



Support to the Armenia-Turkey  
Normalisation Process  
European Union Initiative

# **NEGOTIATION OF DIFFERENCES IN THE SHARED URBAN SPACE**

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The brochure presents excerpts from the essays to be published in the book *Negotiation of Differences in the Shared Urban Space*. The book has been developing in the framework of the project sharing the same title.

The project “Negotiation of Differences in the Shared Urban Space” aimed at collaborative publication of essay collection that encompass various insights on the Armenians’ and Turks’ experiences of sharing common urban space, negotiating differences, striving to attain or seize space for representation of belonging, identity, history, power, etc. The essays discuss the negotiation of the differences in the shared urban space from the perspectives of architecture, urban planning, literature, musicology and travel experiences.



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**Nora N. Nercessian**

**DECODING FRAGMENTS, NEGOTIATING THE WHOLE**

After the visit to Zeytun, we had returned to Kahramanmaraş by early evening, my last evening in a place I had heard so much about as a young girl. I had asked Emin, my guide, to take us all to a nice restaurant for our last meal together. It would be my treat. He and Mehmet, the driver, had been wonderful companions. They picked me up just as it was getting dark. It was a perfect summer evening, as we drove on a road with a lake on one side and small hillocks on the other. Lights, like little stars, glittered from the summerhouses that sat on the hillocks.

“Do you see those houses?” Emil asked.

“Yes,” I said, “they look lovely.”

“They used to be your [meaning Armenians’] houses, Mrs. Nora,” he added, “but now

we live in them.”

I took another look at the glittering lights. I wondered who lived there now. Here we go again, I thought to myself. The houses I had seen in Zeytun that morning used to belong to Armenians, but not now. The summerhouses in Kahramanmaraş used to belong to Armenians, but no more. Some discovery in a single day!

A few short minutes later, Emin continued: “How do you feel, Mrs. Nora?” He asked.

“How do I feel about what, Emin?”

“You know, that those used to be your houses, and now we live in them.”

I was in no mood to get into a discussion on the issue. "Let's not talk about it, Emin," I said.

"But really, how do you feel?" he insisted.

He refused to give up. Trying to make light of things, I said: "You told me they belonged to us. So, next time I come, I'll collect rent from everyone who lives in those houses now, and with interest."

"Really?" He said, shocked, "You're joking, right?"

"Of course I'm joking, Emin. Let's just drop the subject. I mean it."

I thought that was the end of it. But Emin was persistent. He wanted to know my feelings.

"Let it go, Emin," I said again, "let's talk about something else."

He was quiet for a minute or two, but he had not given up. He turned around to face me, sitting in the back of the car.

"But truly, Mrs. Nora, I truly want to know how you feel."

He was earnest, genuine. He wasn't gloating or getting any pleasure from poking.

And he kept looking at me, waiting for my answer.

I finally gave in. "Emin," I began, "you've heard of Pablo Picasso, the artist, right?"

"Yes, of course," he said. "He is very famous."

"Well, then you know that one of Picasso's most famous paintings is his *Guernica*."

"Of course," said Emin, again, "I have seen it."

“So now picture in your mind the expansive scene in various hues and tones of overlapping black, gray and white, showing the willful devastation of all things living as they are deliberately targeted, again and again.”

Emin was conjuring up the painting in his mind. He nodded.

I continued: “There are many differing interpretations of *Guernica*, as you know, but everyone agrees that the painting shows the destruction of life and the agony of those trapped in a horrifying chaos. Now, picture in your mind, again, the left corner of the canvas, just under the figure of the bull. There is a woman there, holding the lifeless body of her baby in her arms. The baby’s head hangs down, limp; it is dead. The woman’s head is craned back unnaturally; her face is turned upwards, forever caught in

a moment of horror, her mouth wide open, frozen in an agonizing scream.”

Emin nodded.

“Emin,” I finished, “you want to know how I feel?” I feel like that woman. I scream, but I hear no sound. I cry, but there are no tears. Only disbelief.”

Kind, gentle Emin, was quiet now. He had turned back and was staring at the road. From a distance I could see the lights of the restaurant where we would be having our last supper. It was important to change the mood, I thought. The last few days had been surreal, and it was time to reenter the real world.

“What kind of food do they serve at the restaurant we’re going to,” I asked Emin, still looking for some light conversation.

“Oh, it’s traditional Marash food,” he said, “You’ll like it, Mrs. Nora.”

He was right. I ate with delight. The keofte tasted like my grandmother's, and it was heavenly. Emin was pleased.

“What’s the name of this restaurant, Emin?”

