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Carikci, A.

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**Author:** Carikci, A.

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# Introduction

## One Hundred Years of Silence

The atrocity committed by the Ottoman Empire against the Armenians in 1915 is perhaps the most controversial episode in Turkish history. In fact, in modern Turkey, there is not even agreement as to what term should be used to refer to the destruction of the Armenians. In the Turkish historiography, *deportation* [tehcir] or *civil war* [iç savaş] are the predominant concepts adopted to refer to the events of 1915. Yet, Armenians claim that these terms trivialize and downgrade the crimes committed by the Ottoman Empire.<sup>1</sup> Thus, they demand that the mass extermination of the Ottoman Armenians be recognized as genocide.<sup>2</sup> In fact, since 1915, there is an ongoing struggle in Turkey about how to narrate the story about the country's past. As I was writing this in 2015, centennial commemorative events were being

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- 1 The same pattern can also be observed in US politics and Washington consistently uses other terminologies such as Great Catastrophe to evoke the Armenian language phrase *Meds Yeghern*. In his election campaign speech in 2008 Barack Obama promised to call the 1915 events genocide. Since becoming president Obama has been referring to the atrocities committed by the Ottomans in 1915 as the Great Catastrophe. The USA has heeded the warnings of its ally Turkey and has yielded to the Turkish government's diplomatic threats to recall its ambassador. The use of the term genocide could jeopardize the existence of the US İncirlik air base on Turkish territory, which is also a key supply point for US military operations in the Middle East.
  - 2 In *Between Genocide and Catastrophe* David Kazanjian and Marc Nichanian exchange e-mails on a regular basis and debate the term Catastrophe. Nichanian asserts that the word Aghed [Catastrophe] in Armenian, like Shoah in Hebrew, properly refers to the calamity of 1915. Nichanian emphasizes the singularity of the experience shared by the Armenians and insists on adopting the term Catastrophe while historicizing the event. He believes that only this term expresses the trauma of the Armenians in a collective way. For instance, the genocide recognition initiatives, led by the Armenians scattered around the world, are framed within the terminology of genocide. Nichanian asserts that this identification ignores the fact that the term genocide has gained importance after the Holocaust to refer to the Final Solution of the Nazis. Thus, the term has grown to be strongly associated with the extermination of the Jews. Nichanian states that if the Armenians persist in adopting the term genocide, the unique suffering of the Armenians is fractured; thus the need arises to authenticate and re-authenticate the victimization of the Armenians by emphasizing the word genocide. He points out that the perpetual re-victimization of the Armenians, through the term genocide, does not historically refer to the loss and trauma of the Armenians.

organized by NGOs in Istanbul, Diyarbakır and other Turkish cities for the victims of the genocide.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the state censorship, intimidation, obfuscation of historical realities and the re-writing of history are still predominant elements of the Turkish government. Hence, there is a conflict between the official version of history and several competing historical narratives.<sup>4</sup>

Let me give an example of this tension. In the first week of August 2014, Turkish newspapers informed their readers that the Turkish pavilion at the 56<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale in 2015 would feature a new work by Sarkis Zabunyan, a Turkish artist of Armenian descent.<sup>5</sup> The artist created an installation called *Respiro*, which means breath/I breathe in Italian. It is an installation of mirrors, stained-glass panes, neon-works, and is complemented by a composition of Jacopo Baboni Schilingi. The work of this Istanbul-born, Paris-based contemporary artist was on display in the Turkish pavilion at the Arsenale, one of the two main venues of the Biennale, from 9 May to 22 November 2015. The pavilion of Turkey at the Venice Biennale was organized by the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (IKSV) and realized with the contribution of the Promotion Fund of the Turkish Prime Ministry, under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey. Defne Ayas, the director of the Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam, curated the pavilion.<sup>6</sup>

At first sight this selection might seem like a decision made purely on artistic grounds for representing Turkey. However, there are three things that raise questions about the selection of Sarkis for the Turkish pavilion. These relate to the year chosen for this assignment, the venue of the Biennale and the artist's ethnic identity. First, the 56<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale started on the 9 May and will continue until the third

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3 For the Armenian genocide centennial commemoration organized by Project 2015, a US-based NGO, DurDe initiative and leading Turkish human rights organizations in Istanbul see: <<http://www.armenianproject2015.org>> [accessed 25 April 2015]. For the commemoration of the Gomidas Institute see: <<http://www.gomidas.org/projects-and-studies/show/15>> [accessed 26 April 2015].

4 In this context the term "history" does not refer to the academic study of the past. I use it to refer to a collective consciousness or the "remembered past".

5 Born in 1938 in Istanbul, Sarkis studied painting at a prestigious Istanbul art school, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, before moving to Paris in the early 1960s. Sarkis has presented his works at first-rate galleries and museums including the Louvre, the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Guggenheim Museum.

