

# Varujan Vosganian's Novel of Postmemory<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This article looks into Varujan Vosganian's *The Book of Whispers* as a novel of postmemory, a term coined by Marianne Hirsch. It argues that postmemory is the essential dimension of a book which looks back on the past and tells stories from a vantage point which is also our post-communist present. Such a novel could not have been written and published during the communist regime, not only because its publication would have been prevented but also because the times it recovers need the author's distance from them and the perspective that distance gives. According to Vosganian, the main character in the book is the 20<sup>th</sup> century with all its atrocities. It is also a book about the Armenian people. Although the Armenian genocide of 1915 is central, it is far from being the only terrible abuse the novel evokes. The communist atrocities add to the several stages of the Armenian genocide, and its victims are Armenians, Romanians, Jews and other nations.

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## Post-Colonialism as a Contentious Concept

In spite of the obvious differences in terms of decolonization from one former colony to the next, postcolonial studies, also known as postcolonial theory, have emerged as a variety of intellectual discourse whose aim is to analyze the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism from preponderantly globalizing and generalizing perspectives. However, when this kind of indiscriminate approach has to bear upon writing, it may feel like a questionable label. In his account of the post-colonial, Dennis Walder draws attention upon its rather cumbersome nature:

All literary or cultural labels are questionable to some extent, and 'post-colonial' is no exception. Indeed, nothing is more likely to enrage certain writers than to hear themselves described as 'post-colonial'. Who can blame them? To write is usually an attempt to express the particularity of yourself or your situation, an attempt to engage an audience with what you have to say. To find yourself then lumped together with authors from around the globe whose only connection with you appears to be that they also happen to use one of the world languages, and come from a country once colonized, is not going to leave you with the feeling of being attended to for what *you* wrote, or the way you chose to write it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Dennis Walder, *Post-colonial Literatures in English: History, Language, Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 1.

Walder's opening remark throws into question the concept itself. It shows that post-colonialism has been considered a seriously questionable label when used to tag writers, who are by definition, as Walder notes, free spirits. Walder is far from being the only theorist to raise questions both about the concept's limitations when used to apply to a variety of writers across cultures sharing a colonial past and the hazard of a generalizing approach. Another postcolonial critic Sankaran Krishna argues that globalizing tendencies, originally perceived as efficient decolonization strategies, have recently posed neo-colonizing threats as the global economic system has been promoting the exploitation of cheaper labour force in the former colonies<sup>3</sup>. No matter how one may look at it, whether culturally, politically or economically, postcolonialism is a discourse which covers ground but does so in ways which may be too questionably general or too alarmingly global.

Although frequently put under the umbrella of postmodernism, post-colonialism's relation to this other "post" raises yet another set of problems. Looking for possible relations and connections between post-colonialism and post-communism in his seminal study "An Exercise in Fictional Liminality: the Postcolonial, the Postcommunist, and Romania's Threshold Generation," Adrian Oțoiu quotes from the chapter titled "The Postmodern and the Postcolonial" in Anthony K. Appiah's *My Father's House*: "the *post* in postcolonial, like the *post* in postmodern is the *post* of space clearing gesture." Oțoiu sees in that answer a good basis for further associations. To its promising new horizons, the Romanian author adds Appiah's contention that both paradigms are '*postrealist*', or in Ihab Hassan's terms 'anti-mimetic', which Oțoiu deems to be a major aspect of post-communist fiction<sup>4</sup>.

## Were Sovietization and Communism a Form of Colonialism?

Is the Sovietization of the former Communist bloc comparable to the colonization of the formerly Western colonized countries in the first place? What aspects do they have in common? Was Sovietization followed by communism another form of "colonialism"?

To the question whether Sovietization and communism might be another form of colonialism, David Levinson's approach to it is a possible clue. Looking back on a past prior to Sovietization, Levinson argues that before it, "Russification was a form of colonialism that lasted until the 1920s, when it was replaced by Sovietization, a similar process."<sup>5</sup> Although Levinson speaks about the Sovietization of the countries within the borders of the Soviet Union as a form of colonialism, it may be argued that its impact was designed to reach independent states outside its borders, which it Sovietized through various means. In Romania, the military presence of the Red Army lasted from 1944 until August 1958. All the other methods described by Levinson apply to the Sovietization of Romania and of the other countries in the Communist bloc, with slight

<sup>3</sup> Sankaran Krishna, *Globalization and Postcolonialism: Hegemony and Resistance in the Twenty-first Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Adrian Oțoiu, "An Exercise in Fictional Liminality: the Postcolonial, the Postcommunist, and Romania's Threshold Generation," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, no. 23:1&2 (2003): 88.

<sup>5</sup> David Levinson, "Ethnic Relations," in *Ethnic Groups Worldwide: A Ready Reference Handbook* (Phoenix, Arizona: The Oryx Press, 1998), 76.

differences: although Russian was not the official language, it was forced upon their systems of education as a major means of Soviet propaganda; there was a strict Soviet control of those countries' policies and economies<sup>6</sup>. Indeed, Sovietization had a deep and long lasting effect, and Soviet principles continued to govern the communist regimes decades after the withdrawal of the Red Army from the countries of the Communist bloc.

Therefore, Sovietization, followed by the drastic and systematic repressive methods used by the communist regimes in the countries of the Communist bloc to maintain control and to keep power was a form of colonialism. Even after the military withdrawal of the Red Army and despite Ceaușescu's policy of building a system where he could rule as the supreme power in Romania, the methods and principles of communism were provided by the Soviet "master."

### **“The Necessity of the Analysis, Repudiation and Condemnation of the Communist Regime”**

Now, after the demise of the Soviet Union, which was arguably the equivalent of an empire, the former communist countries feel an urgent need to look back on their communist past for answers to their post-communist present. There are many large and small-scale, governmental and non-governmental initiatives which indicate this urgency in Romania. In 2009, The Institute for Investigating Communist Crimes in Romania (IICCR) merged with the National Institute for the Memory of Romanian Exile (NIMRE) and created The Institute for Investigating Communist Crimes in Romania and the Memory of Romanian Exile (IICCRMRE)<sup>7</sup>.