“Sultan Abdul Hamid,” he said, completely unaware of the fact that at the mere mention of that name my mind conjured up the corpses of half of my family killed in 1895, compliments of Sultan Abdul Hamid.

**Nora N. Nercessian** is a Ph.D in Art History, a retired professor at Harvard University.

**Ekin Can Göksoy**

**REMEMBRANCE OF PLACES PAST: PANGALTI ARMENIAN CEMETERY**

Urban space was, is and will be a battlefield. Urban space has always bear the traces of expropriation, privatization and loss and it has always been a subject for discussion, dispute and conflict. Gezi Protest has not been the first or will not be the last example of this conflictual nature. Gezi Park - the land covering the graves of the Armenian people - was seized and was used subsequently to gain an economic benefit. Later on, it became a park in an attempt to give it to the public. It was divided, sold and reduced to a small size. Buildings were constructed and destroyed on it. With all these interventions, the land somehow managed to stay constantly on the agenda. The story of this piece of land represents the Turkish Republic in a nutshell. Thus, the urban intervention and policies against non-Muslim minorities created a loss both in urban space and in collective memory. Maps demonstrate many examples of transformed spots and amended topographic names, which blanket the previous stories and affect the memories. At this point, we should perhaps ask again: is there any way that a common loss could link people from different times together? Can the loss of a place help us in establishing a sense of place?

In their Getty Institute talk entitled *“Balancing Continuity and Change”*, Knox and Vines (2011) speak of how developments in the contemporary life create a need for us to hold on to a sense of real space. Knox points out that, due to disembedding of social interactions through social networks, people have an increasing desire to hold on to real places and identities. These identities encompass the heritage. What Vines adds to this

argument in the same talk is crucial as well: the depression felt by people of the present day is, at least partly, linked with being unable to make a meaningful contribution and to alienate from where we live. If we are able to find a way to protect the places that our history, culture and all the stories we had are related to, we will have a chance of hanging on to a sense of place. In the face of these transformations, the lost fragments of history could help us to connect to a sense of place. By embracing what we have lost before, we can rely on a hope that the loss will (or may) not be forgotten in the future. With protests and every other method, we, as residents of the city, can contribute to shaping it. Pierre Nora (1989) says that our interest in places of memory starts at a particular historical moment. At this moment, we become aware of a break with the past, which is deeply linked with the sense that the memory has been torn. Gezi protests might be that moment for Pangaltı Armenian Cemetery. The statements on the cemetery during the protests show us that the defenders of an endangered urban space are able to connect themselves with a previous and similar loss.

It is impossible to bring back the Armenian cemetery. However, knowing that there was once a cemetery and uttering this very fact matters. It is impossible even to return to the actuality that d'Ostoya, Goad or even Pervititch maps suggest; however, it must not be forgotten that these maps correspond to some actuality that has been destroyed, has been made to forget, and distorted. The pieces of these maps can provide us with a shelter against the burdens of history.

**Ekin Can Göksoy** is a Ph. D. student in History in Boğaziçi University.

**Meltem Şafak**

**REMEMBERING COSMOPOLITAN ISTANBUL: GENDERED MEMORY OF SPACE**

I shed light on the commonalities and differences among the biographies of Zabel Yessayan, Halide Edip Adivar, and Hagop Mintzuri to understand the different models of their engagement with Istanbul. My findings revealed that the notion of gender united Zabel Yessayan and Halide Edip Adivar to write mostly about women and domestic life in their memoirs. Especially in the Ottoman context, gendered segregation became something to struggle with for both Zabel Yessayan and Halide Edip. They openly criticized the contemporary conditions of women and tried as well to educate them and to relieve their pains with their stories related to the own experiences of their readers. Gendered segregation also affected those writers' experiences of Istanbul, because Halide Edip and Zabel Yessayan were more focused on domestic places as they did not have enough access to the outside world until they reached a certain age, in contrast with Hagop Mintzuri. Female writers encountered the diverse nature of the city from their houses, unlike Mintzuri who focused on the relationships among men in the different neighborhoods of Istanbul. Mostly, he described the different parts of the city physically, demographically, and socially. For Mintzuri, it was impossible to talk about a home in Istanbul since his home, which he was attached to with the feeling of belonging, was destroyed during 1915.