6 Together with Neery Melkonian, Defne Ayas was the co-curator of the *Blind Dates Project*, developed upon the invitation of Dr. Ani Kalayjian in late 2005. Ayas and Melkonian submitted a proposal for an exhibition by Armenian and Turkish contemporary artists to "envision a better future" that would help foster dialogue towards overcoming historical barriers between the Armenians and the Turks. This project included exhibitions of artists such as Karen Andreassian, Elif Uras, Ahmet Ögüt, Nina Katchadourian, Karina Matsakian, etc.

week of November 2015. 24 April 2015 marked the centennial commemoration of the Armenian genocide. In the USA, Canada and Europe, many local and Armenian organizations organized seminars, conferences, demonstrations and public commemorations. In addition to commemorating the victims liquidated by the Ottoman Empire, these initiatives also addressed Turkey's refusal to acknowledge the Armenian genocide for a century. Thus, the Armenian genocide gained more public visibility in the Western and American mass media in 2015. Is the choice of Sarkis, an artist of Armenian descent, to represent Turkey at the Venice Biennale in 2015, the year that coincides with the centennial Armenian genocide commemoration, a pure coincidence? Or does the Foreign Office of the Turkish Republic aim to bolster the image of Turkey with this selection?

Since its creation in 1895, the Venice Biennale has been one of the most prestigious cultural events in the world. In contrast to other international art events such as Documenta in Kassel, the Venice Biennale is organized along *national* lines. Many countries have secured permanent national pavilions in the Giardini gardens and some of them are represented in other venues across the city. Taking part in the Biennale soon became a question of national prestige for the participating countries.<sup>7</sup> The increasing popularity of the Biennale, the extensive media coverage and the involvement of prominent curators and artists in the execution of national pavilions have transformed the Biennale into a multinational setting where countries promote their artistic productions, thereby projecting an image of the nation itself. Therefore, choosing a new work by Sarkis, given his background, has allowed Turkey to portray itself as a country that values its cultural diversity. This seems to contrast with the cultural policy of the current pro-Islamist Turkish government that favours the homogeneity of the Turkish society. Moreover, the current government discourages projects that promote cultural diversity, criticize prevailing norms in Turkish society or question Turkish taboos.<sup>8</sup> For instance, İz Öztat, a Turkish

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7 Prominent architects, designers and curators have designed certain national pavilions. For instance, in 1934 Josef Hoffmann built the Austrian pavilion, in 1954 Gerrit Thomas Rietveld designed the Dutch pavilion and Alvar Aalto designed the Finnish pavilion in 1956.

8 As part of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government's family values push, officials at Turkish state theaters are obliged to submit plot synopses for government approval. Late 2014, the Presidential Symphony Orchestra of Turkey dropped compositions by the classical pianist Fazıl Say after he had been charged with insulting Islam with his Twitter message that mocked an imam. Again in 2014 several jury members of the Antalya International Film Festival quit in protest after festival officials cancelled a film about the Gezi Park uprisings in Istanbul. CNN Turk, a private broadcaster, recently pixelated the private parts in Rubens's seventeenth-century painting *The Three Graces* in a programme about beauty to avoid fines for indecency. Moreover, public school teachers were investigated for using books by John Steinbeck, Amin Maalouf and José Mauro de Vasconcelos as educational materi-

contemporary artist, was asked to remove a mention of the Armenian genocide in a booklet she wrote for an exhibition in Madrid in 2013. Since she had received funding from the Turkish government she had to comply. She said, “These are the invisible boundaries. You do not know they are there until you cross them”.<sup>9</sup> Another example of this policy occurred during the cultural season of Turkey in France [La Saison de la Turquie en France] when the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized cultural activities around France to promote Turkish culture and history. In March 2010, as a part of the cultural programme, an exhibition was held at the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts de Paris, entitled *États d’âmes: une génération hors d’elle*. Along with prominent contemporary Turkish artists such as Nevin Aladağ, Şener Özmen and Nilbar Güreş, Tayfun Serttaş also contributed to the exhibition. His catalogue, printed in four languages (French, Turkish, Armenian and English), was censored. The Turkish government made him remove any mention of the word “genocide”. Serttaş integrated this state intervention and censorship into his work. The artist printed the censored text as his exhibition catalogue, which clearly shows how the word genocide had been blacked out in four languages.<sup>10</sup>

In the light of this censorship, one might ask the question: What does the choice of an Armenian artist, in this significant year, imply? Will the participation of Sarkis in the Venice Biennale be used to showcase a multinational image of Turkey? The Republic of Armenia has dedicated its pavilion to the artists of the Armenian diaspora in the Venice Biennale in 2015. One of the artists selected to represent these Armenian artists from the diaspora is Sarkis. The curatorial concept of the Armenia pavilion is entitled *Armenity/Hayoutioun*. It derives from the French word *arménité*, a notion, which expresses the particular characteristics of the grandchildren of the genocide survivors. The website of the Armenian pavilion informs the visitors about what *arménité* suggests.<sup>11</sup>

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als, after parents complained that they were not appropriate for Turkish children. Again in 2014, the newspaper *Agos* revealed that the Turkish Higher Education Association (YÖK) demanded that all Turkish universities share the contact details of the researchers working on the Armenian genocide in order to trace them.

9 Donadio, Rachel. “In Turkey, the arts flourish, but warily”. *New York Times* 18 November 2014. <[http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/19/arts/in-turkey-the-arts-flourish-but-warily-.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/19/arts/in-turkey-the-arts-flourish-but-warily-.html?_r=0)> [accessed 10 December 2014].

10 To check out the censored catalogue of the artist, Tayfun Serttaş see: <<http://tayfunserttas.blogspot.com.tr/2010/04/abstract-allegory-book.html>> [accessed 11 February 2012].

