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## Mulberry Affects

**Ecology, Memory, and Aesthetics on the Shores of the Tigris River in the Wake of Genocide**

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**ABSTRACT:** How can the Armenian genocide be considered in terms of its ecological roots and remnants? Umut Yıldırım explores the more-than-human flora and fauna indigenous to the banks of the Tigris river in Upper Mesopotamia — in particular, centenarian mulberry trees — as resistant roots that register the evidentiary ecologies of the Armenian genocide through the Turkish state's denialist present and its ongoing war against the Kurds.

**KEYWORDS:** Armenian genocide; Eco-redaction; Kurdistan; Kurdish movement; Mulberry trees; Resistant roots; Testimony; Tigris River

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# Mulberry Affects

## Ecology, Memory, and Aesthetics on the Shores of the Tigris River in the Wake of Genocide

UMUT YILDIRIM

### PRELUDE: IN THE SHADOWS

Imagine an ancient Middle Eastern city whose two popular names have been illegalized by a sovereign state. Disregard for aspects of the toponymical and demographic past is commonplace in colonialist and nationalist place naming practices, and the official name for the city of Diyarbakır in Turkey's Kurdistan, where I have been conducting fieldwork since 2004, is no exception. Suffice it to say that this official toponymy was the genocidal result of academic, bureaucratic, demographic, and military Turkification efforts on the part of government administrators and experts, as evidenced by the coining of the name by Turkish Republican elite in 1937.<sup>1</sup> In the province of Diyarbekir, rule had

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1 See Kerem Öktem, 'Incorporating the Time and Space of the Ethnic "Other": Nationalism and Space in Southeast Turkey in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *Nations and Nationalism*, 10.4 (2004), pp. 559–78 <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1354-5078.2004.00182.x>>.

been imposed through a series of pogroms, displacements, dispossessions, and resettlements that intensified in the nineteenth century and culminated in the 1915 genocide of Armenians by the Ottoman state.<sup>2</sup> Although the Republic's denialist naming practices effectively erased both Kurds' and non-Muslim non-Turkish peoples' existence and the violence Ottoman-cum-Republican elites and their various collaborators had perpetrated against them from the official map,<sup>3</sup> the toponymy of Diyarbakır continued to be haunted by its Armenian and Kurdish heritage.<sup>4</sup> The Western Armenian name of 'Dikranagerd' used during the Ottoman

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- 2 Fuat Dündar, *İttihat Ve Terakki'nin Müslümanları İskan Politikası (1913–1918)* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001); Fuat Dündar, *Modern Türkiye'nin Şifresi: İttihat Ve Terakki'nin Ethnisite Mühendisliği, 1913–1918* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2008); *Armenian Tigranakert/Diarbekir and Edessa/Urfa*, ed. by Richard G. Hovannisian (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2006); Joost Jongerden, *The Settlement Issue in Turkey and the Kurds: An Analysis of Spatial Policies, Modernity and War* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Joost Jongerden, 'Elite Encounters of a Violent Kind: Milli İbrahim Paşa, Ziya Gökalp and Political Struggle in Diyarbekir at the Turn of the 20th Century', in *Social Relations in Ottoman Diyarbekir, 1870-1915*, ed. by Joost Jongerden and Jelle Verheij (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 55–84; Raymond Kévorkian, *Le Génocide des Arméniens* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2006); Raymond Kévorkian and Paul Paboudjian, *Ermeniler: 1915 Öncesinde Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda*, trans. by Mayda Saris (Istanbul: Aras Yayıncılık, 2012); Vahé Tachjian, *Daily Life in the Abyss: Genocide Diaries, 1915–1918* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2017); Uğur Ümit Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Uğur Ümit Üngör and Mehmet Polatel, *Confiscation and Destruction: The Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Property* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011); Veli Yadırgı, *The Political Economy of the Kurds of Turkey: From the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
- 3 *Armenian Tigranakert/Diarbekir and Edessa/Urfa*, ed. by Hovannisian; Talin Suciyan, *The Armenians in Modern Turkey: Post-Genocide Society, Politics and History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016).
- 4 Adnan Çelik and Namık Kemal Dinç, *Yüz Yıllık Ah! Toplumsal Hafızanın İzinde: 1915 Diyarbekir* (İstanbul: İsmail Beşikçi Vakfı, 2015); Joost Jongerden, *The Settlement Issue in Turkey and the Kurds: An Analysis of Spatial Policies, Modernity and War* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Umut Yıldırım, 'Space, Loss and Resistance: A Haunted Pool-Map in South-

period was retained by the Armenian diaspora and in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia, while the Kurdish name of ‘Amed’, which references the Kurdish movement’s informal capital of Kurdistan, gained popularity in the 1990s during the escalating guerrilla war between the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, PKK) and successive Turkish governments.<sup>5</sup> As a contested toponymy, the name ‘Diyarbakır’ is a total eclipse. It structures the denialist post-genocide present by obscuring the nested yet layered nativity of Christians and non-Turkish Muslims to the land. In current debates over ancestral custodianship, land, and property claims, such eclipsing toponymy suggests that fieldwork in this genocidal geography of war should begin in the shadows by using an analytical radar attuned to the processes of redaction.

Not only has the dramatic and sedimented history of this genocidal city of seasoned rebellion piqued my concerns around an-archic justice, but the association of its ancient urban agricultural plots with ‘lungs’ has inspired my imagination to propose the idea of eco-redaction as an aesthetic manoeuvre for thinking with erasure so as to uncover ecological clusters of destruction and transformation.<sup>6</sup> In acknowledging Marc Nichanian’s observation that attempting to comprehend the genocide through reason, fact, and closure is a doomed endeavour predicated on its own collapse,<sup>7</sup> I ask a number of pointed theoretical, methodo-

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Eastern Turkey’, *Anthropological Theory*, 19.4 (2019), pp. 440–469. <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499618783130>>.

- 5 Although the city is popularly named Dikranagerd among Armenians, the precise location of Dikranagerd remains unknown. See *Armenian Tigranakert/Diarbekir and Edessa/Urfa*, ed. by Hovannisian.
- 6 Umut Yıldırım, ‘Resistant Breathing: Ruined and Decolonial Ecologies in a Middle Eastern Heritage Site’, *Current Anthropology*, forthcoming.
- 7 Marc Nichanian, *The Historiographic Perversion*, trans. by Gil Anidjar (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

logical, and empirical questions. How can the Armenian genocide be considered in terms of its ecological roots and remnants? How can we acknowledge the layered processes of destruction while also accounting for the resurgence of multispecies life in war-torn geographies shaped by genocidal erasure and ongoing genocide denialism?

Here, I pay attention to centenarian mulberry trees growing along the shores of the Tigris River, together with their younger companions scattered across perished sites, that have survived more than a hundred years of genocidal massacre and solitude and that still resist destruction by sporadic yet ongoing military sieges through low intensity war. Reading against the narrative arc of the Turkish state's sovereign archive, which continues to deny that the Armenian genocide ever occurred, could centenarian mulberry trees on the Tigris riverbank be conceptualized as an-archic archives, with the potential to literally and affectively root Christian nativity to land and counter settler denialism?

