15–22 December, 1935, with my priests," as published in, Pope John XXIII, *Journal of a Soul* (London: Image, 1999), 226.

and too short," Sœur Emmanuelle wrote. "He looked like any badly dressed overweight man in the neighborhood," Liji remembered. Both agreed that he looked funny. But a funny man is better than a serious one. Humor, that space where one can both laugh and cry, where tears don't discriminate.

Having lived in Bulgaria—in the East as he described it—for a decade before coming to Turkey, Roncalli knew what it meant to live as a Catholic elsewhere. His predecessor, the stern Carlo Margotti, left him with a difficult legacy: many Catholic schools had been closed by the Turkish government in the years prior to his arrival. In 1924, just one year after the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, and the year Liji was born, forty French schools and two Italian schools were closed in Istanbul alone. They were suspected of representing the national interests of France and Italy, two powers that had, together with Great Britain, occupied Istanbul after World War I.[19]

But Roncalli brought a human touch to his job as the new Vatican representative to Turkey.[20] On the day of his arrival, he dropped in on Muhittin Üstündağ, governor of Istanbul, and they ended up drinking rakı together on a terrace overlooking the Bosphorus. A year after his arrival in Istanbul, he made a decision that endeared him to many people in Turkey: he introduced the use of the Turkish language in worship and in official Church correspondence.[21] The Catholic community responded with indignation, Liji remembered:

> The old people did not like it at all. Those who did not like it were the Levantines, who only spoke a bit of Turkish. Some even left the church during service. … They were born and grew up in Istanbul but never learned to speak Turkish properly. The church would usually empty before the sermon began. How could they have known that the bishop would later become Pope John XXIII …?.[22]

19. Even the most cursory look at the headlines of Turkish newspapers of the day will substantiate this claim. For a selection of relevant newspaper articles, see: Ayten Sezer, *Atatürk döneminde yabancı okullar*, 22. For a contemporary newspaper article on this subject in English see, for example, "Schools in Turkey close," *New York Times*, April 10, 1924.

20. Rinaldo Marmara, *İki Dünyanın Buluşma Noktası İstanbul - İncontro Di Due Mondi* (Istanbul: Şişli Belediyesi, 2011), 42–43.

21. Roncalli started holding his sermons (or parts of it) in Turkish from Christmas 1936 onward. He understood this as "a symbolic gesture" toward the Turkish people and regime. See Alberto Melloni, "Introduzione," *La Predicazione a Istanbul: Omelie, Discorsi e Note Pastorali (1935–1944)* (Florence: Olshki, 1993)14.

22. Liji writes that holding sermons in Turkish was a "novelty" introduced by Roncalli (Çizemciyan, 59). To my knowledge, the Friends' Armenian Mission, which operated in Istanbul from 1885 to 1922 under the guardianship of the Quaker woman A.M. Burgess, was another church in Istanbul that held worship meetings in both Armenian *and* Turkish. See: Edward Annett (1939), *Fifty Years Among the Armenians, A Brief Record of the work of Ann Mary Burgess*, p. 10ff, Ann Burgess Papers, Friends House Library London, MSS 1030; and Maud A.E.

"Words move but examples draw," Roncalli wrote from Istanbul, a city he loved and learned from:

> Every evening from the window of my room, here in the Residence of the Jesuit Fathers, I see an assemblage of boats on the Bosphorus; they come round from the Golden Horn in the tens and hundreds; they gather at a given rendezvous and then they light up, some more brilliantly than others, offering a most impressive spectacle of colors and lights. I thought it was a festival on the sea for bairam, which occurs just about now. But it is the organized fleet fishing for bonito, large fish which are said to come from far away in the Black Sea. These lights glow all night and one can hear the cheerful voices of the fishermen. I find the sight very moving. The other night, towards one o'clock, it was pouring with rain but the fishermen were still there, undeterred from their heavy toil. Oh how ashamed we should feel, we priests, "fishers of men", before such an example![23]

He always regretted not doing more. "Above all," he wrote, "I wish to continue always to render good for evil."[24] Such wishing is commitment, sacrifice, a way of being that leads to sainthood. "It is with respect to his work in Turkey," Hannah Arendt wrote in her tribute to him:

