

**Written while trying to  
comprehend the world  
from the countryside  
As scribbles for "The Story of My Life"  
or  
while thinking,  
"While on Earth am I taking  
these photographs?"**

It was the end of the **60s** and I had recently started primary school.

They used to come to **Çanakkale**, with their tents and caravans.

I used to overhear the mumblings of the local shopkeepers as they curiously watched the tourists taking photographs.

"Why don't they shoot our beautiful spots?"

After all, why go for those old Greek houses, unkempt gardens, or cobblestones?

We too had tarmac roads and apartment blocks, why not shoot them?

"We'll remember us by these"

As such, I wasn't even supposed to like these tourists.

Justice Party was in government and the Prime Minister at the time was breaking ground for a new concrete factory or a dam across the country almost every single day.

"Grand Turkey" was awaited with yearning.

We were supporting People's Party<sup>1</sup> and my dad had told we that the Justice lot were reactionary  
I was confused even more

Devrim<sup>2</sup> had stopped on its tracks but at least we had the Anadol<sup>3</sup>.

A world population of three billion  
Two million people living in İstanbul

A signpost at the city's border  
Çanakkale.  
Population: 27,086  
Elevation: 10

Across the country, rural population is 65%, the urban is 35%

Papers talking about the worker migration to Germany

Open prison at İmroz

"Citizens" were to "speak Turkish" and "Turkey Was For the Turks"

Jews and Greeks slowly dwindled and then disappeared as if they evaporated  
Nobody even knows that Armenians used to live here

Process of nation-building continues in this country as capital changes hands

Single-tiered Greek houses were pulled down one by one, to be replaced with three, four-storey apartments  
Cobblestones had tarmac poured all over them  
Then they were dug out, over and over again, leading to a process of digging and pouring tarmac anew

We were waiting to see who'd first go to space

İFSAK had set "learning, proliferation and development of the arts of photography and cinema" as its mission

Greeks and Russians were the enemy

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1

<sup>1</sup> Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası*) the first political party of the Republic of Turkey, founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

2

<sup>2</sup> Turkish car prototype, which infamously failed at its launch event.

3

<sup>3</sup> A later national automobile manufacturing project, which endured for decades

America was a yearning!

Maunsell Forts out across Queensborough are under assault by pirate radios  
Voices of the spectres within the walls of Auschwitz lay siege unto Birkenau

Six Days War an the invasion of Palestine

I'm Turkish, righteous and conscientious!<sup>4</sup>

Smiling eyes of Atatürk in the classroom were gazing at me and I used to say that  
I'd be a naval engineer when I grew up

Lunchbox, needlework handkerchief and Marshall Aid-issue milk powder.

We had to be austere.

Domestic Produce Week was celebrated every week

Festive airs at home; uncle came back from the States with gifts again

Ghettoisation used to watched in silence back then

Roads aren't worn down with travel

Tub and bidet in the bathroom at Grand Tarabya Hotel

And an elevator

Chips and sausages

I hadn't even heard of Turkish pizza

Cowboy films at the Officer's Lounge on Saturday afternoons

We adored the white men

The one in blue doublets

In the dark room, we printed photographs with granddad.

## **70s, izmir**

Boarding school trauma

Years of confrontation with the mundane

My solitude, my fate

My grandfather the master, I'm the apprentice, we built a raft on the rubble bed

Dardanos was my kingdom

They were the days when neighbours dropped by to make phone calls

Night of blackouts

The waves '68 became ever so perceptible  
Sideburns grew bushy, skirts grew short  
But the valiant veterans of Korea<sup>5</sup> weren't forgotten yet

Nixon asked Nick Ut whether "that shot"<sup>6</sup> was fixed

SS Ayrfield Sydney was towed to shore after its Pacific tour  
Disassembly yards were shut one by one, as mangrove trees covered its deck

In view of the relative diminishing of coal market in view of the rising demand for oil, mines in Gunkanjima and Iwate, as well as other, were abandoned to their fates

European economies were turned upside down  
Arab nations were enriched  
Japanese car industry was threatening the American one

June 15th-16th

Martial law

First, they murdered Mahir  
Then, they hanged Deniz  
(Back then, nobody could surmise that Abdullah or Recep could one day become President)

Coup d'état in Chile

Army and People hand in hand  
"We conquered Cyprus!"  
Colonels' Junta in Greece collapsed

We were beggars for seventy cents and queues seemed infinite

Freedom Anthem, flag and television  
Muhammed Ali bouts being watched at the break of dawn

Hardworking boys to science departments, the brightest ones to study mathematics!