11 For the national pavilion of the Republic of Armenia at the 56<sup>th</sup> Biennale di Venezia 2015 see: <<http://www.armenity.net>> [accessed 05 August 2015].

The curatorial concept of armenity implies the notion of displacement and territory, justice and reconciliation, ethos and resilience. Regardless of their place of birth, the selected artists carry within their identity the memory of their origins. Through their talent and willpower, these grandchildren of survivors of the Armenian Genocide – the first genocide of the 20th century – rebuilt a “transnational assembly” from the remnants of a shattered identity. Their ingrained concern for memory, justice and reconciliation skilfully transcends notions of territory, borders and geography. Whether they were born in Beirut, Lyon, Los Angeles, or Cairo and wherever they may reside, these global citizens constantly question and reinvent their armenity.

It is clear that the Armenian pavilion highlights the transnational memory of the genocide through the selection of international artists. Besides, the location of the pavilion itself is also a political stance about the deep roots of Armenian history and culture. The island of San Lazzaro degli Armeni, where the Armenian monk Mekhitar established the Mekhitarist order in 1717, hosts the pavilion. Lord Byron studied the Armenian language here in the nineteenth century. The monks who settled on this island disseminated the Western Armenian literary, linguistic and historical tradition throughout the world.

Choosing Sarkis to represent Turkey at the Venice Biennale in the year of the centennial commemoration raises all sorts of complicated questions about cultural policy. Is this an implicit acknowledgment of the history of genocide? Should this be seen as a denial of the situation of cultural censorship? Is Turkey seeking to project itself to the outside world as a multicultural and tolerant nation in order to efface or hide its repressive policies towards minorities? Should we understand the Turkish pavilion as a pre-emptive response to the Armenian pavilion whose curatorial concept has been devoted to the genocide?

This example shows that culture cannot be isolated from the politics of memory and commemoration. The very selection of an artist to represent Turkey in Venice needs to be understood against the background of the disputes over the meaning of Turkish history. In fact, the cultural field itself, with the two “competing” pavilions of Armenia and Turkey, is the very ground on which the battle between competing versions of history is fought. This unspoken “competition” becomes clearer when we consider the pavilion in light of other events taking place inside Turkey, which often have the character of an implicit competition. For instance, early 2015 Serzh Sargsyan, the president of the Republic of Armenia, invited world leaders to attend on 24<sup>th</sup> of April 2015 the centennial commemoration of the Armenian genocide in Yerevan. Just after this invitation became public, the president of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, sent out invitations to the leaders of 102 countries, including Sargsyan, to attend the ceremonies in Turkey to mark the centenary of another event,

the Battle of Gallipoli, on 24 April 2015, the *exact* same date as the commemoration of the Armenian genocide events. The Battle of Gallipoli refers to the fighting that took place on the Gallipoli peninsula of the Ottoman Empire and which started on 25 April 1916. This battle was one of the greatest victories of the Ottoman Empire but a major defeat for the allied forces.

There are three puzzling elements about the diplomatic manoeuvre of the Turkish government. Each indicates that the Gallipoli event should be understood as a calculated “counter-event” against the commemoration event in Yerevan.<sup>12</sup> First of all, the choice of date is rather curious. The international Remembrance Day, also known as *Anzac Day*, which refers to the landing of Australian and the New Zealand troops in Gallipoli, takes place on 25 April.<sup>13</sup> However, Erdoğan’s government *chose* not to organize a commemoration on this date. Instead Erdoğan fixed the date of the commemoration day for the world leaders to meet in Turkey on 24 April, the very day of the international Armenian genocide centennial commemorations in Yerevan. Country leaders who did not want to antagonize the president of Turkey as the leader of a country with a booming economy chose Turkey over Armenia. As a result the Turkish government succeeded in diverting world attention from Armenia and to obfuscate global media coverage. This helped the Turkish government efface the commemoration event, by replacing it with another historical narrative, by celebrating the heroic victories of the nation. Finally, inviting Sargsyan to attend a commemoration of the military success of the Ottoman Empire, which coincided with the centennial commemoration of the Armenian genocide would be seen as a Turkish diplomatic success by the current AKP government. However, this invitation not only disregarded the memory of the Armenian victims but also ridiculed the importance of the centennial commemoration in Yerevan.

These two examples illustrate the fact that there is a tension between the official version of history promoted by Turkey and the various competing memories such as the memory of the Armenians within and outside Turkey. It furthermore shows

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12 Another “counter-event” of the Turkish Republic was applying to the Europalia Festival in Brussels to be the guest country in 2015. Europalia is an international arts festival held every two years to promote one country’s cultural heritage. In 2015 Turkey will be the guest country in the European capital. In his article titled “Mauvaise année pour la Turquie” François Janne d’Othée analyzes how the Turkish government intensifies the lobbying activities in 2015 to divert the world attention from Armenian genocide. See Janne d’Othée, François. “Mauvaise année pour la Turquie”. *Le Vif/L’Express* 05 October 2015 <<http://www.levif.be/actualite/international/mauvaise-annee-pour-la-turquie/article-normal-426163.html>> [accessed 21 October 2015].