In 2006, a Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship was set up (PCACD)<sup>8</sup>. It was chaired by Vladimir Tismăneanu, and it devised a Final Report (FR)<sup>9</sup>. The subtitle of the FR's conclusions states “the Necessity of the Analysis, Repudiation and Condemnation of the Communist Regime.” Its first line affirms that

<sup>6</sup> David Levinson, 76-78.

<sup>7</sup> The Institute for Investigating Communist Crimes in Romania and the Memory of Romanian Exile (IICCRMRE), accessed May 3, 2012, [http://www.crimelecomunismului.ro/ro/despre\\_iiccr](http://www.crimelecomunismului.ro/ro/despre_iiccr).

The Institute's aims are not only to analyze the communist regime in Romania, which is a thing of the past, but also to look into its consequences, which is our present; in the same line of making the past relevant to the present, it aims not only to promote the memory of communism in Romania at a public, national and international level, but also “to develop a culture of liberty, democracy and of legitimate state.” Apart from collecting, archiving and publishing documents relevant for the Romanian exile between 1940 and 1989, it also aims to develop and encourage scientific research of the history of communism “through critical and comparative methods and in accordance with international standards.”

<sup>8</sup> The Institute for Investigating Communist Crimes in Romania.

<sup>9</sup> The Final Report looks into major aspects such as the nature, scope and effects of the totalitarian communist regime in Romania (1945-1989), various aspects of Sovietization, and instruments of repression in communist Romania: from genocide, *Securitate*, repressive legislation, the communist incarceration system and its political detainees, the deportations and dislocations of the 50s, the institution of forced residence; memoirs of communist detainees, armed anti-communist resistance, the students' rebellions of 1956, workers' protests in communist Romania, dissent and dissenters, resistance and exile, religious persecution, aspects of economy, collectivization, ideology and terror, the demographic policy of Ceaușescu's regime, the situation of ethnic minorities, communist repression in Soviet Moldova, communist surveillance until the 1989 Revolution.

based on the analysis of thousands and thousands of pages of documents, taking into account the existence of a huge amount of analytic literature and testimonies which prove the anti-patriotic nature of the communist dictatorship, we can affirm that the communist regime in Romania (1945-1989) was illegitimate and criminal.<sup>10</sup>

Credits for the conclusive chapter of the report are given to Sorin Ilieșiu, who submitted the text of his *Report for the Condemnation of the Communist Political Regime as Illegitimate and Criminal* to the President of Romania in October 2005, updated in January 2006. Ilieșiu's text is largely a very concise summary of the documentary material devised over a period of more than twelve years by the International Centre for Studies of Communism within the Civic Academy Foundation/the Memorial of the Victims of Communism and Resistance.

The decolonization of the countries which used to be under the dominion of Western empires preceded the demise of communism. Post-colonial theories had emerged as an intellectual necessity to meditate on a new reality. The “decolonization” of the former communist countries started in 1989. Prevented in their attempts at building a present and projecting a future by neo-communist factors and by other cultural aspects, post-communist cultures have been tentatively looking for theories apt to reflect on their situation, and they have been seriously considering postcolonial studies as a source they might “translate” and use for their own purposes.

## Can Post-colonialism Be Translated into Post-communism?

To what extent can post-communism turn to post-colonialism as a discourse that reflects on comparable situations? Is post-communism another version of post-colonialism? Can post-colonial theory and its terminology shed light on a totally different kind of “colonialism,” which was Sovietization followed by the communist regimes in the Communist bloc?

In his essay “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique,” David Chioni Moore argues, meeting Levinson's argument on this matter, that Russia and then the Soviet Union exercised colonial domination over the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Baltic countries, Central and Eastern Europe over a period of approximately 200 years. Chioni critiques what he considers to be a Western-centered privileging of Western European colonization, and pleads for a global postcolonial critique that should encompass both post-colonial models<sup>11</sup>.

Undeniably, Postcolonialism is now a crystallized discourse, while Post-communism, as Oțoiu shows, is “a feeble companion voice in the dialogue with the postcolonial.”<sup>12</sup> Maybe the dialogue should be seen in terms of “translation,” which is a means of bearing language and meaning across from one model into the other. Without calling it by this name, that is what Oțoiu is actually probing, although he starts from the premise that “in purely historic, economic and social terms, the colonial experience and the communist experiment have distinct profiles that cannot be conflated.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship: Final Report, 628, accessed May 2, 2012, [http://cpcadcr.presidency.ro/upload/RAPORT\\_FINAL\\_CPADCR.pdf](http://cpcadcr.presidency.ro/upload/RAPORT_FINAL_CPADCR.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> David Chioni Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique,” *PMLA* 116:1 (January 2001): 111-128.

<sup>12</sup> Oțoiu, 88-89.

<sup>13</sup> Oțoiu, 91.

Indeed, ideologies differ, but both models are underpinned by imperialism. Oțoiu shows that the rhetoric of “othering” in the colonial discourse contrasts with the egalitarian discourse of communism. The author admits that ethnicity and race, so blatantly present on the colonial agenda, were absent in the communist discourse, though it is also true that communist propaganda was highly antiphrastic. Despite the differences, Oțoiu references Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans* as a support for his own “translation,” and finds in her approach at least three concepts in postcolonial discourse which may be successfully “translated” into a post-communist lexicon that also bears upon Romanian post-communism. Those three are “liminality,” “hybridity,” and “ambiguity,” to which “transition” may be added<sup>14</sup>.

### **“Postmemory” Novels**

The “post” in both post-colonialism and post-communism is a “post” which looks back on a past, its legacy and its consequences in the present. More often than not, their pasts are sad, or even grim and traumatic. This compels a lot of post-colonial writers to dig into the colonial past, put it into perspective and thus build bridges across fragmented time and space. An emblematic example is Salman Rushdie, an Indian-born British writer now living in America, who is driven by a “Proustian ambition to unlock the gates of lost time.”<sup>15</sup> The same sense of loss and Proustian pressure to recover the meaning of the past through writing “haunts” Maalouf, a Lebanon-born French writer, in *Origines*.

Across cultures, the post-colonial writers engage their individual projects in works of restoration, which transport them to a past which is not even theirs as individuals, but their ancestors'. Thus, their writing is an act of expiation and healing, of putting the past into perspective for the present to “recover” and make (better) sense.