In underscoring sediments of violence as they have accumulated along the shores of the Tigris River, my intention is not to flatten out the complex layering of claims over what constitutes 'settling' and 'indigeneity' in Diyarbakır. Nuance in the question of commensurability over ancestral claims to land is particularly important given that some of the Muslims of various backgrounds and ethnicities who participated in the 1895 anti-Christian pogroms and the Armenian genocide were also native to the land. Historians and historical anthropologists have been attending to such complex, contested, and violently traversed layering. Moreover, two recent ethnographic works are particularly important to note here as they attend to such intra-communal relations and tensions in the genocidal wake. In their recent book, *The Century-Old Curse*, Adnan Çelik and Namık Kemal Dinç show, for instance, that while

villages, cities, landmarks, rivers, and provinces throughout northern Mesopotamia, particularly in Diyarbakır, have taken on almost mythical status as sites of scarred longing and ancestral pain within Armenian collective intergenerational memory, for Kurds, they have become sites that materialize Armenians' curses against Muslim perpetrators.<sup>8</sup> The writers show how, in the imaginary and vernacular of rural Kurds in Diyarbakır, Armenian curses were absorbed by those geological sites where massacres occurred beginning in the late nineteenth century, including wells, dens, caves, gorges, and streams. Çelik and Dinç argue that this morphing of the curse into geological forms points to rural Kurds' self-reflexivity vis-à-vis their ancestors' crimes in the genocidal past. Indeed, the Kurds themselves have suffered under the colonial rule of the Turkish state and have curses of their own marked on the landscape to be redirected to colonialists and their collaborators who orchestrated anti-Kurdish pogroms. My point here, though, is not to force equanimity on intercommunal convergences, tensions, and conflicts between Muslims and Christians. Here, I draw on Zerrin Özlem Biner's notion of 'ruined heritage' in which a repertoire of intersecting temporalities of ongoing state violence and dispossession in the aftermath of genocidal expropriation excites business interests and causes intra-communal conflict in the neighbouring multi-ethnic city of Mardin.<sup>9</sup> Bereft of historical memory, heritage becomes the conduit of an illusory existence, masking a continuum of destruction that further conditions legal and intracommunal conflicts over already expropriated lands.

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8 Adnan Çelik and Namık Kemal Dinç , *Yüz Yıllık Ah! Toplumsal Hafızanın İzinde: 1915 Diyarbakır* (İstanbul: İsmail Beşikçi Vakfı, 2015), p. 17.

9 Zerrin Özlem Biner, *States of Dispossession: Violence and Precarious Co-existence in Southeast Turkey* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), p. 42.

Hence, I propose here a methodological approach that is purposefully humble in its emphasis on incommensurable and tension-aware forms of political convergence against Turkish state-sovereign violence, rather than an exhaustive chronicling of historical claims. If bifurcated approaches to settler colonialism that neatly and statically partition the world into settlers and natives are mistaken, so too is a naïve equivalence between Kurdish and Armenian understandings of colonialism and emergent decolonial visions and paradigms. The advantage of centring more-than-human life conceptually within Armenian resurgent politics is that it enables us to reckon with the genocidal constitution and colonial management of supposedly feral, 'abandoned' ecological sites. Today's centenarian mulberry trees are literal and affective roots resisting the erasure, confiscation, and reappropriation of ecological life by colonial paradigms that have partitioned the world between Turkish sites of developmentalist zeal and heavily militarized Kurdish ancestral lands. Today's centenarians along the shores of the Tigris River open an imaginative horizon against genocide denialism by centring on more-than-human lives as an-archic indexes of the anti-Christian pogroms of 1895 that culminated in the genocide. Anarchy here means that 'abandonment', in its ecological form, should be explored rather than assumed.

#### AN-ARCHY IN THE ARCHIVE

Using an an-archic perspective, on the one hand I propose how considering omissions in Ottoman and Turkish archives constitutes the genocidal aftermath of the anti-Christian pogroms of 1895, which culminated in the Armenian genocide by obstructing a space for its reckoning, and thus enabling and recycling genocide denialism. On the

other hand, I propose how ecological resurgence pushes back against the logocentric hold of these archives. My attention here turns to Jacques Derrida, who by studying the etymological roots of the concept of archive drew a connection between the official prints of history, epistemic of rule, and structures of memory.<sup>10</sup> The Greek word *arkhē*, he notes, means both beginning and command, and links creation stories to government and law. Derrida informs us that the *arkheion*, or the archive, was originally ‘a house, a domicile, an address’, which was the residence of ‘the superior magistrates, the archons, the commanding officers.’<sup>11</sup> Originally, archons and magistrates governed these archives, maintaining the epistemic, legal, and affective parameters of homeliness for rights-bearing citizens, and providing franchises and entitlements to the privileged.

Violence is an integral part of this archival homemaking. As Derrida takes a pass at Freudian psychoanalysis, he entangles the Freudian primal drive toward aggression and elimination embodied in the death drive with an ‘archive destroying’<sup>12</sup> that provokes a collective amnesia by annihilating memory. Derrida bypasses the theoretical bottleneck of sovereign factuality that had jammed archival inquiries with problems they had created themselves in the first place. While the sovereign archons select, classify, order, and govern facts that build the house of citizenship, they also feverishly burn the house, so to speak, by erasing facts in order to escape responsibility for past atrocities, as well as future mass violence. It is, he notes, ‘in this house arrest, that archives take place.’<sup>13</sup>

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10 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

11 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 10.



Recently, Jodi Byrd analyzed the sovereign archive in a critical way that went beyond Derrida — that is, beyond the written word, demonstrating that archival destruction does not necessarily lead to passive forgetfulness and amnesia, but rather to an active dissociation from facts unsuitable for the maintenance of sovereignty, or ‘agnosia of colonialism.’<sup>14</sup> At its core, colonial agnosia reproduces archival destruction socially and affectively in the present by suspending issues around historical culpability and everyday complicity with such destruction. An agnosia about colonialism refers to the affective preference of staying in the dark about archival destruction. It is a socially and historically structured psychic investment in remaining ignorant of sovereign mass violence and its pulsing effects in the present. It is the disavowal, especially, of right-bearing citizens of sovereign and racial privilege, who invest in their own failure to comprehend mass violence as an ongoing relation that shapes political imagination and action within the constraints of sovereign facts. This type of investment prevents those who benefit most from colonialism from taking responsibility for the violence it perpetrates. Colonial agnosia is culpability and complicity historicized and temporalized.

Bringing Byrd’s elaborations on active dissociation to the ecological realm, I revisit the Greek root of the word archive, *arkhē*, which means ‘beginning, foundation, first place’, and derives from the verb *arkhō*, meaning ‘to begin, rule, govern.’ In tune with methodologies that re-route the Greek root as an-archy,<sup>15</sup> I hope to foreground more-than-

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14 Jodi Byrd, ‘Silence Will Fall: The Cultural Politics of Colonial Agnosia’ (unpublished manuscript, n. d.).