13 The word *Anzac* is the acronym of “Australian and New Zealand Army Corps”, which was founded in 1915 and disbanded in 1916. *Anzac Day* is a national holiday in the Cook Islands, Niue, Pitcairn Islands and Toga, as well as in Australia and New Zealand.

that culture, whether in the narrow sense of “high art” (as in the Venice Biennale example) or culture in the larger sense (as in the example of the commemoration) is the battleground where this struggle over memory is fought.

In recent decades the relation between culture, memory, commemoration and history has been at the centre of a series of academic debates in a burgeoning field that goes by the name of “memory studies”. The discipline of memory studies reflects on the following questions: How does an individual develop memory? What social frameworks affect the memorialization process of the members of a society? What is the role of the governments when we discuss the concept of collective memory? Key theoreticians such as Maurice Halbwachs, Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann have contributed to this discussion.

In the 1920s Maurice Halbwachs developed his concept *mémoire collective*, which was elaborated in three works: *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925), *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en terre sainte - Étude de mémoire collective* (1941) and *La mémoire collective* (published posthumously in 1950). Halbwachs argues that there is always a social dimension to memory. He states, “No memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society” (1992, 43). Halbwachs believes that an individual memory cannot form or sustain itself without social frames of reference. An individual is the one who has the memory however it was created collectively. Thus, while the group does not have a memory, social frames determine the memory of its group members. In the light of this discussion, it can be said that an individual’s participation in communicative processes is a tool through which s/he forms a memory. Participation and involvement in social groups such as family, religion and nation result in specific memories for individuals. Halbwachs asserts that “the greatest number of memories come back to us when our parents, our friends or other persons recall them to us” (1992, 38). Therefore, according to Halbwachs, one of the ways of developing memory happens during social processes. In his above-mentioned works Halbwachs questions the social conditioning of memory. He believes that individuals recall, recognize or localize their memories within a society and this socialization generates memories for them.

Halbwachs suggests that memories also originate from different groups and societies that individuals belong to. Thus, when we attempt to localize older memories, we transfigure the past to the present or the present to the past through the societies that we are members of. Since societies oblige its members to reproduce, retrieve or reconstruct memories, the mind of an individual executes these tasks under the pressure of society. In addition to the role of social processes in memory formation, Halbwachs also takes the authoritarian role of the nation states into consideration. He portrays governments in modern societies as responsible agents of memory making. Hence the pressure and authority exercised by governments impose many

constraints on their citizens and subject the individuals to certain way of thinking. Therefore, for Halbwachs, “what we remember depends on the contexts in which we find ourselves and the groups to which we happen to relate” (Hutton 1993, 79).

Applying Halbwachs’ idea to the Turkish situation, it is evident that the Turkish government seeks to impose a certain official history on its citizens. As long as the Turkish citizens perform their duties by adhering to this officially sanctioned memory they do not stand out in the society. However, social processes are never that smooth and a society’s collective memory is never monolithic. At times individuals present memories that breach the frameworks of a socially accepted memory and tell stories that compete and collide with the official one. The public presentation of such counter-memories can sometimes lead to real “battles” over memory. An instance of this took place after the release of *The Cut*, a film by the Turkish-German filmmaker Fatih Akin, which is set in 1915 and depicts scenes from the Armenian genocide. The film features the French-Algerian actor Tahar Rahim, in the role of an Armenian blacksmith from Mardin who travels around the world to find his two daughters, whom he has lost contact with after the genocide. With a budget of 15 million euros, *The Cut* is Akin’s most ambitious film and was premiered at the Venice Film Festival in 2014. Even though the topic of the genocide is, of course, politically sensitive, Akin claims that his work did not seek to have an impact on politics per se. In August 2014, Evrim Kaya, a journalist of the weekly *Agos*, interviewed Akin. He stated, “Turkey, of which I am part of, is ready for this film”.<sup>14</sup> He further added, “I have no political motives in making the film and I hope that it will ‘receive due respect in Turkey and be shown in large, modern theatres’”. However, after the interview was published, the ultra-nationalist Pan-Turkist Turanist Association [Türkçü Turancılar Derneği] tweeted that Akin was being too optimistic. Posting tweets from the official account of the association, members of the far-right group announced that they would not allow Fatih Akin to bring the story of the Armenian genocide to big screens in Turkey. Their message read:

Turkish-German filmmaker Fatih Akin, affiliated with the terrorist Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), is working with the *Agos* weekly in order to release his latest film *The Cut*. We, the members of the Turkish Turan Association, are not going to let them to bring this so-called genocide story to the big screen. This film is the first attempt of a plot to make Turkey acknowledge the Armenian genocide lies. We explicitly threaten the *Agos* weekly, Armenian fascists and so-

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14 Kaya, Evrim. “Turkey, of which I am part of, is ready for this film”. *Agos* 2 August 2014, <<http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/7724/turkey-of-which-i-am-a-part-of-is-ready-for-this-film>> [accessed 11 September 2014].

called intellectuals. This film will not be released in Turkey. We are following the developments with our white berets on and our Azeri-flagged glider. Let's see if you can!<sup>15</sup>

The mention of “white berets” in the last sentence carries a sinister message as it brings to mind the violent ending of another “memory war” that took place in Turkey. On 19 January 2007, the former editor-in-chief of the *Agos* newspaper, Hrant Dink, was shot in broad daylight outside his newspaper's office in Istanbul. Oğün Samast, Dink's suspected assassin, was wearing a white beret when he shot Dink in the neck. The white beret has since become a symbol displayed frequently at anti-Armenian racist and nationalist demonstrations, with connotations not only of violence, nationalism and repression, but also the power to suppress alternative histories and to enforce a certain version of the memory of the past.<sup>16</sup> This death threat seeks to convey the message to Akın that if talks openly about the genocide he will be silenced by the ultranationalist groups the way Dink was assassinated. It furthermore suggests that the screening of the film itself is to be understood as the continuation of a series of battles over memory.

