



**Asli Erdogan**

## We left a deep invisible mark behind us

"What are we applauding? We are applauding Hrant, his resistance, resistances, our union, that unexpected solidarity..." Novelist Asli Erdogan describes her feelings of love and loss while marching in protest against Hrant Dink's murder.

The couple behind me turned round to look back. Then so did those on their right, in front of them, behind them... They looked in surprise, one by one, in twos. They were trying to see the back of what seemed to be an endless procession. Were there so many of us? Why had we allowed so much time to go by in a solitude that had been imposed upon us? I wished that looking back on our lives, our own lives, we had not been confronted with so many defeats, so many disappointments and disillusionments.

It was a long, silent walk. Thousands and thousands of people were slowly walking, side-by-side, under an unexpected winter sun, a luminous sky, reminiscent of spring. A compact, homogeneous crowd was filling the avenues, the streets, the squares. There were blood-red carnations. Black signs spelling out the same message in three different languages: "We are all Hrant, we are all Armenians." Hrant's face emerges above arms, above heads, an intact face, bearing no signs of aging, with his gentle, comforting smile... Thousands of people, in mourning, heartbroken, intently turned to that face with a sense of loss even deeper than if he had been one of them. Newspapers, headlines, people clapping their hands, the white dove, so alive, in front of *Agos*,<sup>1</sup> people recognizing each other and humbly greeting, heads bowed in gravity, weighed down by the assassination. It was a winter sun that we did not seem to deserve. (But who had the right to deprive anyone of that sun, be it for a single minute?) "They say it is five miles away, do you think we can walk that far?" a voice says. Another one replies: "We will make it!" We walk on, leaving a deep invisible mark behind us.

It was two or three years ago. We were in *Agos* on a solidarity visit and there were ten or fifteen of us, all familiar faces. "Welcome to you", he had said smiling... I had sat down in a corner and gazed at him as I drank my tea. The way he spoke of the injustice he had suffered unswervingly, his warm enthusiastic sincerity... I recognized him as a man of heart, of feelings, from head to foot, and I liked him straightaway. On that day, it seemed to me I had caught a glimpse of a solitude I could not bring myself to name.

Last Friday, I went back to *Agos*, my face covered with rain, soaked with his shadow. It was the first time in my life I had ever managed to chant slogans. There was also that New Year's Eve message I had sent to him eighteen days before: "Happy New Year! I wish you a Happy New Year!"

My eyes will often turn to helicopters, I don't know why, and to the birds silently flying and circling over the procession... I will walk to the sea, until I can get a glimpse of the old Istanbul... In that warm light, under this astonishingly lavish sun, on that mild January morning... I will think of Hrant, I will think of my own losses... Mourning all those I have lost, what I am to lose, all those years, those emotions... Sometimes I will join the thunder of applause, rising in successive waves... What are we applauding? We are applauding Hrant, his resistance, resistances, our union, that unexpected solidarity...

Or is it life, just life? I walk on without saying a word. It is the first time in ages I have not felt lonely. Today here we are, thousands of people overwhelmed with emotion. Each of us is a soul, each of us is a dove. A dove carrying an olive branch in its beak.

Here we are, still alive.

PS: And so am I, before it is too late, with our past as well as with our present.

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<sup>1</sup> Istanbul's Turkish–Armenian weekly newspaper, of which Dink was editor-in-chief.