15 See Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2014); Jacques Rancière, ‘Ten Theses on Politics’, *Theory & Event*, 5.3 (2001); Simon Springer, *The Anarchist*

human life as a way of unsettling a sovereign perceptual design that renders massacres sites unthinkable and unrecognizable by denying the historical significance of genocidal processes, and thus naturalizing the ‘genocidal will’<sup>16</sup> that is embedded in official Ottoman and Turkish archives. This perceptual design reproduces the ecological parameters of the present-day Turkish order, including its supposedly feral, wild, abandoned sites. Turning this archival perceptual design into a problematic, the an-archic perspective seeks to forge an affinity between archival omissions and ecological resurgence in officially denied or unrecognized massacre sites by paying close attention to the more-than-human life that emerges despite the odds from such sites, and the land claims that such resurgence might complicate.

Here, I follow Lerna Ekmekçiöğlü’s lead in mobilizing an imaginative approach to restoring Armenian presence and visibility to land that would allow a transition from the denialist present in Turkey to a ‘utopian era’ of Armenian self-possession.<sup>17</sup> For Ekmekçiöğlü, in this imaginative utopian era, concrete naming practices, educational interventions, and commemorative efforts that go beyond a metaphorical de-linking from Turkish ‘institutional, intellectual, and political barriers to acknowledgement’ can restore Armenian nativity to the land.<sup>18</sup> As a political (and religious) minority scholar from Turkey well aware of, and

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*Roots of Geography: Toward Spatial Emancipation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016); Facundo Vega, ‘On Bad Weather: Heidegger, Arendt, and Political Beginnings’, in *Weathering: Ecologies of Exposure*, ed. by Christoph F. E. Holzhey and Arnd Wedemeyer, Cultural Inquiry, 17 (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2020), pp. 227–43 <[https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-17\\_11](https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-17_11)>.

16 Nichanian, *The Historiographic Perversion*.

17 Lerna Ekmekçiöğlü, ‘Of Dark Pasts and Pipe Dreams: The Turkish University’, *YILLIK: Annual of Istanbul Studies*, 3 (2021), pp. 185–93 <<https://doi.org/10.53979/yillik.2021.12>>.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 193.

at times complicit with, settlers' 'moves to innocence' that serve to assuage settler guilt in repatriation processes without working to redress the harm done to indigenous ways and forms of life,<sup>19</sup> I follow Ekmekçioğlu's lead by envisioning an an-archic approach that contributes to utopian restorative projects centred on the repatriation of Armenian land and life. The centenarian mulberry trees scattered around the Tigris riverbank today are rooted in the memory of diasporic Armenians as commemorative lives indexing homeliness as well as destruction. Like 'living-dead trees',<sup>20</sup> the resistant roots of the mulberry fold the past into the present by an-archically sparking the imagination to consider perpetual grief, anger, and the drive for self-possession outside the deathly and denialist confines of state-sovereign archives. An-archy is ecology historicized, aestheticized, and thus, politicized, and its *modus operandi* is eco-redaction.

#### ECO-REDACTION AS METHOD

My methodology in tackling this issue is eco-redaction. After Christina Sharpe, I move beyond conventional disciplinary notions of archival factuality in the wake of Transatlantic slave trade. In conversation with Black feminist scholarship, particularly that of Saidiya Hartman, and abolitionist through and through, Sharpe's project develops new methodologies going beyond archival eradications that castrate slave's lives and experience on the ship and

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19 Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1.1 (8 September 2012) <<https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18630>> [accessed 12 November 2022].

20 See Aylin Vartanyan Dilaver, 'From Longing to Belong to Shaping the Longing: Dwelling with Armenian Women in Istanbul' (PhD diss., European Graduate School, forthcoming).

beyond. Sharpe's aim is to abolish the very conceptual and archival framework that is constituted and pervaded by the anti-Black apparatus and racist logic in North America, one that forces Black researchers to obey terms and analytics that precondition their own decimation. 'We must become undisciplined', she writes.<sup>21</sup> In thinking with 'this pain of and in the archive', Sharpe claims and mobilizes the undisciplined force of imagination, not to 'make sense of [archival] silences, absences, and modes of dis/appearance', but to generate a processual ethics of radical care in the present and into the future against 'state-imposed regimes of surveillance'.<sup>22</sup> To this end, Sharpe theorizes 'wake work' as a methodology that stays on the side of the dead with a sensitivity toward the work of grief in building political aesthetics. Laced with manoeuvres of 'annotation' and 'redaction', wake work moves attention 'toward reading and seeing something in excess of what is caught in the frame; towards seeing something beyond visibility'.<sup>23</sup>

Now, I am aware of the risks of appropriating radical Black feminist theorizing for use in Middle Eastern contexts. Such a move would not only flatten the relational, ontological, and spiritual aspects of Black endurance and praxis, but it would also eclipse the particular structuring of effects and affects that underwrite histories of mass violence and genocide denialism in Turkey. In turning to Sharpe, my intention is more circumspect: I engage in archival wake work with the aim of mobilizing the resurgent power of an imagination that refrains from approximating the lived experience of Armenian life so as to produce a co-

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21 Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016) <<https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822373452>>, p. 13.

22 *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 12, and 20.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 117.

herent, hopeful, or 'civilized' corrective to settler archives. My point is not to detoxify an already toxic archive, but to place the conditions that reproduce the impossibility of generating historical facts of the genocide under a magnifying glass, and in so doing, carve out spaces in which to understand 'abandoned sites' otherwise. Centenarian mulberries scattered across the Tigris' shores today contradict state-sovereign assumptions that all is in order, and that peaceful order has been guaranteed. Mulberries enable us to take a closer look at the cracks in the cloak of state sovereignty, bringing forth a tension between official documents of history and their faltering ecological grounds.

Here I toy with the idea of eco-redaction as a way to think of ecological sites as media works that generate an aesthetic and affective interface that is caught in the long movement between destruction and resurgence. I embrace the idea of eco-redaction as 'a counter to abandonment, another effort to try to look, to try to really see.'<sup>24</sup> Such 'noticing'<sup>25</sup> means paying attention to mutant,<sup>26</sup> ruderal,<sup>27</sup> and unexpected<sup>28</sup> ecologies that emerge at the rough edges of colonial milieus and environmental histories. Rather than romanticizing a pristine 'outside' of settler colonialism as a model for alternative modes of endurance with an ontological twist, eco-redaction engages in 'edge think-

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24 Ibid.

25 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

26 Joseph Masco, 'Mutant Ecologies: Radioactive Life in Post-Cold War New Mexico', *Cultural Anthropology*, 19.4 (2004), pp. 517–50 <<https://doi.org/10.1525/can.2004.19.4.517>>.

27 Bettina Stoetzer, 'Ruderal Ecologies: Rethinking Nature, Migration, and the Urban Landscape in Berlin', *Cultural Anthropology*, 33.2 (2018), pp. 295–323 <<https://doi.org/10.14506/ca33.2.09>>.

28 Gastón R. Gordillo, *Rubble: The Afterlife of Destruction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

ing', in which researchers encounter mutable ecological elements at the archival and on-the-ground edges of destruction. Eco-redaction, as I employ it here, entails the use of photographic images, texts, and zines to create a montage of 'critical fabulations' after Hartman as well as feelings designed to amplify the dissonant ways in which ecology has been pushed out of the order of a dignified life and reduced to background effect (see figures 1 to 6).