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5

<sup>5</sup> Turkey was a combatant in the Korean War following the country's accession to NATO.

6

<sup>6</sup> Famous photograph, "The Terror of War", depicting napalm-struck Vietnamese children.

My dad petitioned, so I was exempted from religion courses  
I read *the Holy Family*  
I had to re-sit for morals

We just bunk off school and go to the movies  
"Yeşilçam, all bare thighs"  
What-you-call-it too, every once in a while

Slate mines in Corris worked no longer

Albeit late, I got to know the Pink Floyd

İstanbul, "golden in rocks and soil"<sup>7</sup> harboured four millions  
Ghettoes were remembered only at election period.

As we saw the highways of Europe that rose from its ashes in thirty years  
We could hardly hide our awe.  
"Well, they had built it"  
But we didn't ask what women did  
Foreign travel permits were issued only once in two years and I now had an 8 mm  
camera

Was art for art, or was it for the public?

Kolmanskop, known for its rich diamond mines had surrendered to desert storms  
for over thirty years  
Mombello, Racconigi, Vercelli and many other insane asylums in Italy were  
shuttered due to human rights abuses.

"Ecevit was Our Hope" and "Wind was blowing in favour of the worker"  
We were all leftists, but "Gauchists", "Social fascists" and "Revisionists" were  
pummelling each other every day

Fascists were on the prowl

NATO and CIA  
National Intelligence and Counter-Guerilla  
And Maraş Massacre<sup>8</sup>

Yet, nobody could make him say "Rightwingers commit crime"

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7

▫ A common phrase amongst immigrant to denote the perceived prosperity of İstanbul.

8

▫ Unsolved killing of more than a hundred Alevi civilians presumably by fascist paramilitary group, the Grey Wolves, in 1978.

Mayday 1977

Soviets invaded Afghanistan  
Iranian Revolution first devoured its own children  
The United States did not yet know that it'd reap its own whirlwind

In Pittsburgh, one of the United States' largest steel manufacturers, Carrie Furnaces,  
succumbed to international competition and was shut down

Nicos Poulantzas, author of *Fascism and Dictatorship* committed suicide at the age of  
forty-three. I'm dreaming of the ways of how to prepare my own end by the age of  
thirty-five

We could hardly grasp "factories building factories" and we couldn't foresee what  
would happen when "the bottom of pie would burn"

## **80s**

Çorum Massacre, Decrees of January 24th, September 12th, Özal governments...  
The harm was done, but things still spilt out it seems

Two weeks after the coup, I enrolled to the faculty in **İstanbul**  
My mother was worried

Trade unions, associations, NGOs were also closed  
Shouts of the National Lottery criers echo along the alleys

We had to be on the lookout against external foes "in these days where we needed  
unity and solidarity the most"  
"Turk had no friend but himself"

Tortures, arrests, murders  
Soldiers everywhere!

Fear, everywhere!  
"Mothers and father are at peace"

It took some time to see other moms and dads

Higher Education Council was founded

Turkey's most prestigious association of amateur photographers and directors petitioned the National Security Council for a grant of confiscated and nationalised properties of annulled political parties.

"The nation was in peace" but war broke out in the east.  
Were there really Kurds?

Cinematheque was closed  
Roads and pavements were dug over and over again

John Lennon is shot!  
Imagining is even harder now

After the rubber boots from Germany, my new favourite was the fibre boat  
My granddad's raft had long fell out of favour, left to rot in a corner  
One evening, I dragged it over to a campfire in surreptitiously  
My granddad was sombre, mumbling "I'd fix it"  
Honestly, what good are the old for?