The narrator of Varujan Vosganian's *Book of Whispers* is his much younger, innocent self, who plunges into the past of his “old people.” The book shapes the memory and knowledge of the most terrible moments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from the 1915 Armenian genocide, connecting it with its earlier stages, and through the anti-communist resistance, the ransom of the Jews, collectivization, nationalization, the repatriation of the Armenians, and the day when the books were publicly burnt. In order to write about these histories the author drew on documents he found in archives across the world from the Centre for Research of the Armenian Diaspora in Paris, newspaper and magazine articles published in various countries, documents kept in German archives, testimonies of the genocide and the Armenians' deportation, books and papers, the author's discussions with old Armenians and their notes and diaries.

In her essay “Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory,” Marianne Hirsch uses the concept of “postmemory” to bear upon the way in which the Holocaust past is preserved in photographs and triggers in viewers a collective memory which precedes their individual existence. Although it is not a post-colonial coinage, the concept bears upon both post-colonialism and post-communism as discourses which restore various layers of a traumatic past. Hirsch defines postmemory

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<sup>14</sup> Oțoiu, 92-100.

<sup>15</sup> Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (Penguin Books, 1992), 10.

as “the response of the second generation to the trauma of the first.”<sup>16</sup> Indeed, if used in a postcolonial or post-communist context, this concept may illuminate the pressure of a colonial or communist past upon people before they were born or before they could feel responsible for it. The colonial and communist past, respectively, hides especially in photographs, but also in other documents, and waits there to be discovered by later generations. Thus, photographs become metaphors of the colonial or communist past and its ghostly, albeit compelling, presence in the present. Therefore, the post-colonial and post-communist writers feel that they have to engage in the “archaeology” of digging it out, setting it free, and thus expiating it. Apart from the rich suggestiveness of the visual metaphor, this ekphrasis is a “postrealist” and “anti-mimetic” narrative strategy.

### The Iron Curtain and Other Episodes of the Past in Photographs

Varujan Vosganian is aware, like all the other post-authors, that “the world in which we live is like a gigantic bee eye that recreates an image each patch of the eye sees; in each spot there is a correspondence with the other spots of the world.”<sup>17</sup> It is with the image of this huge mosaic in their minds that writers like Vosganian, Rushdie and Maalouf write their novels of memory or postmemory. They dispatch their memory deep and far in time and space to trace threads of the past and of the remote and to weave those threads into meaningful stories.

Of all the documents used, photographs are the most precious and suggestive. Vosganian writes a compelling novel in which the history of the Armenians is visually represented by their photographs, a photo-history of a photo-culture. In this book, “photographs often replace people.” Photographs were, for the Armenians of those times,

like a testament or a life insurance. Had the persons come back from the convoys of deportees, from orphanages, from their journeys in ship bellies, the photos would be stored again and the living persons would resume their place among the living. Had they failed to return, then the photos would bring the persons vanished back among their lot when the old beautifully chiselled boxes were opened on special occasions.<sup>18</sup>

Forced to find methods of getting their messages across in times of terror and censorship, the “old people” of the writer’s childhood, as the narrator recurrently calls them, take pictures with encoded messages of themselves and of one another, and communicate through them. The novel itself, apart from being illustrated by a suggestive picture and accompanied by a whole album of photographs<sup>19</sup>, spins the yarn of one of its episodes starting from a picture. Thus, in this ekphrastic key, the picture of

<sup>16</sup> Marianne Hirsch, “Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14, no. I (2001): 8.

<sup>17</sup> “*The Book of Whispers* and the Armenian Genocide,” an online interview by Iolanda Malamen, Accessed March 20, 2012, <http://www.ziuaveche.ro/exclusiv-zv/intalnirile-zv/cartea-soaptelor-si-genocidul-armean-7863.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Varujan Vosganian, *Cartea șoaptelor* (Polirom, 2009) 167. All passages from *The Book of Whispers*, from interviews and from Romanian articles are my translation.

<sup>19</sup> Varujan Vosganian, *Cartea șoaptelor*, Accessed April 5, 2012, <http://ro.scribd.com/doc/34883454/Cartea-Șoaptelor-Album-de-Varujan-Vosganian>.

Nicolae Iorga found dead in the forest of Strejnicu is the visual germ of a fascinating story of General Dro's weapons, which were never to be found. General Dro, the guerrilla name of Drastamat Kanayan, former minister of defense during the short-lived history of the Republic of Armenia, is one of the Armenian legendary figures. Dro planned to use those weapons in a fight on the side of the Germans against the Red Army. Like several other histories, this risky dream of liberation ended up in catastrophic disappointment. However disappointing the end of the dream may have been, like many other dreams in the book, this expresses the Armenians' nostalgia for a dignified and glorious past, their lives rooted in imagination, their recurrent dream of recovering, against all odds and especially against the odds of "reality" itself, the Armenia of its golden past.

### **Sahag Seitanian, Hartin Fringhian and an Alternative "Reality" of Imagined Maps**

Constructing the alternative reality of imagined maps, Vosganian writes a postrealist and anti-mimetic novel. Indeed, the narrator insists on the importance and significance of things "imaginary" and things "imagined":

Leaving real things behind, the people of my grandparents' generation let themselves guided by the imaginary and the imagined things, which is to say those things which did not exist and those which, existing, they would obstinately see as what they were not.<sup>20</sup>

More often than not, characters in the novel experience the every-day reality in all its dullness or grimness, trying to imagine another "reality" behind them. Sahag Seitanian, whose Muslim name is Yusuf, the split character who frames the tragic story of the Armenians' initiation into death through the seven circles, is one of those emblematic characters in *The Book of Whispers* in which the Armenians do not live only in the spectral world of photographs but also in the imagined world of maps. Through maps, they project an alternative "reality" where the glorious spectre of historic Armenia is restored by their imagination. Being one of the very few whose lives were spared in the deportation of 1915 because his mother bartered him to an Arab to save him, Sahag grows into a more and more embittered old man, who fuels his hatred of communism by listening to Radio Free Europe on a Telefunken radio installed in a tomb, by watching avidly the withdrawal of the Red Army's battalions in the summer of 1958, and then the live broadcast of the funerals of Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej, "without missing the slightest detail, cracking seeds, drinking beer and kibitzing as if on a stadium."<sup>21</sup>

Sahag Seitanian is also "one of the first who let himself lured by the fascination of maps." Thus, Sahag typifies his people who

fled, emigrated, crossed deserts, continents, seas and oceans, but did not travel in reality. Travelling around the world was marked by sadness, not by curiosity or joy. Therefore, they were travellers of worlds spread on paper, like the book scorpions.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Vosganian, 205.