#### FEELING IN THE BLANKS

My conversations with the city's few remaining Syriac Christians and with a diasporic Diyarbakırite Armenian family whose ancestors had owned plots of land on either side of the Tigris River, most notably in the now-destroyed village of Qeterbel, had taught me to consider the affective dimension of the Tigris riverbanks. After several years of research in state archives and among derivative secondary sources in the hopes of establishing Armenian and Syriac ownership and/or cultivation of plots in and around the Hewsel Gardens before and after the Armenian genocide, and faced with the absence of documentary evidence in these archives, I came to realize that the archive is itself a logocentric chokehold; an imposing abstraction in need of further conceptualization.<sup>29</sup>

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29 See Meltem Ahıska, 'Occidentalism and Registers of Truth: The Politics of Archives in Turkey', *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 34 (2006), pp. 9–29 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0896634600004350>>; Ekmekçiöğlü, *Recovering Armenia: The Limits of Belonging in Post-Genocide Turkey* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016); Yael Navaro, 'The Aftermath of Mass Violence: A Negative Methodology', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 49.1 (2020), pp. 161–73 <<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-010220-075549>>; Marc Nichanian, *Writers of Disaster: Armenian Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Taderon, 2002); Nichanian, *The Historiographic Perversion*; Suciyan, *The Armenians in Modern Turkey*.

I sift through the pages of *A Mulberry Tree in Hewsel Gardens*,<sup>30</sup> a political memoir in the form of an interview between two Kurdish men from different generations, both of whom have served prison time as a result of their affiliations with Kurdish decolonization. The introduction to the memoir, written by the famous Kurdish novelist Mehmed Uzun, transforms the mulberry tree into the ecological counterpart to the old Kurdish intellectual, Canip Yıldırım,<sup>31</sup> about whom the memoir is written. In Uzun's hands, the tree becomes a witness to Kurdish intellectuals' struggle to give life dignity and meaning. It compels testimony: to the violence of the Ottoman and Turkish states since the turn of the twentieth century; to the long and riotous history of Kurdish political organizing; first to the presence, and then to the displacement and erasure of non-Turkish and non-Muslim communities of the city of Diyarbakır. The memoir is part of the trend of oral history in Turkey in early 2000s, where the Armenian genocide denied by official Turkish state discourse and the state archives that support it becomes a fact that builds methodologically on the differentially situated living memory of Armenian and Kurdish elders. In this literature, the Armenian genocide becomes a 'counter-hegemonic' fact regenerated as political memoir.<sup>32</sup> At one point in the memoir, Yıldırım narrates stories about his Armenian and Syriac neighbours who were skilled silk weavers. This brief pause acknowledging *en passant* Armenian and Syriac nativity to the land

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30 Orhan Miroğlu, *Hevsel Bahçesinde Bir Dut Ağacı: Mehmet Uzun'un Sunuşuyla Canip Yıldırım'la Söyleşi* (İstanbul: Everest Yayınları, 2010).

31 No relation to the author.

32 Adnan Çelik and Ergin Öpengin, 'The Armenian Genocide in the Kurdish Novel: Restructuring Identity through Collective Memory', *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey*, 2016, p. 2 <<https://doi.org/10.4000/ejts.5291>>.

allows me to ‘notice’<sup>33</sup> the importance of mulberry trees for Kurdistan’s now annihilated or forcibly displaced Christian peasants, farmers, and silk manufacturers.

While digitally accessible state archives demonstrate the important role that mulberry tree and endemic silk-worm cultivation played in Ottoman Diyarbekir prior to 1915, evidence on the durable effects of the loss of expertise in mulberry cultivation, as well as in silk processing and weaving immediately following the annihilation of the Christian silk masters and the confiscation of silk factories and mulberry orchards is scarce. While Turkish secondary sources based on state archives generally tie the decrease in silk production and mulberry orchards to global events, such as World War I and the economic crisis of 1929/1930,<sup>34</sup> and later, in the 1990s and mid-2010s, to the ‘terrorism’ of the PKK,<sup>35</sup> new work comparing district-level agricultural production and population data from the pre- and post-World War I periods suggests that, in addition to other agricultural crops under study, the 90 percent decline in the Ottoman/Turkish silk industry between 1907 and 1936 may have been a consequence of Armenian human capital loss in the genocide.<sup>36</sup> Following the genocide, Armenian existence all but vanished along the shores

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33 Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*.

34 Tahir Öğüt and Çiğdem Çadırcı, ‘Cumhuriyet Dönemine Geçiş Sürecinde Diyarbakır’da İktisadi-Mali ve Sosyal Yapı’, *Gazi Akademik Bakış*, 7.13 (2013), pp. 141–70 (p. 154).

35 Compare Zafer Başkaya, ‘Diyarbakır İli İpekböcekçiliğinin Türkiye’de Yeri ve Mekansal Analizi’ [The Place and Spatial Analysis of Sericulture in Diyarbakir Province of Turkey], in *Uluslararası Diyarbakır Sempozyumu*, ed. by Ufuk Bircan and others (Diyarbakır: T. C. Diyarbakır Valiliği Kültür Sanat Yayınları, 2017), xviii, pp. 2191–2217 (p. 2214).

36 See Ayça Akarçay, Nurhan Davutyan, and Sezgin Polat, *Economic Consequences of Demographic Engineering: Turkey and WWI* (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, 15 April 2021), pp. 9 and 12 <<https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3828518>>.



of the Tigris River and that the number of Diyarbakır's mulberry trees and orchards decreased precipitously.

The absence of a formal archive that might document chronological Christian ownership of the orchards was unsurprising: the archives of the Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress, which orchestrated the genocide, were destroyed soon after 1915, and the archives of the succeeding Turkish state, which officially denies the genocide, 'have very little to say, if anything at all' on the matter.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, a series of legal and administrative manoeuvres enabling the confiscation and expropriation of 'abandoned' property by the state, including a series of abandoned properties laws beginning in 1915. The single trustee system were compounded in the 1930s by new travel regulation and passport laws blocking the return of Armenians to Turkey to reclaim their property.<sup>38</sup> Several other archives in Turkey are either closed to the public or require special permission to conduct research: the archives of the Armenian patriarchate in Istanbul; the archives of the Directorate General of Foundations (*Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü*); the archives of the State Treasury (*Milli Emlak ya da Hazine*). These last two include the archives of the Directorate General of Land Registry and Cadastre (*Tapu ve Kadastro Genel Müdürlüğü*), which, like the confiscated immovable assets that are their subject, were transferred after the genocide to the Directorate General of Foundations and the Treasury.<sup>39</sup> Archival abyss and

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37 Suciyan, *The Armenians in Modern Turkey*, p. 1.

38 Compare Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*; Suciyan, *The Armenians in Modern Turkey*; Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey*; Üngör and Polatel, *Confiscation and Destruction*.