I never left behind my Zenith TTL camera

*1844 Manuscripts*  
Inti Illimani and Maria Farandouri

I thought I had found Engels' contradictions between the lines  
A naïve smile appears on my face  
With *Theses*, I severed my bonds with Kemalism<sup>9</sup>  
Movie days and Klimov, Wajda, Mikhalkov, Antonioni, Bertolucci...  
New horizons  
And an untimely marriage

Inadvertent waves, reckonings to be paid  
I couldn't be a philosopher, but I did manage to finish the engineering school

Working life and ethical oscillations

A lost relationship, a desperate divorce  
Lonely once again

In Saarbrücken, the giant of steel industry, Völklingen was shuttered  
Shipyards are being built in Tuzla

Population in İstanbul reached six millions

Nuclear disaster in Chernobyl affected a vast region  
Forty-three thousand people were evacuated out of Pripjat with a thousand and one hundred buses within three hours and a half  
Minister Aral, co-founder of Motherland Party, sipped tea on live television and showed to Turks that nothing would happen to them<sup>10</sup>

Glasnost and Perestroika

Aral was rapidly desiccating  
Detroit was a ghost town

That's the moment for Philip Glass

Berlin Wall collapsed with our dreams  
Buzludzha Monument, built with such pride, is now in the hands of looters

"Nothing could happen if Constitution was breached just once"  
Besides, "My clerks would know their way"<sup>11</sup>

Dollar, Marlboro, global economy  
Bankers and the quest for profit

AIDS is in church agendas

## 90s

"Power is no longer with the Soviets"  
World is now monopolar

In **İstanbul**, it was the times when galleries in Nişantaşı wouldn't yet open photography exhibitions, when İstanbul Modern, Santral İstanbul or Pera Museum didn't even exist

With the decree of United Nations Security Council, north of the 36th parallel was closed to the Iraqi aircraft  
We were supposed to "scoop three at the price of one", but the maths didn't match up.

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10

<sup>10</sup> The minister allegedly drank radioactively contaminated tea to prove that "a bit of radiation" could not possibly be harmful.

11

<sup>11</sup> These two phrases, by former President Turgut Özal, were emblematic of the acquiesced corruption in state structure.

Travel magazines are published one after the other  
Nowadays, one shouldn't take pictures of snotty boys anymore  
The photographer should pursue "the beautiful"

The arabesque culture surrounds us all  
"Neo-Image Period"

Private television channels being set up one by one  
Demand for cinemas is dwindling

"The Tide is Turning" in Berlin  
Narcissus in London  
Nostalgia in Folegandros  
Disappointments and hopeless loves  
Boarding school trauma never actually let go off me

"Keep the aggrandiser" said my granddad with his last breath

Trains no longer pass through Alaverdi  
Vanadzor is silent

Çiller, Ağar, Susurluk Scandal<sup>12</sup>  
Disappearances under custody, extrajudicial killings and unsolved cases  
The number of evacuated, razed, demolished villages and hamlets are expressed in  
thousands

Saturday Mothers<sup>13</sup> are determined

Sivas Massacre<sup>14</sup>

Gökova Hydrothermic Powerplant is commissioned

Apartheid is over  
Number of Ponte invaders under the command of the gangsters in Johannesburg has  
reached ten thousand

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12

▣ A crash crash in Susurluk revealed a deep connection amongst intelligence services, government and mafia, as the victims were representative of the said groups.

13

▣ A weekly protest, launched by the mothers of disappeared victims of police detentions and arbitrary arrests, occurring at Galatasaray Square in Taksim, İstanbul.

14

▣ The killing of Alevi intellectuals at Hotel Madımak, in Sivas, by far right and religious mobs who set the hotel on fire and barred the doors.

Is it possible to find Che's footsteps in Sierra Maestra?

İstanbul Transparent Days offers a space for self-expression through photography to participants

Beautiful slides pass along and a melting unit alongside New Age tunes

No comment!

Have we forgotten to express ourselves?