<sup>21</sup> Vosganian, 378.

<sup>22</sup> Vosganian, 379.

Sahag's maps cut through the real world and open a new dimension. On these maps, wars end differently, prisoners manage to escape from deportation camps and warriors from ambushes. These maps are the blueprint of a parallel history in which the Americans land in the Balkans, the English parachutes pack the sky and the Russians withdraw into the depths of Siberia. Of course, on these maps Armenia stretches across the surfaces it used to stretch under the rule of Tigranes the Great in the last century B.C. On another map the Treaty of Sèvres, which provided for an independent Armenia, is still valid, the Yalta Conference has not taken place and Stalin's designedly blunt pencil tip has not divided Europe.

It is only in these maps, and of course also in the carefully treasured photographs, old books, old boxes and old carpets, that the chaos and unrest of the age find a certain meaning. Maps, even if imagined or all the more because they are so, preserve the world and save it for a meaning and a final redemption. All the old people of Vosganian's childhood let themselves "guided towards this new Bethlehem, where redemption took the shape of a map."<sup>23</sup>

One of the many stories within the all-encompassing story of the novel, the story of Hartin Fringhian adds to the *mise en abyme* effect, which gives depth both of perspective and of meaning to the book. This story is another old man's, who fled from Anatolia and came to Romania when he was young in 1916. Settled in Constanta, he became one of the most respected tradesmen in the city and even the vice president of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. He developed his business and prospered. However, in 1948 the Law of Nationalization was enforced and thereby the communist state became the owner of Fringhian's factories.

The old man flees and takes cover at a sheepfold in the mountains. He lives with a group of Romanian intellectuals, who are armed partisans fighting to keep their lands away from collectivization. There, the old Armenian and the Paragină brothers, Vasile Sava, captain Mihai Timaru, Gheorghică Barbu, sometimes joined by Filimon Tudose, a monk from Moșinoaia Monastery<sup>24</sup>, tell stories and make "plans for a future which only there, in the deep snow and closer to the sky, seemed to be possible." Around the fire in the forests, on winter days and nights, they would discuss "high politics, drawing with Cristea's bayonet and the old man's shepherd stick new maps where the Red Army withdrew in the steppes and the allies occupied Eastern Europe and the Balkans."<sup>25</sup>

Fringhian, another old Armenian who traveled in sadness, who earned money only to lose it and who found his dreams shattered only to dream more dreams, is buried wearing his black suit which used to be a tuxedo, now so worn out that it falls apart like

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<sup>23</sup> Vosganian, 380.

<sup>24</sup> "Paragină-Timaru" was the first nucleus of the anti-communist resistance movement called "Vrancea." Ion Paragină was a fresh graduate from the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, and Cristea Paragină was still an upper secondary school student. Timaru had been a young officer in the royal army. He had graduated top of the form and he had been promoted by King Michael himself. Vasile Sava was a tradesman from Panciu. After only few months, the leading nucleus counted 25-30 persons, who coordinated several hundreds of partisans recruited in the area. Each partisan was armed with guns, submachine guns and grenades. Like in most of the areas of the country, these arms were "captured" during the Germans' retreat. For almost eight years, from 1947 until 1953, "Vrancea" was a very active and dynamic movement of anti-communist resistance, fighting against forced collectivization. For all these data, see <http://www.jurnalul.ro/special/eroii-din-vrancea-paragina-si-timaru-69038.htm> (accessed March 25, 2012)

<sup>25</sup> Vosganian, 290-291.

brittle paper. His hands are folded upon his will, the metaphoric essence of a life in which he never despaired and never ceased to imagine a better future.

## **The Anti-Communist Resistance and the Ransom of the Jews in Communist Romania**

Chapter Four of *The Book of Whispers* is set in 1958, a year when

Romania was the only country where anti-communist resistance still continued. It was about to continue until 1962, the last hero of the resistance being a peasant called Ion Banda<sup>26</sup>, killed by the Security troops in the Banat mountains.<sup>27</sup>

1958 was also the year when Petru Groza died, and Ion Gheorghe Maurer succeeded him as the President of the Great National Assembly. In *The Book of Whispers* and in the past it reflects, those were times of political duplicity: while in the field of foreign affairs Romania was busy signing all sorts of treaties, in the field of domestic affairs repression grew more and more fierce. That duplicity typified the communist regime, but at that particular time the stake was the regime's will to emancipate itself from the Soviet rule and to take grip of absolute power. The main targets of repression were the intellectuals. The young students interrogated after the Hungarian revolution were expelled from universities. Many intellectuals of older generations like Constantin Noica, Arșavir Acterian were arrested. The founders of "Rugul Aprins" / "the Burning Altar" were also arrested. Arsenie Papacoic, who later became one of the great Orthodox fathers, and Dumitru Staniloae, Orthodox priest, theologian, academic were arrested, and so were Father Daniel Tudor, who died shortly after he was incarcerated, and poet and physician Vasile Voiculescu, who died several months after being set free. "You meant to burn the effigy of communism with your Burning Altar!" the narrative voice in *The Book of Whispers* summons the yell of the prosecutor as a painful evocation of those terrible times. "However, the fire smoldered for more than thirty years"<sup>28</sup>, the narrative voice whispers.