39 Compare 2012 *Beyannameşi: İstanbul Ermeni Vakıflarının El Konan Müllkleri / 2012 Declaration: The Seized Properties of Armenian Foundations in Istanbul*, ed. by Mehmet Atılgan and others (Istanbul: Hrant Dink Vakfı Yayınları, 2012) <<https://hrantdink.org/tr/bolis/>

blockage of access to these archives reproduce the confiscation and destruction of liquid assets, sacred sites, and immovable property, including homes, shops, farms, gardens, orchards, mills, and both cultivated and uncultivated plots of land, as well as movable livestock<sup>40</sup> borne of the Ottoman elite zeal for Turkification and Muslimization in the eastern parts of the empire, including in Diyarbakır.<sup>41</sup>

Working in official archives is akin to facing ‘an active act of production that prepares facts for historical intelligibility.’<sup>42</sup> Armenian individuals, communities, and milieux were purged from the official archives and reduced to a cipher. In such a context, the task of the researcher is to develop a method for locating and deciphering omissions that ‘silence the past’ and deductive strategies for extrapolating that which remains ‘unthinkable.’<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Armenian historians and critics remind us how conducting research in these archives and in the secondary sources that reproduce them is like being in an enclosed and darkened chamber with only a small and damaged aperture through which to project Armenian nativity to the land in

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faaliyetler/projeler/kulturel-miras/149-2012-beyanname-i-istanbul-ermeni-vakiflarinin-el-konan-mulkleri> [accessed 12 November 2022].

- 40 Kouymjian, ‘Confiscation and Destruction: A Manifestation of the Genocidal Process’, *Armenian Forum*, 1.3 (1998), pp. 1–12 (pp. 3–4).
- 41 Dündar, *İttihat Ve Terakki’nin Müslümanları İskan Politikası (1913–1918)*; Dündar, *Modern Türkiye’nin Şifresi; Armenian Tigranakert/Diarbekir and Edessa/Urfa*; Hilmar Kaiser, ‘Armenian Property, Ottoman Law and Nationality Policies’, in *The First World War as Remembered in the Countries of the Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. by Olaf Farschid, Manfred Kropp, and Stephan Dähne, Beirut Texts und Studien, 99 (Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 2006), pp. 49–71 (pp. 66 and 70) <<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:gbv:3:5-91478>>; Kévorkian, *Le Génocide des Arméniens*; Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey*; Üngör and Polatel, *Confiscation and Destruction*.
- 42 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995), p. 48.
- 43 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, p. 70.

distorted fragments. We learn how these distortions compel the researcher to feel and to imagine that which has been erased.<sup>44</sup>

Armenian literary critic and philosopher Marc Nichanian, for instance, has reflected the impossibility of reconstructing a factual history of the extermination of Ottoman Armenians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries under such conditions of historical unthinkability.<sup>45</sup> He argues that pushing back against the archive's non-existence, its blanks and silences, dampens the researcher's historical acuity and at the same time fixates the researcher traumatically, forcing the researcher to enter a traumatic field of enclosure only to face a painful discordance between working through history and offering up a politics of mourning. In moving otherwise from this apparatus of enclosure built by 'genocidal will',<sup>46</sup> Nichanian distances himself from factual modes of representation and documentation that reproduce the archival bias of erasure only to replace it with finitude. The violence and monstrosity of the genocidal will and its ever-present and ongoing attack on memory cannot be captured by documentary practices that imply graspability and compensation, argues Nichanian. Instead, he proposes to refashion testimony as monument<sup>47</sup> as an excruciating yet creative activity around the impossibility of mourning rather than a finite factual achievement that demands the transparent understanding of mass violence. Nichanian is on the lookout for interpret-

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44 See Ahiska, 'Occidentalism and Registers of Truth'; Ekmekçiöglü, *Recovering Armenia*; Navaro, 'The Aftermath of Mass Violence'; Nichanian, *Writers of Disaster*; Nichanian, *The Historiographic Perversion*; Suciyan, *The Armenians in Modern Turkey*.

45 Nichanian, *Writers of Disaster*, p. 3.

46 Nichanian, *The Historiographic Perversion*, p. 9.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 94.

ative and imaginative narrative strategies and methodologies to see through the authoritarian archival erasure that locks the researcher into methodological dead-ends.

Powerfully circumventing archival dead-ends of structural denialism in their respective works, both Talin Suciyan and Lerna Ekmekçioğlu have recently rendered Armenian existence legible by turning to Armenian-language newspapers, memoirs, oral narratives, and their personal herstories.<sup>48</sup> Rejecting intellectual absorption in the defeatism generated by factual fundamentalism, Suciyan sets to work demonstrating how genocide denialism is constitutive of the racist structuring of the Turkish state's historical and legal apparatus. While denialism is further fed by the process of 'becoming-diaspora',<sup>49</sup> in so far as the overwhelming majority of surviving Armenians were forced to leave their ancestral lands as a result of legal and social campaigns, for the few who remained in Turkey, Lerna Ekmekçioğlu argues, the intimate spheres of 'domesticated survival',<sup>50</sup> religion and spirituality, and feminist politics became productive arenas in which to retrieve Armenian existence against the archival chokehold.

Rather than digging through the oppressor's archive to find proof and validation, these approaches reject the distorted terms of archival gaslighting's fabricated causality. Taking a cue from Saidiya Hartman's work, these approaches attempt to think through that which has been forced to stay in 'the position of the unthought'.<sup>51</sup>

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48 Suciyan, *The Armenians in Modern Turkey*; Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*.

49 Suciyan, *The Armenians in Modern Turkey*, pp. 20 and 27.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 122.

51 Saidiya V. Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson III, 'The Position of the Unthought', *Qui Parle*, 13.2 (2003), pp. 183–201 <<https://doi.org/10.1215/quiparle.13.2.183>>.

Hartman's point is to expose the chokehold supremacist archives represent, limiting as they do the researcher's ability to uncover the unrelenting violence of transatlantic slavery and its brutal wake in the ongoing legacy of enslavement after emancipation in North America. Rendering 'what cannot be known' thinkable is not Hartman's project, for such a move would propose a coherent and hopeful corrective to the archive. The goal is thus not to speak truth to the archive by approximating the lived experience of slavery. Nor is it to civilize the archive by 'giving voice' to the enslaved.<sup>52</sup> Hartman sets herself the task of developing a methodological strategy ('critical fabulation'<sup>53</sup>) whereby the scholar authorizes herself to cautiously speculate about and rearrange the experience of enslavement.

If for Hartman the 'unthought' is the 'narrative restraint'<sup>54</sup> that makes it impossible to think the relationship between the structural brutality of enslavement and the racist forms of archival and everyday violence that developed after emancipation (the 'afterlife of slavery'), then for Suciyan and Ekmekçiöğlü, the position of the unthought would be the position of the social reproduction of archival denial that the Armenian genocide ever occurred or that Armenians were and are native to the land. In a similar fashion to Hartman, the methodological strategies of shadowing, omission, and eclipsing used by Suciyan and Ekmekçiöğlü work to surface the denialist structural constitution of the Turkish regime without abandoning contact with historical experience. While the two historians do not creatively

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52 Saidiya Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, 12.2 (2008), pp. 1-14 (p. 12) <<https://doi.org/10.1215/12-2-1>>.

53 Ibid., p. 11.

54 Ibid.

fashion stories in Hartman's sense, they do rely on meticulously researched narratives that turbulently *feel in* rather than *fill in* the archival blanks. As responses to the limits of the archive, their accounts seek to 'resurrect' the 'impossible story' by amplifying 'the impossibility of its telling'.<sup>55</sup>

Faced with the limits of the archive, inspired by Suciyan and Ekmekçioğlu's methodological handsprings through the obstacle course of legibility, and seeking to centre genocide's 'evidentiary ecologies'<sup>56</sup> via ecoredaction, a form of Hartman's 'critical fabulation',<sup>57</sup> I wonder if ecological elements that make up the landscape of the long-ruined Dikranagerd can better be understood as resurgent fragments of a crime scene that live suspended in time and held hostage under 'house arrest' by the denialist Turkish state.

