

fire. Death was the immediate consequence of this kind of sexual violence. The victims took with them to their graves—or a mass grave, or nothing, no final resting place at all—the humiliation, the dehumanization, the memory of it all. But what about those who survived?

The response to this trauma was not always silence. Sometimes, the victim of such an extreme brutalization revealed extraordinary reactions, reactions that exposed the total collapse of moral order and normal human behavior. Describing the responses of the survivors of the 1894–96 massacres, for example, Suren Partevian relates an amazing but heartbreaking story about a girl named Saiko. After a two-month forced conjugal life with her Kurdish abductor, Saiko ran away but had nowhere to go. Her family had been slaughtered and their house ransacked. She wandered in the streets, pregnant and desperate, and when the child was born, in a moment of rancorous rage, she killed the baby to efface the traces of her own impurity and the memory of the unclean life she had been forced to live.¹⁴ In another episode, Suren Partevian describes the virginal Sarah killing her Kurdish assaulter in his sleep by pulling out his dagger and thrusting it into his heart, even though she had surrendered herself in return for a piece of bread. After feeding her younger brother and sister and having some herself, she gathered her strength and returned to her senses. In this painful moment of realization, she came to see the enormity of the sacrifice she had made and the sin she had committed.¹⁵ Killing the

¹⁴ This episode, titled “Saiko,” is discussed in Perroomian, *Literary Responses to Catastrophe* (1993), p. 130.

¹⁵ This episode, titled “Hatsin uzhe” (The power of bread), is discussed in *ibid.*, p. 131.