The voice of power always yells in *The Book of Whispers*, while the narrative voice and the voices of those whom it evokes to eventually redeem, the oppressed and

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<sup>26</sup> Ion Banda joined a partisan group which counted 20 members in 1946. Failing to capture him because the local peasants supported and provided him with shelter, the Security arrested his son. Since Banda would not give himself up, Banda's son was "allowed" to escape together with the informer Ion Gavrilă, in hope he would take Gavrilă's accomplices to his father's hiding place. This did not happen. However, without realizing it, Banda's son gave away the names of several connections, who were arrested on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 1950. The Security never managed to trace Ion Banda. He continued to live on his own in the woods until 1962, and at that date he was the only partisan left in Romania. He would frequently chisel messages on tree barks. The messages would say: "Banda is alive!"; "Banda will never die!"; "Banda will take revenge!"; "Long live King Michael!" He was eventually killed, though not at the hands of the authorities, but in rather unclear circumstances. It seems, however, that the assassins were poachers from Cornereva, about whom he knew enough and who feared that if he was caught by the Security, he would give away their names, too. For these data please see [http://www.vestul.ro/stiri/3392/„al-doilea-nivel”-al-miscarii-de-rezistentanta-anticomunista-din-banat-\(9\).htm?action=print](http://www.vestul.ro/stiri/3392/„al-doilea-nivel”-al-miscarii-de-rezistentanta-anticomunista-din-banat-(9).htm?action=print) (accessed March 25, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> Vosganian, 189.

<sup>28</sup> Vosganian, 189.

the defeated, the massacred and the deported, the dispossessed and the repatriated, the tortured, the poets and the dreamers always tell their stories in a whisper:

As a matter of fact, *The Book of Whispers* remains in its essence the same for all times, like a choral piece by Johann Sebastian Bach, like a narrow gate through which people pass nestling into one another.<sup>29</sup>

There were not only the Armenians and the Romanians, but also the Jews. As a consequence of the imbalance between industrial development and more and more rampant poverty, Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej asked Nikita Khrushchev: “What are we going to do?” and Khrushchev’s answer was: “Sell Jews!” In *The Book of Whispers* the secret is out, and we find out that the obnoxious plan was carried out:

Prices were established per head of Jew. It was only later that Ceaușescu adapted prices to market demands, even though the prices set in that manner did not suit the value system of the proletariat dictatorship: namely, several times more dollars for an intellectual than for a worker. As many Jews were intellectuals, the trade flourished.<sup>30</sup>

In *The Ransom of the Jews* published in 2005, details of this (until recently) secret bargain is disclosed and analyzed. Radu Ioanid shows that Israel paid for the Jews and also mediated Romania’s influence in the Middle East. The price was \$2,000 to \$3,300 per head, and also involved trade and loan considerations. According to Ioanid, approximately 235,000 Jews emigrated from Romania to Israel under this arrangement, which ended with the fall of the Ceaușescu regime. The complicity does not stop here. Apart from Romania, which ruthlessly traded humans, and Israel, which accepted the deal irrespective of its dubious ethical implications because it saved human lives, the secret reached the United States in 1978. However, the Carter administration turned a blind eye to it for reasons related to its policies towards the USSR. The trade satisfied both states, but it is still considered a confidential matter.

## **Collectivization and the Day when the Books Were Burnt**

Although saturated with history, “*The Book of Whispers* is not a book of history, but one of states of conscience.”<sup>31</sup> The focus of this approach being the relevance of the communist past to our post-communist present, it should be noted that the book’s highlight of the most abusive episodes in the history of communism is expected to stir “states of conscience” which are seen as necessary by many other post-communist “consciences.” The post-communist present cannot ignore the secrets, lies and murders of the communist regime. Should history be a broken montage of missing slides, then those missing bits might not matter. As it is, it seems that the post-communist present simply cannot do without an awareness of the communist past and therefore without those “states of conscience.” In this sense, Vladimir Tismăneanu argues that there is a close connection between building a democratic post-communist society and confronting our communist past. He also implies that if the Romanians fail to bring the

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<sup>29</sup> Vosganian, 311.

<sup>30</sup> Vosganian, 190.

<sup>31</sup> Vosganian, 310.

past to bear upon the present, then post-communist democratization is seriously jeopardized. He explains:

All postcommunist societies face major dilemmas in confronting their traumatic past. A functional democracy cannot be based on lies, denial, and amnesia. Romania's exit from communism has resulted in a hybrid quasi-democratic regime, with former communists like Ion Iliescu maintaining influential positions and opposing a genuine break with the past.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, Vosganian's postrealist reflection of the communist past in *The Book of Whispers* through hyperbolic evocation of landmarks of communist terror has the role of mediating aesthetically between past and present, and therefore helping our collective conscience confront the traumatic past through catharsis.

The episode of forced collectivization is one of those events in the history of Romania under the communist regime whose evocation triggers such states. Chapter Six is another knot in the novel's complex plot. The time is simultaneously 1949, November 1957 in an early winter, 1964, when the narrator and other characters in *The Book of Whispers* dip their fingers into the creamy dish which is an offering in the memory of the dead, and 2005, when times seem to have changed. This is also another knot in the novel when post-communism looks communism into the eye for signs of change, and there is change, but the scars are still there and post-communism will not heal them. The best it can do is to show them, and maybe through writing, open the gate to redemption. In 2005, "the burden of being chased and of speaking in a whisper had turned into the burden of being free and not knowing what to say, just because you don't know what to say in the first place"<sup>33</sup>.

Towards the end of this story, we find out that the survivors who are now Vosganian's interlocutors were imprisoned and released in 1964, but when they returned nobody hurried to greet them, nobody asked them what happened and they locked this story in their hearts for four more decades. "Now it is the first time [we're asked]," one of them says<sup>34</sup>.

Before the cruel episode of the uprising, the day when the books were publicly burnt is remembered again. Crimes connect. The same pernicious ideology of a criminal regime rules that people be killed and books be burnt. Both books and people may be declared enemies of the people, and they actually were in those days. The story being circular and accretive, this is not the first time when the sad day of the public burning of books is remembered. In Chapter Three, the diction sadly and ironically echoes the jargon of communist ideology:

The list of forbidden books was brought by the postman. The trailer was parked for several days round the street corner. People carried sackful of books to it. They knew not whether it was good or bad to show that they would have had forbidden books. Books are mind-twisters and they breed enemies of the people.<sup>35</sup>

People are morally confused: their sense of right and wrong is twisted by an ideology and a policy which absurdly claims that books are inimical. However,

<sup>32</sup> Vladimir Tismăneanu, "Democracy and Memory: Romania Confronts Its Communist Past," accessed May 4, 2012, <http://ann.sagepub.com/content/617/1/166>.