> Where, during the war, he came into contact with Jewish organizations (and, in one instance, prevented the Turkish government from shipping back to Germany some hundred Jewish children who had escaped from Nazi-occupied Europe) that he later raised one of the very rare serious reproaches against himself—for all "examinations of conscience" notwithstanding, he was not at all given to self-criticism. "Could I not," he wrote, "should I not, have done more, have made a more decided effort and gone against the inclinations of my nature? Did the search for calm and peace, which I considered to be more in harmony with the Lord's spirit, not perhaps mask a certain unwillingness to take up the sword?" At this time, however, he had permitted himself but one outburst. Upon the outbreak of the war with Russia, he was approached by the German Ambassador, Franz von Papen, who asked him to use his influence in Rome for outspoken support of Germany by the Pope. "And what shall I say about the millions of Jews your countrymen are murdering in Poland and in Germany?" This was in 1941, when the great massacre had just begun.[25]

He was tasked with the responsibility of protecting the interests of a small Roman Catholic community of about twenty thousand Catholics in a coun-

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Rowntree (1917), "In the City of the Sultan,"; and cited in *Friends' Armenian Mission Constantinople Report 1917*, Yale University Divinity School, Call No: Bdcl F 93, 6.

23. Roncalli, "Retreat, 12-18 November, 1939, Istanbul, in the Residence of the Jesuit Gathers Ayas of Pasa, 'Sacred Heart' Thoughts and Intentions," *Journal of a Soul*, 234.

24. Ibid., 228.

25. Hannah Arendt, "Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli: A Christian on St. Peter's Chair from 1958 to 1963," *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 62.

try overwhelmingly Muslim.[26] Because he was in Istanbul, because the last escape route out of Nazi-occupied Europe led through the Balkans via Istanbul, because he had lived in Bulgaria and had good contacts to state and church leaders in the Balkans, and because Turkey was officially neutral until 1944 (although tilted toward Nazi Germany), a wide number of people began to know and to discuss the fact that Roncalli helped Jews. Liji told me that everyone knew that Roncalli was helping Jews and that there was much commotion in the papal residence, which was just a few streets down from their school—a building she passed every day.

Sixty years later, as Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, the firstborn son of a farming family from Sotto il Monte, became Saint John XXIII**,** Istanbul was again, at best, just a pass-through for refugees, and I had become somehow involved. This time, the movement was from the East to the West …

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There is a line in Susan Howe's book, *That This*, that I love: "History intersects with unanswered questions while life possesses us."[27] As I write this, a little package arrives in the mail. "I have written a book about my journey from Damascus, Beirut, Istanbul, to Tranås Kyarn. I have dedicated this book to you." My simple gesture (a letter) to Fajr Yacoub all of these years ago found its embrace in four simple words: to Suzan Meryem Rosita. It made me think of all the delicate threads by which a life hangs. Mine, yours, ours.

When I began writing this essay, I soon found I had little to go on. I had Liji's book, a handful of notes of her stories about Soeur Emmanuelle and Papa Roncalli, but almost more questions than I had answers. Had I ever planned to find the answers? I did not know. Liji told me very little about herself during our afternoon together. I had asked even less. My questions had felt intrusive, inappropriate, and unfair. Adrienne Rich has a poem about that: "This was the silence I wanted to break in you/I had questions but you would not answer/ I had answers but you could not use them/This is useless to you and perhaps others." Rich had written "there was enough pain there."[28] Or had I just been

26. In a lecture delivered at Bergama University in 1936, Roncalli says that while there were 20,000 Catholics after the war, during his time there were only 6,000 Catholics left. "I am not talking about the Armenians … but the Latins: the Italians, the French, …." Angelo G. Roncalli, "Chiesa Cattolica e Oriente", Bergama University, 24 September 1936. As cited in Angelo G. Roncalli, *La Predicazione a Istanbul: Omelie, Discorsi e Note Pastorali (1935–1944)*, 94. Also see Massimo Faggioli, *John XXIII: The Medicine of Mercy* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 2014), 69ff.

27. Susan Howe, *That This* (New York: New Directions 2010), 19.

28. Adrienne Rich, "Cartographies of Silence" in *The Fact of a Doorframe: Selected Poems 1950–2001* (New York: Norton & Company 2002), 139–140.

comfortable with the silence that stood still between us? Something else Susan Howe wrote, "More and more I have the sense of being present at a point of absence where crossing centuries may prove to be like crossing languages. Soundwaves. It's the difference between one stillness and another stillness."[29] Can absence, I wonder, become a space for connection where we ask fewer questions but listen more? Can absence itself become a presence?