To sum up, these three examples – a film screening, a public commemoration, an international art exhibition – may at first sight seem unrelated. Yet they show how cultural texts are not simply representations of Turkish history, but that they should be understood as active forces that participate in a political battle over memory. They highlight the tension between two aspects of cultural memory outlined by Halbwachs. The first one is generated through the social frameworks and governments that put pressure on members of society by imposing a certain official history create the latter. The current situation in Turkey can be explained in the light of the political pressure exercised by the Turkish government on its citizens. However, within Turkey there have always been some individuals who have opposed this state imposition of what citizens should remember or forget. The death threats that Fatih Akın received after releasing his latest film perfectly illustrate the fate of Turkish individuals should they fail to obey the state-imposed amnesia about the Armenian genocide.

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15 Translations from Turkish are my own.

16 During the seventh anniversary commemoration of the assassination of Hrant Dink in January 2014, Turkish police officers wore white berets in spite of the fact that it was 18 degrees Celsius. It was quite remarkable to see that the police officers of Turkey who are supposed to protect every Turkish citizen regardless of ethnicity, sex or religious belief were openly wearing these white berets. No disciplinary action was taken against these officers and the leftist *Radikal* newspaper was the only media that brought up the issue.

The aim of this study is to understand the specific role of culture in this dynamic process. In this introductory chapter I will give an outline of the specific cultural cases that I will study. Furthermore, I will give an overview of the theoretical debate about memory to which this study aims to contribute. Next, I will introduce my main theoretical concepts. However I will start by briefly looking at the question as to *why* the Turkish government seeks to silence Armenian memory. What does the state aim to achieve by censoring other historiographies about Turkey's past? Why is this silence so important for the Turkish nation?

Before one attempts to answer these questions, I suggest we first look at *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Arts of Memory* by Aleida Assmann in which she addresses why it matters for individuals and nations to define themselves through that which they collectively remember or forget. Assmann's starting point is the situation of a recently reunited Germany in the 1990s, which found itself completely surrounded by a problem of identity and memory after the fall of the Berlin Wall (2013, 54). The question that haunted the nation was: which kind of memories should be discarded or retained? This dilemma led to conflicts and discussions between those who wanted to forget and those who wanted to remember. Assmann asserts that this situation is far from new. In fact she suggests that we can see a structurally similar situation in the period in which Shakespeare wrote his historical plays *Richard III* (1592-1593) and *Henry V* (1599). In order to analyze the links between memory and nationhood, memory and identity, history and memory, Assmann examines the plays of Shakespeare to determine under which circumstances a nation needs a history.

Assmann claims that Shakespeare's historical plays could be understood as dramatizations of memory wars in which the real actors represent memories, which are the defining element of personal and collective identities (2013, 55). For instance, in the final scene of *Richard III*, the reader listens to the unhappy Edward IV. This scene showcases the clash between forgetting and remembering. Edward becomes aware of the fact that he has forgotten to do most things, for example showing his gratitude to his brother Clarence who saved his life at the Battle of Tewksbury. Assmann believes that Shakespeare's play shows that political conflicts are often conflicts over memory and that "anger and fear make people forget as is evident from the example of Edward" (2013, 57). This also illustrates the fact that hatred and revenge sharpen memory; however "settling disputes and establishing peace" can be achieved by "taming, containing and eventually transforming collective memories" (2013, 61).

Assmann also analyzes *Henry V* to gauge the connection between memory and history. She asserts that the beginning of the play clearly shows how history is made out of memories. For instance, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely were quite concerned about the fact that the crown might confiscate the treasures of

the church. In order to avoid this, they called on the ambitious king to remember Salic Law.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, they hired legal advisers, archivists and philologists to act as the authoritative guardians of the historical heritage that belonged to the church. Considering the fact that their interpretations of the legal documents would bolster the claims of the church to retain the treasures, they had to work meticulously. Since a reconstruction of identity always goes hand in hand with the reconstruction of history, in the case of the church rewriting history this happened through books and by rearranging official documents and framing the history in the service of the church. That is why Assmann believes that “the truthfulness of historical research is still entirely dependent on the interpreter” (2013, 65).

Hence, Assmann’s analysis of the Shakespeare plays shows how memory was utilized as a sort of defining element for the relationship between personal identity and history. It also proves the fact that historical memories are always prone to political exploitations by the rulers for the sake of creating a nationhood or national identity. Assmann shows that the plays are not only *about* the question of memory, they also participate, as actors, in the memory wars that took place in the period in which they were performed. Assmann claims that the historical plays were written for a new addressee, which were the English people (2013, 69). They need to be understood against the background of a fundamental change in the use that was made of history, and the way in which memory and identity were connected. Assmann argues that in the period before Shakespeare, “works of history were commissioned by kings and written for the benefit of the kings” (2013, 68). However, from the seventeenth century onwards, the nation itself became the new subject of history. This meant that history no longer aimed to instruct or justify the king to his subjects. People became the bearers of their own history and this new phenomenon facilitated to fashion a collective identity for the citizens. The study of Assmann uncovers the fact that after this shift the interconnection between historical memories and nation-building became crucial. Thus, we can say that the process of nation-building started to be evaluated as a wider phenomenon that included different agents such as poets, dramatists, antiquarians, philologists and artists. Shakespeare’s plays also exemplify how the reconstruction of identity also entails the reconstruction of memory.