<sup>33</sup> Vosganian, , 255.

<sup>34</sup> Vosganian, 271.

<sup>35</sup> Vosganian, 122.

postmemory restores the event and puts it into perspective. In the book, the day is sad, the wrong done reaches cosmic proportions and upsets the circadian cycle:

The pyre lasted the whole night. The fire's guardians looked gigantic, their silhouettes elongated and casting enormous shadows upon the people who watched in silence, upon the houses and windows, upon the city. [...]

On the day when the books were burnt the passage from one night to the next was done without a sunrise and without a sunset, only through a smothering darkening.<sup>36</sup>

In Chapter Six we read that “in the war between powers and books, although only the books die, the powers never win. Because people wrote more than they are able to forget.”<sup>37</sup>

In March 1949 the Central Committee of the Romanian Working Party ruled that collectivization should be implemented. The category of peasants who started to be oppressed was that of freeholders (Rom. “mijlocași” and “chiaburi”). The regime sent its messengers to stir the spirits, instill fear, or if possible to persuade the peasants to consent to giving their lands away. There were the “agitators” and the “guides.” Since small groups might have been scared away by the reluctant peasants, the agitators and the guides went on their raids in larger and larger groups. There was no escape either for those who stayed or for those who ran away. Thus, when

they lacked the common sense to run away, the peasants were arrested at gunpoint, which those who had been to war knew as merciless weapons, they were tied up and flung in trucks, like sheep, one on top of the other. Those who had run away were eventually caught too, taken away from their hiding places, from thickets, from woods, from relatives' places, giving themselves away from hunger, from cold or from fear that their relatives would suffer what the runaways themselves could suffer if they helped them to hide in their barns or cellars, or so they had been told.<sup>38</sup>

Terror seizes whole villages. One of the agitators is Nicolae Ceaușescu, “sent by Bucharest to put an end to the peasants' uprisings in the Siret Plain for good.”<sup>39</sup> The peak moment is the military intervention. Seeing the tanks coming, one of the peasants cannot even cry out loud that they are in mortal danger, and only starts pouring out his panic:

I mean, what are we going to do with our barricades of rug tow and planks in the face of the tanks, and where are we going to hide from their shells and their rotating gun rings, but his voice could no longer be heard, because in the meantime the large bell started to chime.<sup>40</sup>

Bodies are pierced, blood spills out, the whole universe liquefies, the bell continues to chime

as if the belfry had dripped like lime onto the walls of the church and the whole church had been a belfry with copper walls. The chime became so deafening that the church rose gigantically, set its foundations on the verge of the horizon and the sky became a copper dome, and a much larger bell was banging against the walls of the sky.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Vosganian, 123-124.

<sup>37</sup> Vosganian, 255.

<sup>38</sup> Vosganian, 259.

<sup>39</sup> Vosganian, 262.

<sup>40</sup> Vosganian, 264.

<sup>41</sup> Vosganian, 266.

For what seem to be a few seconds, the “gigantic battle” leaves humans out. It is waged between the belfry, the pillar of the peasant’s universe, and the guns and tanks, the destructive weapons used to force upon them the communist terror. The belfry is pulled down, but the bell continues to chime. Against this battle of the two camps, no-name wounded bodies crawl away from the march of the chain treads. It is only when the bell is silent that the bullets stop. Dismembered bodies twist or kneel,

clinging their nails or feeling with the soles of their feet the frozen ground for steps to lean on, as if climbing a staircase, the weaker nestling in the arms of the larger, the bleeding into the arms of others bleeding, for the blood had started to blend until you no longer knew whose wound that was.<sup>42</sup>

This episode can be read against Ruxandra Cesereanu’s argument in her book *Panopticon: Political Torture in the Twentieth Century*. When she speaks about “body and unbody,” Cesereanu starts from the idea that:

Our era began with an act of torture that became the matrix of humanity. In the final part of the gospels, Christ was a tortured body (flagellated, crucified!). His humanity was tested through repeated excruciating torments, through a (torture-induced) blood sacrifice. Christ died as a man in agonizing pain.<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, Christ’s archetypal example puts the suffering of the decimated peasants in *The Book of Whispers* in a perspective which the writer himself intended his readers to achieve. Vosganian repeatedly declared that “*The Book of Whispers*, like *Book of Lamentations* by Narekatsi” is “not just a book to read but also a book to redeem.”<sup>44</sup> The author also indicates a resemblance and a connection between his book and those of David’s psalms which are a gradual descent into yourself when you gradually discover yourself. The steps in *The Book of Whispers* are those of postmemory.

Both postmemory and memory show that individual memory cannot do without collective memory. One’s identity is steeped in a larger identity, and so those who were not killed in the massacre of the 4<sup>th</sup> of December 1957 remember in 2005 that the bell’s chime could be heard as if in a dream. All of Vosganian’s interlocutors remember those terrible moments when communion and communal continuity were violently breached, and any sense of transcendence diabolically denied in the name of an atheistic age and a devastating force.

Those imprisoned were set free seven years later, and the narrative of postmemory counts them: eighteen at Vadu Roșca, fifteen at Suraia, forty at Răstoaca and fifty at Cudalbi. The narrative voice in *The Book of Whispers* deems that those who were set free seven years later lived with the spectre of their wasted lives in the aftermath of their experience in prison. There were forty eight wounded, and ten dead: eight men, a woman and a bell. Widows stayed alive and raised their children who, a long time after the event, were still called “children of bandits.”<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Vosganian, 267.

<sup>43</sup> Ruxandra Cesereanu, *Panopticon: Political Torture in the Twentieth Century* (București: Institutul Cultural Român, 2006) 117.

<sup>44</sup> “*The Book of Whispers* and the Armenian Genocide,” an online interview by Iolanda Malamen, <http://www.ziuaveche.ro/exclusiv-zv/intalnirile-zv/cartea-soaptelor-si-genocidul-armean-7863.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Vosganian, 271.