There is more in a child than any woman has been able to keep.[30] And memories are made and remade. I had loved Liji's return to childhood, I had loved her stories about Sœur Emmanuelle and Roncalli, and I was grateful that she took me along with her to an Istanbul I never got see. An Istanbul that has since vanished, a city that feels both more cosmopolitan and grander, yet also friendlier, with an intermingling of cultures that no longer was plausible in the modernized and streamlined city that I knew, in which public spaces are no longer ours and people go to bookstores not to buy books, but to drink American-style coffees and to charge their phones. Bidding me farewell, Liji told me she was content with her life. Anything she dreamt of achieving had always been within her reach. "Atatürk made it possible for us, you know. He helped women to get education."

But as I sat on the *ada vapuru*—the ferry that connects the Princes' Islands to the city—surrounded by people who, like me, had visited family and friends on the Islands and were now on their way back, I wondered what Liji had *not* told me. And I thought about what Liji had said about Atatürk. He had given a republic of little girls a new lease of life that started with education. Liji had gone to the same school as Atatürk's adopted daughters did:

> It was such a famous school that Atatürk enrolled his first adopted daughter Rukiye there. Apparently, he had said this: 'We will have schools like this.' …After Rukiye, he sent another one of his adopted daughters: Afet İnan.[31]

Now, as I put Liji's book to the side, I wonder whether Liji's life would have been different had she been a boy. The blurb on the back of her book begins with these sentences:

> *Istanbul'da Kayip Zamanlar* depicts Istanbul through the eyes of a little girl, almost the same age as the Republic. She watched Gazi Mustafa Kemal Pasha give a speech from the balcony of the Kocataş Villa. Later, this republican child studied at the same school as his adopted daughters.

29. Susan Howe, *That This*, 31.

30. Original quote: "There is more in a child than any man has been able to keep." Adapted from William Empson, "Alice in Wonderland: The Child as Swain," in *Literature and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Columbia University Press 1983).

31. Çizmeciyan, 122.

The narrative content immediately suggests itself. This is to be a book about a little girl whose life intersected with the birth of the Republic of Turkey and had seen Atatürk with her own eyes. A *republican child*. I am not sure the blurb would have worked for an Armenian boy. It was the women and girls adopted into the Atatürk household who, after all, became republican role models. The symbolism behind Atatürk's adoption of female orphans of various ethnic backgrounds is loud and clear. One of the many legacies of the Armenian genocide—a gendered genocide that allowed women and children to live—that still reverberates in our present. There were no boys or young men who held as much symbolic meaning for the making of modern Turkey as did Atatürk's six adopted daughters Rukiye, Nebile, Afet, Zehra, Sabiha, and Ülkü.

If the blurb on the back of Liji's book gives us an answer to some of the central questions in the history of modern Turkey: what are forms of identification and attachment enabled people "of Turkic, Kurdish, Albanian, Bosnian, Armenian, Bulgarian, Greek, Circassian, Georgian, Laz, Abkhazian, Arab and Iranian origin" to relate to Atatürk as the Father of the Turks? And what role did forgetting their own histories play in affirming their allegiance to Atatürk and to the Turkish nation? The pages inside tell the story how Liji came to identify herself in this liminal situation between remembering and forgetting, between speech and silence, and how she nevertheless found ways of telling her personal story.

And although Liji might be criticized for her unquestioning allegiance to Kemalist ideology—finding no fault in it—her life story complements but also contradicts the master narrative of the Turkish nation. It is a life that Rachel Blau du Plessis would call "both/and vision"[32] and Gloria Anzaldua and Mae Henderson would say, "speaks in tongues."[33] Liji's memoirs thus represent a particular triangulation between Kemalist prose, descriptive memoirs, and women history. And readers (may) detect a hidden sublime critique in her silence.

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32. Rachel Blau du Plessis, "For the Etruscans," in *Debating Texts: Readings in 20th Century Literary Theory and Method* edited by Rich Rylance (Toronto: Open University Press, 1987), 276.

33. Mae G. Henderson, "Speaking in tongues," in *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 119–138.