#### MULBERRY AFFECTS

I ask an Armenian writer from Dikranagerd questions about mulberry trees. A few months into our correspondence, Varduhi recounts her research with relatives and acquaintances on her roots near the Tigris riverbank. She tells me that beneath the foundations of Dicle University, directly across from Hewsel Gardens and just below her grandparents' Armenian and Syriac village of Qerebash, lies the rubble of another Armenian and Syriac village. Qeterbel was famous for its clean water, watermelons, and

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55 Ibid.

56 Kristina Lyons, 'Decomposition as Life Politics: Soils, *Selva*, and Small Farmers under the Gun of the US-Colombian War on Drugs', *Cultural Anthropology*, 31.1 (2016), pp. 56–81 <<https://doi.org/10.14506/ca31.1.04>>.

57 Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', p. 11.

orchards.<sup>58</sup> Varduhi tells me that rubble from the buildings and monuments destroyed by the Turkish military in 2015 during the Siege of Sur — the ancient Christian neighbourhood in which she grew up — as well as the centenarian trees that were erased, were all deposited into an area near the Gardens atop the rubble of the old village. I look up the two villages in a book titled *Amed*, the Kurdish name for Diyarbakır, published by the Diyarbakır Municipality.<sup>59</sup> The municipality is known for its efforts to open up space for memorialization practices that counter the Turkish Republic's official historiography and its denial of the Armenian genocide. I see that Qeterbel is not mentioned. Qerebash, on the other hand, is depicted as a Kurmanji-speaking Kurdish village that was the target of assimilation policies enacted by the Turkish government in 1934 with the aim of settling Turkish migrants from Bulgaria into the area. The two Armenian/Syriac villages have vanished from the book.

When I began searching for traces of mulberry trees and of the village of Qeterbel in accounts that challenge this vanishing effect, I had to un-learn in order to re-learn, search through fragmented layers of time and space. In the near complete absence of local Armenian or Syriac testimonies about the anti-Christian pogroms of 1895, Joost Jongerden and Jelle Verheij read the reports of foreign missionaries, the Ottoman archives, and the consonant secondary sources and Turkish nationalist memoirs against the grain in an attempt to reconstruct the void

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58 Qeterbel, now in the site of the Dicle University campus, is spelled in various sources also as Ktırıl, Kiterbêl, Gheterpel, Qatrabel, and Keterbel. *Social Relations in Ottoman Diyarbekir*, ed. by Jongerden and Verheij, p. 307.

59 Amed Tigris and Yıldız Çakar, *Amed: Coğrafya, Tarih, Kültür* (Diyarbakır: Diyarbakır Büyükşehir Belediyesi Yayınları, 2015).

that mass violence against non-Muslim, non-Turks opened in Ottoman Diyarbekir's demographic and socioeconomic life.<sup>60</sup> In their respective accounts, the village of Qeterbel emerges in 1895 as the site of pogroms against Armenians and Syrians in which their properties were confiscated and transferred to Muslim collaborators of the Committee of Union and Progress regime, which had ordered the pillaging and burning of the village.<sup>61</sup> The village was the site of a massacre carried out by Muslim militia in which about five hundred Christians were murdered.<sup>62</sup> Ümit Üngör and Mehmet Polatel further confirm that the villages of Qeterbel and Qerebash became targets in a new wave of mass arrests and violence around the time of the 1915 genocide.<sup>63</sup> The silk and *pushi* headscarf industries operated primarily by Armenians and Syrians became extinct after the 1915 annihilation of the Diyarbakır Christians, with their assets, including mulberry orchards sold at auction to Muslim settlers who began re-settling from the Caucasus and the Balkans, due to state policy.<sup>64</sup> Not only were these refugee-settlers resettled there soon after the genocide; they were also given the annihilated Christians' seeds, animals, ploughs, vineyards, orchards, and gardens.<sup>65</sup> During the 1920s, the ruined village of Qeterbel became a model site of Republican developmentalist zeal as the government sought to revitalize '5,000 acres of barren land' by sending in experts ranging from veterinarians to health

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60 *Social Relations in Ottoman Diyarbekir*, ed. by Jongerden and Verheij.

61 *Ibid.*, pp. 73–74, p. 334.

62 Jelle Verheij, 'Diyarbekir and the Armenian Crisis of 1895'; in *Social Relations in Ottoman Diyarbekir*, ed. by Jongerden and Verheij, pp. 85–147 (p. 105).

63 Üngör and Polatel, *Confiscation and Destruction*, p. 68.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

65 Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, p. 146.



inspectors to examine and monitor the land and its inhabitants, building a ranch with technical equipment from Europe, and distributing free saplings, chicken, and seeds as well as pesticides. The erasure of the village from the toponymical map was completed in the 1930s when its name became Turkified as 'Eğlence', meaning 'fun' in Turkish.<sup>66</sup>

Another attempt to document former Armenian ownership of village land here and plots at Hewsel Gardens was to conduct archival research on local journals published in Armenian in and around Dikranagerd/Diyarbakır with the assistance of a research collaborator, Muraz Sarangil. The journal *Տիգրիս* (Tigris) was published in Dikranagerd on various dates at least as from the late Ottoman period and at various intervals. The nine issues of the *Տիգրիս-Tigris* that we were able to access also contained articles addressing resettlement. They too included missing persons' reports from Diyarbakır families who had lost their relatives and loved ones in 1915 and were still trying to find news of them through the magazine. Although rare, these magazines contained letters from compatriots, poems, and phone numbers and messages for events, including picnics and late-night dinners organized by the association's headquarters and branches. After the genocide, *Տիգրիս-Tigris* resurfaced in New York as a weekly magazine under the title of *Nor Dikranagerd* (New Diyarbakır). The association that published the New York magazine, the Dikranagerd Compatriotic and Reconstruction Union, was a solidarity organization that held large-scale meetings in the halls of the Ramgavar Party, an Armenian diaspora party that maintained relations with Soviet Armenia. An important goal of the association was the establishment of the satellite city

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66 Ibid., p. 244.

district of Nor Dikranagerd, to be built on land located between the satellite cities of Nor Malatya (New Malatya) and Nor Sepasdya (New Sivas) in the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic capital of Yerevan.