The examples that I cited before suggest that in contemporary Turkey, culture plays a role that is in many ways similar to that in Shakespeare’s time. For instance, in modern Turkey certain memories such as the Armenian genocide are discarded

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17 Salic Law was an ancient Germanic law code and was the major body of the Frankish law in the early Middle Ages. It provided written codification of both civil law, such as the statutes governing inheritance and criminal law.

whereas others – such as the victory of the Ottoman army during the Battle of Gallipoli – are retained. The presentation of history is carried out in line with creating a noble and proud Turkish identity. Inappropriate memories, which would challenge the notion of officially imposed Turkish identity, are omitted from the historiography. This process is carried out by writing books, destructing Armenian churches and monasteries, pulping archives that challenge the claims of Turkey and renaming squares and schools in the honour of the Ottoman pashas such as Talaat Pasha boulevard in İzmir, Cemal Pasha street in Adana and Enver Pasha street in Kahramanmaraş. History is reconstructed with a view to bolstering national identity and validating these projected identities. Yet, the memory conundrum in Turkey is more complex than the one in Shakespeare's time. On the one hand, the Turkish government projects itself as a country that values its ethnic diversity; on the other hand, however, any pluralistic view is censored. That is why the memory question is utilized for the sake of creating a national identity within Turkey.

Whereas Assmann argues that the link between memory and nationhood has been crucially important from the early modern period onwards, other theoreticians have suggested that its importance in recent years has only grown. In his article "Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia", Andreas Huyssen focuses on the emergence of memory as a key concern in Western societies. Huyssen states that memory discourses emerged in the West after the 1960s as a result of decolonization, new social movements and the search for revisionist histories (2000, 22). However, he believes that the memory discourses gained momentum in Europe and the United States in the 1980s with the debates about the Holocaust (2000, 22). Assmann focuses on the importance of why and how certain memories are utilized in the service of creating a history. Conversely, Huyssen concentrates on the key role of traumatic memories in the construction of collective memory. He argues that currently debates about memory are often debates about the memory of traumatic events, frequently the memory of genocide. Huyssen suggests that this can be understood as the effect of what could be called the "globalization" of the Holocaust discourse that took place in the 1990s. During that period, which saw genocidal politics in Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo, the Holocaust began to function as a metaphor for traumatic histories and memories (2000, 23). Huyssen asserts that this phenomenon has centred Holocaust as a prism through which other examples of genocides have started to be analyzed (2000, 24).

Another historical event that contributed to the growing importance of memory, according to Huyssen, was the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. Since then, issues of memory and forgetting have gained momentum in post-communist countries in Eastern Europe. Something similar happened after certain historical events in different parts of the world such as the post-apartheid period in South Africa,

the genocide in Rwanda, and following situations in which repressed or “forgotten” historical episodes were revived, as happened with the “stolen generation” in Australia, the conflict about “comfort women” between Korea and Japan and the issue of *desaparecidos* [the disappeared] in Argentina (2000, 25-6).

Assmann therefore suggests that the link between memory and nationhood has very deep roots and that this relationship can be traced back to the emergence of the idea of the nation. Huyssen, on the other hand, claims that there are reasons to assume that the specific function of memory has undergone changes in the post-WWII period after which questions of trauma and genocide became crucial. What is interesting about the Armenian case is that, on the one hand, its history is inscribed in a story of the emergence of Turkey as a modern nation. In this way it seems to follow the logic outlined by Assmann. Yet, on the other hand, it is a story of genocide. It is perhaps not a coincidence that memory discourses relating to the Armenians first emerged in North America where important numbers of diasporic Armenians live in cities such as Los Angeles, Toronto and Montreal. The memory discourses among the Armenians started emerging at the same time as the discussion about the commemoration of the 40<sup>th</sup> year since the Holocaust was being discussed in the United States and Israel. In 1983 the Toronto-based Zoryan Institute undertook a major oral history programme that aimed to document the memoirs of Armenian survivors. Interviews were conducted in the United States, Canada and Armenia. Currently the institute houses about 780 interviews in their archival collection. The Armenian Library and Museum of America in Boston also has oral history tapes based on interview records of 287 survivors. In addition to this specific collection, the museum has 1,091 oral history tapes recorded by the Armenian Assembly of America. The University of Southern California (USC) Shoah Foundation has started integrating the archives of the Armenian survivors into its collection as well. Thus, the interest in the Armenian genocide arose as part of the wave of the “globalization” of the Holocaust discourse described by Huyssen.