Susan Sontag's *On Photography*, Salgado's album, *Workers*, and Koudelka's *Chaos* were published back to back

New things are being spoken about photography in Turkey

Social documentary photography is being discussed somewhere

*Geniş Açılı* [Wide Angle] is launched

World Press Photo seminars give a new breath of life to young photographers

Women's suicides in Batman

Massacres in Srebrenica

With Yugoslavia hurtling into civil war, Krk hotels, once known as the "sunny face of socialism" first hosted refugees, and then were abandoned and forgotten

In İstanbul, art galleries and museum are opening up one after the next

The word "Art" is being added to the end of bank names

War in the east keeps raging on

Kurdish national movement is rising

Burials of the fallen in the west

Kyoto Protocol was signed, but did not go into effect

İFSAK İstanbul Photography Days is in search for an international identity with its thematic departments

The earthquake has brought great destruction and anguish, as well as hope to the society in a short period

After long years, we remembered that we were human

But the cracks were plastered over soon enough

The photographer children's truck is everywhere

And at last, the Photography Foundation is in the process of foundation

In the darkness of the night, kapok trees embroiled Ta Prohm

Monkeys are playing around in Bayon

The statue of Jesus deep in the sea

## **2000s** and at last, the millennium

The Twin Towers collapsed, the world reeled

In **İstanbul**, Photography Foundation was founded

Operation "Return to Life"<sup>15</sup>

With Halil's deliberations, six girls and six boys were sent to Nordens Fotoskola for education

The bridge between Stockholm and İstanbul was built

"Globalisation" is oft-repeated word in our tongue

My first visit to Arles and new horizons

We're now watching images of war, relayed by "embedded" journalists as we sit in our warm seats

First, Afghanistan fell, then Iraq

Then, chaos

What actually fell is still being debated

Organised with great hopes, ULISfotofest failed to leave a mark on cultural life of İstanbul and was forgotten

All that remained were memories and a catalogue

Shipbuilding is living its golden age in Turkey, as well as in the world at large

New shipyard are being built in the free zones in Antalya and Gölcük

Trailing queues in front of miniskirt-wearing bank representatives at workers' mess halls

Workers with credit cards feel themselves as privileged and special

Scenarios of "Moderate Islam", Republic Rallies, Kemalist flutters, Islamist reckonings and the quest for democracy

The left in tatters

The weather has turned

Islamic capital is stronger than ever

I'm lonelier than ever

Istanbul, with its rocks and soil in gold reached a population of twelve million  
Roads and pavements are being dug over and over again every day  
Everywhere across the country resemble a half-way construction site  
Shopping malls are popping up like mushroom  
Most of the investments are on the quake belt  
No regulations to speak of

A world built on images  
Billboards, neon lights, skyscrapers  
Everywhere, a photography contest  
I joined Andres Petersen's workshop to learn "How to Shoot Better"  
But the course was "lessons of life"  
For eight years, I couldn't press the trigger

Murder of Hrant Dink<sup>16</sup> is behind a veil of mist

Economic crisis  
World's balance is being readjusted  
The United States is even more anxious and ferocious  
Shanghai is growing rapidly  
Factories in Milan and shipyard in Genoa are being shuttered one by one

Cancer robbed me of my mother  
My family in pieces

I'm waiting for my retirement

## **2010s**

At long last, the earth fell ill  
World population reached seven billion

**Istanbul**'s population breached fifteen million

"Arab Spring" and the domino effects  
Borders are being redrawn at tables  
They say "Turkish Republic will remain forever"

We lost Angelepoulos

In an Anatolian village, an elderly man is proud of our construction of the largest airport in the world

Capital keeps sliding from production to construction

The Minister of Culture, plucked from "the Left" is trying to get rid off the "greasy seats" of Emek Cinema Hall<sup>17</sup>

Accession to the European Union is long forgotten

Security cameras are everywhere

Fukushima nuclear disaster

Due to the aggravating effect of recent sanction, Iran is forced to increase its oil-dependent production

Ministry of Health announced that due to the air pollution in capital city of Tehran, four thousand four hundred and sixty people have died annually

And finally, I've retired myself and restarted on photography

Where were we?

So difficult!

"Gezi"<sup>18</sup> rocked Turkey

We, Westerners, met armoured police cars, Kurds laughed at us

Did revolution winked at us?

Were "listeners of Open Radio, with copies of Orhan Pamuk under their arms, surprised to see, as the gas clouds disperse, children in white caps reading national newspapers?"