In the twelve issues of *Nor Dikranagerd* we accessed, reports on financial and infrastructural matters regarding the construction of the New Dikranagerd neighbourhood in Yerevan were supplemented with essays on the Armenian names for sites of historical import located along the shores of the Tigris, such as Karsun Mangants for Kırklar Mountain and Barda Buren for the Erdebil Mansion, along with a history of Ten Eyes Bridge recounting a journey by boat from the bridge to Mosul, Baghdad.<sup>67</sup> Reporting on massacres was a significant theme in the journal's pages. Among the letters received by the journal, Tovmas Mıgırđıçyan is noteworthy in that he presents his research on Diyarbakır in application to the association for its publication as a book. His letter includes photos of the village of Qerebash. Mıgırđıçyan maintains that he has carried out research on Diyarbakır and has fifteen to twenty articles ready for publication, several of which contain 'political secrets' about which he swore in April 1921 to the British Foreign Office not to publish or make public for ten years.<sup>68</sup> Now that the deadline had passed, the author was seeking assistance from the journal's New York editors to publish it in their pages. An open letter from 1938 to the association's headquarters and branches by the Armenian patriarch of Turkey, Mesrop Naroyan, mentions the existence of Armenians still living in Diyarbakır and recounts how the church was damaged in a fire on the night of 24 April 1938, the eighteenth anniversary of the genocide. The patriarch also

67 Yeğişe Çerçıyan, *Nor Dikranagerd*, 20.2 (1937), pp. 5–6.

68 Tovmas Mıgırđıçyan, 'Letter', *Nor Dikranagerd*, 20.3 (1938), pp. 9–11.

notes that the church expected to receive financial support from the Armenian residents of Diyarbakır.<sup>69</sup> An excerpt from a letter from Tovmas Zavzavacıyan illustrates how, during the anti-Armenian pogrom of 1895, the massacres lasted for three days, with the Diyarbakır Armenian church of St. Sarkis destroyed just after the plunder of the Qeterbel Syriac church and the killing of the entire village, along with its priest, Kas Ablahat.<sup>70</sup>

The *Tigris-Dikris Almanac* published in 1946 provides more room for imagination in reconstructing the landscape of the Tigris riverbank. The almanac was prepared by the Aleppo branch of the Dikranagerd Compatriotic and Reconstruction Union. Although headquartered in New York, the solidarity association had by the mid-forties some thirty active branches, located primarily in Aleppo and Beirut. Armenian villages along the shores of Tigris and near the Hewsel Gardens were portrayed as recreational places of ecological abundance where Armenian peasants cultivated the land. In an article compiled by A. Kuyumcuyan in the *Tigris-Dikris Almanac*, we learn that silk farming was completely in the hands of Armenians, with the writer listing the names of Armenian family businesses.<sup>71</sup> In Hewsel Gardens, there was a tradition for people to invite each other to drink tea at the *manafşalık* (violet gardens) during the Christian festival of carnival (Lent). With the arrival of spring, first the almond groves would be frequented in Hewsel, then the rose gardens (*güllük*), and especially the Ğam garden (*gam götürmez*). These are gardens cultivated today by Kurdish farmers without any sign of previous Armenian cultivation.

69 Mesrop Naroyan, 'Open Letter', *Nor Dikranagerd*, 21.2 (1938), pp. 9–10.

70 Zavzavacıyan B. Tovmas, 'Letter', *Nor Dikranagerd*, 21 (1939), p. 5.

71 A. Kuyumcuyan, entry in *Tigris-Dikris Almanac* (Aleppo: Dikranagerd Compatriotic and Reconstruction Union, 1946), p. 97.

Qeterbel emerges in these essays as the site of old vineyards with endemic grapes, watermelons, and mulberries. The Qeterbel vineyards were frequented by groups of people spending the summer in tents by the shore.<sup>72</sup> *Amidayi Artsakanqner* (Echoes of Amida), published by the New York-based Armenian American writer Dikran Mgunt in 1950,<sup>73</sup> gives further insights into the ecological features of the area between the city and the Tigris riverbank including Ali Pınar and Qeterbel. The village of Ali Pınar (Ali Pinar) was a recreational destination site for well-off citizens who visited during the summer, on Sundays, and after church to picnic among the vineyards, gardens, and under the almond trees. The villagers were very poor and resigned to their fate because most of the barley and chickpea were planted on fields that belonged to the village chief (village lord, ethnicity unspecified) and most of the income went to him while taxes paid to the state were taken from the small amount of produce left in the peasants' hands. Qeterbel appears in this account as a Syriac Christian village, of fifty households. In 1893, the Tigris overflowed and changed its course, eradicating a large forest, the account notes. According to the narrator, because of this once-in-a-hundred-years event, the Tigris River came right up to the entrance of Qeterbel village establishing proximity between the village and city centre via the river. Two years later, during the three-day pogrom of 1895, Mgunt reports, villagers sought refuge in the church. When the church was set on fire, they emerged fighting. The majority of the men were slaughtered, and the women and children were dis-

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72 Քաղաքըցի, entry in *Tigris-Dikris Almanac* (Aleppo: Digranakerd Compatriotic and Reconstruction Union, 1946), p. 32.

73 Dikran Mgunt, *ԱՄԻԴԱՅԻ ԱՐՁԱԳԱՆԳՆԵՐ* [Echoes of Amida] (Weehawken, NJ: Dikran Spear, 1950; repr. Antelias, Lebanon: Cilicia Bookstore, 2019).

tributed to Muslim homes.<sup>74</sup> The book debunks the myth of peaceful coexistence between the Armenian and Kurdish communities by providing insights into everyday life laced with extreme caution and attention on the part of the Armenians and Syrians seeking to avoid potential conflict.

Visiting the approximate site of Qeterbel was another attempt to come closer to an understanding of the anarchic fragments left by the genocidal spiral on the landscape. On my first visit to the destroyed village in 2019, I arrive at an untended and untamed landscape dotted with feral centenarian mulberry trees. My guide, a Kurdish professor specializing in endemic species and native seeds who runs an ecological project by the Tigris River together with a few academics-turned-farmers who were summarily dismissed from their university jobs in the Turkish academic purge of 2016, is reluctant to take me to the site, as he thinks ‘there’s nothing there’. Although the site now belongs to Dicle University, it has long been ‘abandoned’, he notes. In a moment of profound self-reflection, my friend Hasan, whose Armenian family had to convert to Islam for self-protection, shortly after the genocide, wants to see the site even if ‘there is nothing there’. Hasan is interested in retracing his genealogical roots, uncovering the circumstances surrounding his family’s conversion. The research, he says, has piqued his desire to reconstruct his personal history. We wander for a long time through feral plots in a fragile attempt akin to premonition that it is there — somewhere, around the corner, after the next turnout, behind the next hill, perhaps. After becoming disoriented several times in this area due to the absence of site-specific directions, and with the assistance of a map drawn for me and Hasan by an elderly Kurdish interlocutor, some digital

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74 Ibid., p. 235.

maps, and directions we request from passers-by along the way, we finally arrive at a feral spot overlooking the riverbank and the distant face of the ancient city wall of Diyarbakır.

The professor, now visibly excited, studies the abandoned feral landscape and is impressed by the sight of indigenous centenarian mulberry trees. He goes on feeding us information. 'In fact', he begins to recount, 'these trees take about five to ten years to begin bearing fruit... The mulberry fruit is a collection of many tiny fruits joined together, itself the result of a process of inflorescence... These trees prefer drained soil, but they are tolerant of drought and frost, too... They make great shade, which is essential for the summer heat...' The site that had first appeared featureless to the professor later becomes intriguing enough for its ecological habitats to inspire him to share essential biological facts. While listening to him, I notice the stone wall ruins of an old, derelict building, a few centenarian mulberry trees scattered throughout the grass, and a vast array of younger, feral mulberry trees — all an indication of the orchards that once covered the area around the village. Perhaps the indigenous seeds native to Kurdistan that the professor is so adamant about collecting with his farmer friends were of Armenian provenance after all.