In addition, 1999 saw the publication of *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide* by Donald E. Miller and Lourn Touryan Miller, an oral history project conducted with more than one hundred Armenian genocide survivors. In 1979, Laurel Vlock and Dori Laub had undertaken a similar project documenting the personal memories of Holocaust victims in the USA. This initiative resulted in the initial collection of two hundred videotaped testimonies. In 1981 these tapes were deposited at Yale University. In 1987 Alan M. Fortunoff made a major gift to the endowment of the archive fund. Currently the archive is called *Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies* at Yale University.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century there has been an ongoing surge in the quantity of literature on the subject of memory studies in Turkey. The 1960,

1971 and 1980 military coups in the country left deep scars on Turkish society. And the events that followed these coups d'état fuelled society's interest in what happened in the past and how it was communicated to the citizens. The interest of Turkish society and scholars in the discipline of memory studies was further intensified by the silenced parts of Turkish historiography such as the Armenian genocide (1915), the compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey (1923), the Dersim massacre (1937-1938), the *Varlık Vergisi* [Wealth Tax] levied on non-Muslim Turkish citizens (1942), the 6-7 September pogroms (1955), the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish army since 1984 and the murder of Hrant Dink (2007). This development also created a clash between the private and the public narratives.

Scholars concentrated on different parts of memory studies in Turkey: gender and memory (Ayşe Gül Altınay), ethnic minorities (Rıfat Bali), trauma and oral history (Leyla Neyzi), ways of remembrance (Arzu Öztürkmen), literature (Erol Köroğlu), autobiography (Hülya Adak), film studies (Asuman Suner), city and landscape (Amy Mills), monuments (Aylin Tekiner), cultural heritage (Lucienne Thys-Şenocak), history and memory (Biray Kolluoğlu), nationalism and memory (Umut Özkırımlı and Spyros A. Sofos), Atatürk and Turkish memory (Yael Navaro Yashin). These Turkish memory scholars discussed various subjects from national identity to monumentalization, from oral history to ethnic minorities. Moreover, in 2006 *The Politics of Public Memory in Turkey*, edited by Esra Özyürek, came out.

Inside Turkey, interest for versions of history other than the "official" one came mostly from scholars working on oral history. Oral history workshops and research conducted by Leyla Neyzi and Arzu Öztürkmen since the late 1990s have contributed significantly to the development of memory studies in Turkey. Although these academics worked inside Turkey, the universities they taught at, such as the Bosphorus University or Sabancı University, gave them academic freedom. Oral history workshops have also been supported by the private sector and frequently by organisations such as the Open Society, the Heinrich Böll Foundation and Anadolu Kültür in Istanbul. For example, as part of a cultural initiative of the Garanti Bank, Osmanlı Bankası Müzesi [now SALT Galata], oral history workshops led by Leyla Neyzi were held. In addition, the Bozcaada Centre for the Research of Local History, founded by Hakan Gürüney in 2005, has been promoting the silenced Greek history of the region. In 2013 the museum received a UNESCO award for "introducing Greek culture in the best way possible outside Greece and helping to spread the culture of peace among Turks and Greeks".

## Collective Memory and the Remembrance of Armenians in Turkey

Thus the discipline of memory studies in Turkey takes place in a highly politicized context. This is no coincidence considering the fact that re-writing history has played a key role in the very formation of the Turkish nation. Since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, one of the goals of the founding leader Atatürk has been to disassociate the new republic from the former Ottoman Empire legacies. This meant introducing the Latin alphabet, extending rights to women and establishing a new capital, Ankara. This transformation not only created a new democratic and secular state but also facilitated the collective amnesia of the Ottoman Empire's multi-cultural past. It emphasized the homogenous character of the new republic. As a result of the introduction of the Latin alphabet following generations were no longer able to understand Ottoman Turkish. A notable exception to the silence about the Ottoman Empire's multi-cultural past was Taner Akçam. He was the first Turkish academic to acknowledge the Armenian genocide and openly discuss it. He published his *Türk Ulusal Kimliği ve Ermeni Sorunu* [Turkish National Identity and the Armenian Question] in 1992 and in 1996 *İnsan Hakları ve Ermeni Sorunu: İttihat ve Terakki'den Kurtuluş Savaşı'na* [Human Rights and the Armenian Question: From İttihat and Terakki to the War of Independence].

This attack on memory coincided with the spread of what could be called a "foundation mythology", which sought to depict the Turkish nation as a homogenous entity. As a consequence non-ethnic Turks were marginalized in this history. Certain non-Muslim groups, for instance the Armenians, were depicted as Russian collaborators and as non-patriotic citizens of the Ottoman Empire. They are portrayed as communities that stabbed the Turks in the back and aimed to disintegrate the country for irredentist purposes. Therefore, the foundation of the country is based on the exclusion of certain populations as members of the nation. This is in sharp contrast with an earlier period. In the Ottoman Empire, Armenians were referred to as the trustworthy subjects [*Millet-i Sadıka*] in the millet system of the empire. Millet is a term for confessional groups in the Ottoman Empire (Greeks, Armenians and Jews) and refers to the separate legal courts pertaining to the religious affiliations of those communities. These legal courts allowed these subjects of the Ottoman Empire to rule themselves under their own system. However, after the establishment of modern Turkey in 1923, the official state narrative started to portray the Armenians as enemies and traitors. First of all, Armenians were labelled as individuals who falsify the "realities" of 1915. Therefore, they have been depicted as people with anti-Turkey sentiments both in the mass media and the state curriculum

at public schools.<sup>18</sup> Besides, they have at all times been associated with the ASALA [the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia]. The terrorist attacks of this army on Turkish diplomats in Europe from 1975 to 1986 have encouraged the ostracizing of Armenians living in Turkey. The territorial claims of the Republic of Armenia about “the Historic Western Armenia” within the borders of Turkey and the invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh by the Armenian troops in Azerbaijan have resulted in the emergence of anti-Armenian feelings within Turkish society.