I lost my father

Smartphones are everywhere

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17

<sup>17</sup> Ertuğrul Günay, then Minister of Culture, was previously expelled from main opposition party, CHP in 2004 and joined the government in 2007.

18

<sup>18</sup> A local park in downtown İstanbul, which was the starting point for a national wave of protest movements throughout the summer of 2013, against the oppressive government rule in social life.

We "Share" and "Like" images

Proliferation of photographic production is still counted amongst the main priorities  
Angkor Watt is being invaded by Chinese tourists  
In the world of photography, alongside contests in FIAP's axis, "Best points for  
photography in the city" are being marked by municipalities onto maps and same  
images are encouraged to be photographed over and over again.

Urban immigration continues.

Villages are being drained

Across the country, rural population is 22%, while urban population is 78%

Number of seasonal workers, under inhuman conditions, is rising

The resolution process is underway and CHP still thinks itself to be on the left  
The flailing of the Kemalists is reminiscent of a mob, on their knees in darkness,  
pleading to their god with a crucifix in their hands

"Double highways" and "Marmarail" ended up being the answer to the corruption  
probes

Again, "Enemy Without"

Parallel, everywhere!<sup>19</sup>

And we are condemned to live in a monstrous city with constantly excavated and  
dug roads and pavements

The world is preparing for the centenary commemoration of 1915

But the agenda in Turkey will be wholly different

Finally, effects of climate change are being talked on the street

Flowers and grass alongside highways

Istanbul's water is coming from Melen

Is it GM products or oncology hospitals that is more numerous?

Still, you shouldn't smoke anyway

Soma disaster

Hundreds of miners perished

Republic of Turkey still hasn't signed the Article 176 of the ILO, for the "Agreement  
on health and security in mines"

<sup>19</sup> "Parallel Structure" was a neologism coined by pro-government circles to denote the extrajudicial system allegedly operated by exiled Turkish cleric Fethullah Gülen, in order to undermine and subvert the elected government

Don't Stop, Keep Ahead<sup>20</sup>

All three great cities in Turkey have ranked amongst the fastest growing metropolitan economies in the world

In the list, İzmir ranked fourth, ahead of İstanbul and Ankara

A fragment from the largest glacier in Antarctica, Pine Island, has drifted away due to melting

Palestine on fire

ISIS has declared its caliphate

"Resolution Process"<sup>21</sup> is in a cul-de-sac

The United States offer hope in Kobane

We finally figured out what happens when the pie turn hot

Icons of the Republic are being torn down one by one

Saturday Mothers are still waiting

And the People have elected their President

Don't Stop, Keep Ahead

Laid-off crane operator ekes out a living in garbage heaps in Diyarbakır

A peasant in Kars is weeping for not making enough for a year's worth in hay even by selling his cow

Upon the halted construction of the fifth and sixth reactors at Chernobyl, trees are branching upwards

We're chasing one record after the other

Arrested journalists

Internet bans

Human rights abuses

And glamorous courthouses

The lion's share of the annual budget goes to the Presidency and the Department of Religious Affairs

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20

<sup>20</sup> The main slogan of Justice and Development Party through the mid-to-late 2010s.

21

<sup>21</sup> The negotiation attempts with the Kurdish insurgent group, PKK (Kurdish Workers Party)

Build, o Exalted Master!  
Don't Stop, Keep Ahead

Enemies Without say, it's fascism

Intervention to the judiciary  
Police state  
And to boot, private security

Child brides and murders of women  
Public housing everywhere  
Sunni Islam hegemony in education  
Where are the National Intelligence lorries heading?  
Hydroelectric and nuclear powerplants  
Mining permits are flying around  
Workplace deaths  
Subcontracts  
Pillaging of northern forests  
New thermal powerplants in Çanakkale

Taksim awaits its fate

Target, 2023!

An eclipse of the mind

I'm reading *1844 Manuscripts* once again:

*"In estranging from man (1) nature, and (2) himself, his own active functions, his life activity, estranged labor estranges the species from man"*

Karl Marx - Paris, 1844

İstanbul, November 2014  
Emin Altan