The stone foundations peek out from among the stand of mulberries of Varduhi's grandparents' now-ruined village. Whether they strictly evidence past Armenian and Syriac habitation or not, these centenarians materialize ecological roots amid ongoing sieges. Hasan is silent. He says he feels overwhelmed by the site. The centenarians seem to work their way in and through him, like affective matter. Having long understood himself as a Kurdish man with strong sympathies for the Kurdish movement,

he opens to the possibility of identifying as an Armenian man from this land and reclaiming his complex nativity to it in new light. I feel an uneasy silence weigh heavy on my shoulders as the sight of the centenarians prompts me to consider the possibility that we have perhaps trespassed on an unrecognized massacre site. Mulberries urge me to unsettle my own academic and political complicity in not noticing, thus perpetuating a distinction between abandoned and annihilated ecological sites, an epistemically violent distinction that permits the tacit maintenance of denialist conceits and schemes. We set off to leave.

On our way back, I reconsider Marc Nichanian's observation that in a realm of denialism, facts are doomed to be inoperative, and documentation is an inadequate intellectual and political disposition.<sup>75</sup> I take refuge in these reflections to consider these centenarian mulberry trees and their feral companions to be 'testimonies as monument.'<sup>76</sup> They 'escape'<sup>77</sup> the gaze of the official archive as resistant roots that continue to feed on more than a hundred years of destruction and solitude. Held hostage under a suspended curse but still readying themselves for an archive that is still 'to come in the anterior future',<sup>78</sup> the trees challenge the logocentric scaffolding of Turkish archives that erase or reduce ecological massacre sites to background effect.

Mulberry affects.

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75 Nichanian, *The Historiographic Perversion*.

76 *Ibid.*, p. 83.

77 *Ibid.*, p. 103.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 114.

ECO-REDACTION: AN AN-ARCHIC COUNTER TO  
DENIALISM

*Char 1: Stumps*

‘Char’ — charred material, the stuff of charcoal — is an idiom of blacked-out redaction. Char invites me to think with ecological edges-in-the-making that exist under archival and on-the-ground erasure of interspecies life by the sovereign Turkish rule and that persist in the ongoing wake of genocidal spiral in the era of climate change. Char regis-



Figure 1. Char 1: Stumps, photo by author, 2019.



ters that disasters have already arrived, have been ongoing, and have been responded to. Char asks us to pay attention to those durable colonial enclosures, genocidal aftermaths, military sieges, and capitalist wreckage that are impossible to metabolize.

The first image is of charred stumps from a centennial mulberry tree on the outskirts of the Hewsel Gardens felled by chemical weaponry during the siege of 2015. I blackened the already charred stumps further to amplify their alleged status as non-life according to the genocidal optic of the state and to point to their invisibilization (and hence their un complication) as ecological rubble that rots in the background.

### *Char 2: The Wall*

Occupation is as much about construction as it is about destruction. The wall in figure 2 was erected soon after the blockade of 2015 to prevent Kurdish youths from escaping to the Gardens and attacking the military convoys in self-defence. The livelihood of Kurdish farmers, based as it was on cultivating the Hewsel Gardens, was completely cut off during the siege.

I blackened the grey concrete wall to amplify its occupying power.



Figure 2. Char 2: The Wall, photo by author, 2019.



Figure 3. Char 3: Mulberry Affects, photo by author, 2019.

*Char 3: Mulberry Affects*

‘To live in the habitus of denial is akin to perpetually setting the cycle of death alight’, writes Aylin Vartanyan Dilaver.<sup>79</sup> ‘Imagine a tree that feeds on the tar of fear, flowing from its roots to its trunk and to the fire of anger. The tar feeds the fire. The fire makes the trunk glow. In time, the tree sprouts leaves of fire and bears fruits of tar. This poison from the roots keeps the tree erect, but it does not keep the tree alive.’<sup>80</sup>

Just before the genocide, I relearn, mulberry trees grew both inside and outside Diyarbakır’s city centre: in the back yards of urban houses and in the Hewsel Gardens.<sup>81</sup> As with the living-dead tree that Vartanyan Dilaver imagines, emblematic of an unfinished mourning, the mulberry’s layered meanings prompt the imagination to recast the contested and violently traversed claims of nativity to the land and the right to repatriation. The tree conveys the sense of something ongoing, collective, intimate, and ecological about the impacts that episodes of mass violence leave on multispecies worlds in the denialist *longue durée*.

On my first visit to what I think might be Qeterbel, I arrive at an erased landscape dotted with feral centenarian mulberry trees. I have blackened the trees in figure 3 to amplify the sense of ongoing ecocide present in more-than-human traces.

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79 Vartanyan Dilaver, ‘From Longing to Belong to Shaping the Longing’ (unpublished doctoral thesis in progress), no page number.

80 *Ibid.*, translation mine.

81 Ahmet Taşğın and Marcello Mollica, ‘Disappearing Old Christian Professions in the Middle East: The Case of Diyarbakır Pushee-Makers’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 51.6 (2 November 2015), pp. 922–31 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2015.1044525>>.



Figure 4. Char 4: Seed, photo by author, 2019.

*Char 4: Seed*

Before the Siege of 2015–16 commenced, hundreds of eco-projects were realized with non-hybrid seeds and pesticide-free farming by eco-activists and Yazidi refugee women who in 2014 fled the Yazidi Genocide in their ancestral homeland of Sinjar in Iraqi Kurdistan and settled in the refugee camp of Diyarbakır. Since the occupation of Sur and its surrounding areas, they are all largely ruined. All signs of previous communal work and cultivation have been erased. Nothing remotely resembling a site of cultivation appears before the passer-by. Plants have been uprooted and are gone for good. Plots have become subdivisions of a wasteland.

Azad cultivates a plot of land across from Hewsel near the Tigris River with a group of academics expelled during the purge of 2016 in Turkey and refugee families. Together, they work to create an indigenous seed bank of pest-resistant plants. Azad stresses the difficulties of putting decolonial ecological principles into practice under the state's sporadic spiral of military sieges where 'war is the climate', as people put it.

I blacked out some of the seeds stored in the ecologically constructed home that houses the seed bank to amplify the ongoing ecocide.



Figure 5. *Lungs*, photo courtesy of the Schwules Museum, Berlin, 2018.

*Zine: 'Lungs' (figures 5 and 6)*

The zine is a medium of lexical eco-redaction. Titled *Lungs*, the fanzine/object is a simple lexical inventory of Hewsel Gardens. Words related to or associated with the Gardens' biodiversity are listed in succession, forming a catalogue of raw data arranged in cross-referenced thematic lists that codify those things that have penetrated the Gardens. The lists include such things as endemic plant and animal species, aquatic resources, fountains, orchards' names, Armenian, Syriac, and Kurdish musical instruments once played in the recreational areas of the Gardens, news reports about blockades, phrases from the UNESCO protocol, construction machinery and materials, the brand names of chemical pesticides, and guns. I produced one hundred copies, some



Figure 6. *Lungs*, photo courtesy of the Schwules Museum, Berlin, 2018.

of which were placed in bookshops in Dikranagerd/Amed after obtaining the consent of shop owners. Others were exhibited in December 2017 as part of a collective show titled *Koloni* at Abud Efendi Konağı, Istanbul, and again in March 2018 at the Schwules Museum in Berlin.

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