## Soviet Propaganda, the Armenian Diaspora, the Armenians' Repatriation and Deportation

*The Book of Whispers* says that “the story of repatriation you won't find anywhere, because nobody ever wanted to tell it through, even less to write it in all its terrible details.”<sup>46</sup> Post-communism looks again communism into the eye for all its terrible practices of human debasement, humiliation, deprivation, for the whole tissue of lies known as propaganda used by communist regimes, communist leaders, and communist agitators in order to persuade innocent people into falling for their tricks, then befuddle them, threaten them, keep them under permanent fear of ambiguous hazards, play their “game of chess” and use their victims as “pawns.”

The gates to this collective experience and horrid reality are opened by another personal story whose key character, the emblem of the Romanian Armenian repatriated in Soviet Armenia, is Uncle Simon, Uncle Sahag's brother. Uncle Simon's repatriation begins, as it does for the whole community of Armenians in Romania, in the autumn of 1945 with pre-repatriation meetings.

The pre-repatriation meetings in Bucharest and in Focșani show a stark contrast between two cultures: one connected to a transcendental dimension and held together in the name of consecrated traditions of religious icons, cult objects, holy books, a historic past and its heroes, on the one hand, and a blatantly red and pompous display of contemporary emblems of ruthless power, the new Soviet *conquistadores* in all their earthly glory and vanity, on the other hand. The forms of the conflict between these two types of humanity, of which the latter is a distorted version, range from “silent” tension, in scenes like the pro-Soviet meetings preceding the Armenians' repatriation, to the most devastating and noisy carnages in the collectivization scenes of *The Book of Whispers*. Both the pre-repatriation meetings and the massacre in the name of collectivization epitomize a war of cultures: one rooted in traditions, connected to transcendental dimensions, deeply religious, be it Armenian or Romanian, and the other atheistic, rooted in immanence, avid of power, keen on destroying the old traditional cultures, societies and individuals, and on transforming them into godless masses, obedient individuals living in the immanent present of the red power. By insisting on this contrast, Vosganian's novel dismantles the communist past of all its red garments and reveals its beguiling and inhuman practices to stir “states of conscience” in the post-communist present. Thus, Vosganian's book performs a recuperative act, restoring truth through fiction and allowing the post-communist collective conscience to build its democratic present confronting the trauma of the past. There are layers and stories of that past, which the novel reveals in the circular and accretive narrative.

In spite of warnings, Uncle Simon volunteers to be repatriated in the name of the Armenian land. He keeps saying in his own simple way: “our land...our land.” It is now clear for his brother Sahag that “for Simon, who saw the world turned towards the centre of the earth, the arguments of the others counted too little.”<sup>47</sup> In the spring of 1946 Simon embarks, together with his wife and their two daughters, Arpine and Hermine.

After Stalin's death, Simon returns to Romania on a visit fifteen years after he left the country. We see him in the mythically charged garden of Vosganian's childhood,

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<sup>46</sup> Vosganian, 126.

<sup>47</sup> Vosganian, 137.

sitting on the couch under the apricot tree, telling stories and smoking all the time. He confesses:

Armenia deserves to be loved. Everywhere you look around there's only stone. In the mountains, stones grow straight, like trees. I'm afraid to die there, they'll throw stones on top of me. Here the earth is good, it's worth dying here.<sup>48</sup>

Since *The Book of Whispers* is a postmemory novel meant to heal because it restores meaning, Simon's life, his repatriation and his death converge to make all the sense in the world. The transcendental and cosmic dimension is there. Simon relates both to his Armenian homeland and to his Romanian land of adoption. The Stalinist days are gone, and now the meaning, worth and value of everything are restored, tables are redressed, balance is struck. This is the perfect time for Simon to pass away, and he dies on that very night. The earth opens to receive him as he has asked, and he lies buried in Focșani.

### **Liminality, Transit, Hybridity and Diaspora**

Uncle Simon's grim story of repatriation is one of "transit" and "liminality," concepts Oțoiu has already translated into the jargon of post-communism. Uncle Simon is, like Hartin Fringhian and all the Armenians in the book, a hybrid. All the old Armenians evoked by the young narrator in *The Book of Whispers* come from Anatolia. Their trajectory charts a liminal map; they are neither here, nor there, but continuously on the move across borders. Neither do they belong to places, although they may feel attached to them, as Simon feels he loves Romania for its good land and Armenia for its wild rugged beauty. Simon's brother Sahag is also a wandering hybrid. He is driven to the Mesopotamian desert in 1915 to die there, but he is bartered by his mother to an Arab, who gives him the Muslim name Yusuf. That changes Sahag's destiny: his hybrid self feels divided from now on between his old Sahag Armenian self and this ambiguous Yusuf Muslim self, which he feels disruptive and alien. That split sets him wandering in an attempt to leave his past behind until he eventually settles in Romania. However, Sahag never feels settled or at peace. Driven out and away either by the Turks or by the Soviets, the Armenian characters in *The Book of Whispers* are in a continuous transit and occupy a liminal space. Driven out of Anatolia, then lured out of Romania to a Soviet Armenia which Bolshevik propaganda describes as a land of plenty, the repatriated Armenians are hybrids longing for home. Hybridity, liminality, transit zone(s) are postcolonial motifs that translate very well into the post-communist discourse.

Diaspora in Vosganian's novel is another arching theme. Postcolonial history and its stories are largely about Diaspora, which connects with liminality, transit, hybridity and ambiguity. Diasporic communities are, par excellence, polyglot and liminal. They continuously reshape language and culture, imagining homes both in the past and in the present, projecting them into the future, but never actually inhabiting a home. Vosganian is a Diaspora writer, and *The Book of Whispers* is about an Armenian Diaspora, permanently on the move. In the repatriation episode, Diaspora is Stalin's

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<sup>48</sup> Vosganian, 153.

issue. While for Uncle Simon the earth has depths, and this is what counts for him, for Stalin, it has no depths but borders:

For Stalin, the earth had no depths and nooks. It was like a board, so that his index finger could point to each of its edges. Not depths were his fantasies, but borders. And when his index stopped at one point on the board, if borders could not be pushed beyond what was going on there, then people had to be taken inside the borders. Diaspora is protean, hard to grasp, too tired by its wanderings to lure and yet too unhealed in its traumas to be tired of its activities. With its nostalgia, with its dream of restoring historic Armenia, willing to find any allies to achieve it, as it happened during the war with General Dro's battalion, which sided with Germany against the Bolsheviks, Diaspora was a source of unrest for the Soviet Union.<sup>49</sup>