All the memories of these three writers are united in referring to the diverse atmosphere of Istanbul; however, they perceive this diversity in various ways, which is directly related

to their own experiences. Being three contemporary Ottoman writers, they share the similar collective consciousness concerning the diversity of the Empire; however, as the space is shaped in the memory with some other elements, such as religion, language, gender, and class, their individual experiences let them perceive, remember, and interpret the same city quite differently. Although Yessayan and Mintzuri shared the same ethnic background, their engagements with the city were quite different. Yessayan was telling her memories with the feeling of longing for her neighborhood in Istanbul, while Mintzuri was doing the same for his village Armudan, as he was imprisoned in Istanbul after the loss of his family and home village. Even the concept of ‘the other’ changed in the narratives of these writers related to their own experiences. For Yessayan and Halide Edip the other refers to the people, who belong to different ethnic and religious communities, including the people who speak a language different from their own. For Mintzuri, “the other” was related to the urban-rural conflict, as he felt more belonging to his village Armudan than the city of Istanbul. He differentiated people living in Anatolia and Istanbul by their manner of speech, the clothing and eating habits, and he placed himself among the Anatolians. He considered himself a stranger in Istanbul. All in all, identities of these writers determine their engagements with the city of Istanbul. Sometimes the ethnic backgrounds unite these writers, and sometimes they are separated due to the gendered reasons, despite the same reasons uniting the two other writers.

**Meltem Şafak** is a PhD student and a teaching assistant in the Department of Comparative Literature, University of Georgia. She has graduated from Turkish Language and Literature Department at Bogazici University.

**Sona Mnatsakanyan**

**DEPICTION OF THE BOSPHORUS AND THE SEA OF MARMARA IN  
TURKISH AND CONSTANTINOPLE-ARMENIAN FICTION**

Why did I undertake the research on "fictional sea" in Constantinople-Armenian and Turkish literature, and what did it ultimately demonstrate? My initial hypothesis was that Turkish writers more often mention the waters surrounding Istanbul than their Armenian counterparts. Then the quest for difference in attitudes towards the same space, and its literary reflections among these two ethnicities followed suit. To quench my curiosity, I have brought together authors who, having lived in the same space, never met in the same language. So, I have made the sea their meeting place, beyond time and language. In this context, the sea has become the unifying territory. I also had to figure out, where the point of separation between these two fictions is. The artistic depiction of the Bosphorus and Marmara has become the main watershed between them. The Bosphorus is more often mentioned in Turkish fiction, and the Marmara - in Constantinople-Armenian one.

In Turkish fiction, the Bosphorus has become the metaphor of opposition/unity between East and West. The Sea of Marmara, as a geographical mediator between the West and East of Turkey, does not have metaphoric value in Turkish fiction. The reason is that Turkish writers create the narrative of their country with the city of Istanbul, and the latter's geography explains the symbolism. Turkish writers claim to speak about whole country by speaking about Istanbul.

In the same time, Constantinople-Armenian literature of the late 19th - early 20th centuries, while depicting

Constantinople/Istanbul, depicts the city itself, not the country. It is true that Constantinople was the administrative and cultural center for Western Armenians at the time; however, it was never perceived as either the center, or even a part of the Armenians' "national state." Those parts of the city were highlighted, where the life of the Armenian community was focused. Only these tiny "national islets" were perceived as homeland within the imperial city. And since the hotbeds of community life existed in the Eastern part of the city, where, parallel with (and, in some places, more than) the Bosphorus, the presence of the Marmara could be felt, the latter makes frequent appearance in local Armenian fiction. The same can be said about Constantinople-Armenian fiction of the post-Genocide period. Here, too, the Marmara's presence is quite distinct. However, the frequent motive of separation in post-Genocide fiction creates different symbols around the sea. Constantinople Armenians' summerhouse life in the islands, beyond its documentary base, becomes an allegoric device. The Sea of Marmara acquires the meaning of exit from the increasingly nationalistic city, liberation from social and national bonds.

Thus, those who live Istanbul "see" the Marmara, while the Bosphorus is a sight for those who stay.

**Sona Mnatsakanyan** is an instructor of Armenian Language and Literature at American University of Armenia. She is Ph.D candidate in comparative literature at Yerevan State University.

**Alyssa Mathias**

**SOUND, MEMORY, AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AT THE  
ARMENIAN GENOCIDE COMMEMORATION IN ISTANBUL**

Within the crowd gathered at the entrance to Istanbul's Istiklal Avenue, a small group of Armenian diaspora visitors were alarmed to hear shouts in the distance. They had come to Istanbul to join citizens of Turkey in commemorating one hundred years since over two hundred Armenian intellectuals had been deported from the city in advance of mass killings of Armenians, Assyrians, and Pontic Greeks further east. While the memorial event was held in accordance with municipal policies regarding public gatherings, it also posed a direct challenge to Turkey's official historiography by using the term genocide. Those coming to Istanbul for the first time got the sense that plenty the city's inhabitants agreed with the government line: just the day before, Istiklal Avenue was littered with pamphlets proclaiming the Armenian Genocide to be "an imperialist lie."

The shouts grew louder, not one or two impassioned voices, but a mass of people chanting in unison. Metallic screeching signaled that the police barricade had given way. Loud cheers. Whistling. More shouting. One Canadian-Armenian woman recounted how she'd listened in panic: "I'm actually going to encounter people who *strongly deny the genocide*. I'm actually going to come face to face with somebody like that."

But the marchers, it turned out, were not coming to counterprotest. They arrived with images of the deported intellectuals—signs proclaiming "հ ն ' ս է ս ք," "buradayız!" "we are here!" They came from Armenian, Turkish, Assyrian, Greek, Kurdish, and Alevi communities, and their speech, finally,

became audible as Turkish-language protest chants in support of solidarity and democratization.

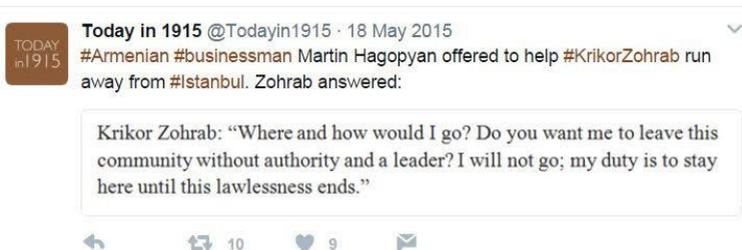
That moment has been recounted from Yerevan to Los Angeles to London as one—if not *the*—narrative of why Istanbul was an important place for Armenians to gather on April 24, 2015. A story of listening and misinterpretation is of course so much more. It reveals connections and disjunctures between Armenian communities worldwide, new possibilities for empathy and solidarity between the various peoples whose histories intersect through the legacy of 1915, and the ways in which Istanbul comes to be known via sensory experience informed by both memory and the political present. Through voicing protest, keeping silence, and listening to the plurality of sounds around them, diverse participants reimagined their relationships to the city and to each other.

**Alyssa Mathias** is a musician and Ph.D candidate in ethnomusicology at UCLA.

## Seda Shekoyan

### BAG OF ISTANBUL. *Catalogue*

Since April 2015, still living in Istanbul, I started following the English-language page "Today in 1915" of the Twitter microblog, launched and coordinated by Hrant Dink Foundation almost throughout 2015, until November. This social media platform was a unique chronicle, recording the days and events of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire, with one or more posts in a day, and sometimes with gaps of a number of days. The work on the page was absorbing. I read the posts with interest and shared them. For the first time, the topic of Armenian Genocide appeared to me from a completely new angle, that of everyday life, an everyday life with a digital dimension. On an ordinary summer day, you are scrolling your Twitter timeline and suddenly, you come across a post, from the distance of one hundred years, anonymous, fragmentary, saying everything and nothing, with the impossibility of telling apart fact and fiction – the most trustworthy station-repository that registers the memory.



An ordinary day in Yerevan, in 2015. You read on Twitter about this episode that took place a hundred years ago and you pass on to your work. Biography, memoirs, diaries, history and fiction

are all together. No source or reference – Twitter has no place for that – therefore the post sticks and stays as the most trustworthy station-repository that registers what happened. You feel, read and share.

We try by all means to collect and recover what happened to others, the memory of it, our experience, but for that endeavor we are in need of stations and pauses. The page "Today in 1915" was doing just that. The station-entries were sometimes linked together through the narrative storytelling, and sometimes seemed separate from one another. Among the succession of posts, the stories of individual characters, fates and journeys could be traced, such as the character and journey of the writer and politician Krikor Zohrab. The Twitter archive of the posts, together with the reviews and comments, is preserved, the page is still open and can be read in full.

The catalogue "Bag of Istanbul" is a journey across physical, mental, digital, geographical, and dream spaces that are often common, shared, and therefore social spaces. This journey also dwells on labels and references, some of which have an everyday nature, e.g. "bag of wit", "a person who has seen the world" and so on, some are literary, while others are reference-labels in themselves, such as Pamuk's statement about cats, which found its way into the text through the Internet, without my reading the novel. The literary reference as an everyday label. Yet another reference, the one from Dostoevsky's "The Idiot", originates from a film: therefore the references are annotated according to their origin. I am interested in the consequences of the movement (of site, space, and context) of these references.

**Seda Shekoyan** is a curator and writer. She studied history and theory of art at Yerevan State Academy of Fine Arts.