Armenian Diaspora spread like spots, spilling out of the edges that Stalin – the chess champion - could manage: it spread towards Australia, Argentina, Ethiopia or Canada. Therefore, repatriation was the initial stage in Stalin's plan: the Armenians worldwide had to be brought back to Armenia, and so they were called. The process had to be quick to prevent those who were outside Stalin's manageable borders from finding out about the terror and poverty that awaited them in Armenia. However, repatriation took two years, and that is why the repatriates' envelopes were unsealed, letters vigilantly read at the border and rewritten by diligent persons who would send them in the same envelopes, keeping only proper names of the initial text. The deportations were the next stage in Stalin's plan: first the repatriated, and then the locals. And Stalin planned ahead, following his diabolic plan in which humans were now pawns, and now figures in statistics. Thus, when the population reached less than one million inhabitants it would lose its status of republic, and its territory could be shared between Georgia and Azerbaijan.

Diasporic identity was cumbersome for Stalin, who wanted to contain it within the borders of the Soviet Union, and then play with his "pawns" by moving them across the board, but never beyond it. Stalin's careful plan was to prevent Diaspora from spilling out of his control. Vosganian's postmemory narrative dismantles the Soviet dictator's game, thus confronting today's post-communist Diaspora and its much less problematic liminality with the communist liminality of danger.

## **Conclusion: A Novel for All Times**

The (his)tory recovered by *The Book of Whispers* is meant to raise awareness and to stir states of mind and of conscience. The restoring agent is the postmemory of an individual who tunes himself to the collective memory of Armenians, Romanians, Jews and other nations.

Irina Ciobotaru argues that "our relation with the reality of the so recent communist period, for instance, is achieved more through the memory of the oppressed than through historic clarification."<sup>50</sup> Indeed, it is very rare that history should record the stories of the oppressed other than through dry figures and statistics. However, our

<sup>49</sup> Vosganian, 150.

<sup>50</sup> Irina Ciobotaru, "Romanul ca travail de mémoire: *Cartea șoaptelor* de Varujan Vosganian," *Dacia Literară*, no. 2, (2010): 76.

humanity yearns for the truth beyond, a truth which only works of imagination like this can recover, show and by showing, redeem.

*The Book of Whispers* references a lot of other books, most of which are religious, in order to give to this 'terror of history'<sup>51</sup>, in Eliade's terms, a meaning by which later generations can live. This is a novel book which tells the stories of how books fare, how they are carefully preserved, or how they are 'accused' of twisting minds, and how they books are publicly burnt. It also describes books, very often of cult, old photographs, imagined maps, Armenian customs, Romanian customs, and it evokes a whole range of colours and smells. It contains a cohort of characters whose stories this 'polyphonic' novel, in Bakhtin's sense of the word, orchestrates<sup>52</sup>. It is their lives that Vosganian never lived, and that is what makes them so exemplary. From the vantage point of the post-communist present, the author can step back from those terrible experiences because he did not live them, and writing about them he can tell us his parables of their lives in a book which holds everybody and everything together: a post-communist perspective on the communist past, a 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective on the past 20<sup>th</sup> century in which the Armenians, the Romanians, the Jews, and other nations shared a shifting, often dangerous and violent world context whose legacy we need to confront in the present.

*The Book of Whispers* is also a book of contrasts. There are always two worlds, two cultures and their ethos set against each other at two opposite poles: in the Armenian genocide, an arrogant dominant culture which states its power by ruling that an entire people be ruthlessly driven to the deserts and die there; in the atrocities committed by the communists, an internationally welded machine of destruction, gaining power and maintaining it through oppressive and repressive methods, imposing its atheistic culture of immanence upon traditional cultures whose essence was a strong sense of transcendence. What is always at stake in these clashes is one culture's position of power versus another culture's position of subordination and/or forced submission, a "subaltern" position probed by postcolonial critics which translates into the discourse of post-communism. Irina Ciobotaru states:

he [Vosganian] writes about the meekness of the weak in the face of the whims of the powerful, about the essential victory of the defeated, about the impossibility of (self)-discovery and (self)-development in terms of identity awareness outside the sphere of the family and the people, about one's own roots, restoring the portraits of the old people who laid the foundations of his being.<sup>53</sup>

Vosganian's *Book of Whispers* is predictably a book for all ages in asserting the most valuable and essentially defining features of our humanity. It is ultimately a book which preserves and states our humanity against real or virtual threats of its destruction. If read in the light of some postcolonial concepts, there is "dialogue" there both between post-communism and communism, or at least a bridge between these two successive ages, and between postcolonialism and post-communism as discourses reflecting on two different, albeit comparable, models of colonialism.

<sup>51</sup> See Mircea Eliade, "Teroarea istoriei," in *Mitul eternei reîntoarceri* 136-156 (București: Univers Enciclopedic, 1999).

<sup>52</sup> Pam Morris, ed. *The Bakhtin Reader, Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov* (London: Arnold, 2003), 93.

<sup>53</sup> Ciobotaru, 77.

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## Romanul de postmemorie al lui Varujan Vosganian

Acest articol analizează *Cartea șoaptelor* scrisă de Varujan Vosganian din perspectiva unui roman al postmemoriei, termen propus de Marianne Hirsch. Postmemoria este dimensiunea esențială a unei cărți care privește retrospectiv trecutul dintr-o poziție care este în același timp aceea a prezentului nostru potcomunist. O astfel de carte nu ar fi putut fi scrisă sau publicată în timpul regimului comunist, nu doar fiindcă publicarea sa ar fi fost împiedicată, ci și fiindcă perioadele pe care le recuperează ficționează au nevoie de distanța autorului față de ele și de perspectiva pe care o oferă acea distanță. Conform declarațiilor autorului, protagonistul cărții este secolul XX, cu toate atrocitățile sale. Aceasta este și o carte despre poporul armean. Deși genocidul armean din 1915 este un episod central, acesta nu este nici pe departe singurul abuz de proporții pe care îl evocă romanul. Atrocitățile comuniste se adaugă celor câteva etape ale genocidului armean, iar victimele lor sunt armeni, români, evrei și alte nații.