While official histories continue to tell this heroic story of the Turkish nation, the repressed history of minority groups is addressed in the domain of literature, with the emergence of autobiographies and books that deal with the memory of the genocide in Turkey. The first years of the twenty-first century saw a wave of novels written by Turks who had discovered that their grandfathers and grandmothers were Islamized Armenians.<sup>19</sup> Prominent authors such as Orhan Pamuk (2002), Elif Şafak (2006) and Ece Temelkuran (2008) have also written about the same subject.<sup>20</sup> Despite the fact that these publications have to some extent resulted in shifting the ossified Turkish historiography, it is difficult to say whether they have reached a mass readership or not. However, they have succeeded in unravelling historical silencing and have resulted in many academic research projects conducted within Turkey such as the conference titled *Islamized Armenians* in 2013. Modern Turkey started to come to terms with its haunting past in the early twenty-first century as a result of the efforts made by authors, journalists, academics and intellectuals.

## Historical Background of This Project

A “memory war” has been taking place in Turkey over the Armenian genocide since the beginning of the twenty-first century. To give an impression of this occasionally violent memory conundrum, I will cite a few episodes in Turkish history starting

18 For the latest report published by the International Hrant Dink Association regarding the hate speech towards the non-Muslim minorities in Turkey check the report see: <[http://nefretsoylemi.org/rapor/HDV\\_ocak-nisan2014\\_rapor.pdf](http://nefretsoylemi.org/rapor/HDV_ocak-nisan2014_rapor.pdf)> [accessed 01 June 2014].

19 The works mentioned here are: Fethiye Çetin, *Anneannem* [My Grandmother] (2004), Baskın Oran, *M. K Adlı Çocuğün Tehcir Anıları* [Deportation Stories of a Child Named M.K] (2005), İrfan Palalı, *Tehcir Çocukları “Nenem bir Ermeniymiş”* [Deportation Children “My Grandmother was an Armenian”] (2005), Yusuf Bağcı, *Ermeni Kızı Ağçık* [Armenian Girl Aghcik] (2007), Filiz Özdem, *Korku Benim Sahibim* [Fear is My Master] (2007), Gülçiçek Günel Tekin, *Kara Kefen Müslümanlaştırılan Ermeni Kadınların Dramı* [Black Shroud - The Tragedy of the Islamized Armenian Women] (2008).

20 Orhan Pamuk, *Kar* [The Snow] (2002), Elif Şafak, *Baba ve Piç* [The Bastard of Istanbul] (2006), Ece Temelkuran, *Ağrı'nın Derinliği* [Deep Mountain Across the Turkish Armenian Divide] (2008).

from the creation of the newspaper *Agos*. In 1996 the Armenian weekly newspaper *Agos* was established in Istanbul. It increased the visibility of the Armenian community in Turkey thanks to the efforts of the editor-in-chief, Hrant Dink. The Turkish government officially launched investigations against Dink and the historian Akçam for using the term “genocide” when referring to 1915 and denigrating Turkish identity in accordance with Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code.<sup>21</sup>

In 2000, Ronald Grigor Suny and Fatma Müge Göçek founded the Workshop on Armenian and Turkish Scholarship (WATS). Alongside active scholars preparing research papers WATS also involved hundreds of people and academics interested in Armenian-Turkish history through its e-mail group. Seminars of WATS were organized at the University of Michigan (2002), University of Minnesota (2003), Salzburg (2004), NYU (2005), The University of Geneva (2008), The University of Berkeley (2010), NIOD and the IISH in Amsterdam (2011) and Sabancı University in Istanbul (2015). *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire* emerged from the research findings and discussions of two groups of scholars: WATS and the Mellon Foundation Sawyer Seminar on Mass Killing.

In 2005, a conference entitled *Ottoman Armenians During the Decline of the Empire: Issues of Scientific Responsibility and Democracy* was held at Istanbul Bilgi University. With over 267 participants, it was the first time since 1915 that the Armenian genocide was ever discussed so openly in Turkey. The police guarded the university building and strict security measures were taken in view of threats by nationalist protesters. Hundreds of nationalists gathered in front of the university building, throwing eggs and tomatoes at the participants and calling them “traitors”. The Turkish Judicial Officials filed a complaint against seventeen organizing committee members.

As *Agos*’ editor-in-chief, Hrant Dink was one of the most prominent Armenian voices in Turkey. He was prosecuted several times for the crime of “insulting Turkish identity” and was sentenced to six months in jail in 2005. He had received numerous death threats and had appealed to the Turkish authorities to be taken seriously. On

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21 Article 301 of Turkish Penal Code, that took effect on 1 June 2005, provides as follows:

A person who publicly denigrates Turkishness, the Republic or the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, shall be punished by imprisonment for six months and up to three years.

A person who publicly denigrates the Government of the Republic of Turkey, the judicial institutions of the State, the military or any security organizations shall be punished by imprisonment for six months and up to two years.

If a Turkish citizen commits the offence of denigration of Turkishness whilst in another country the punishment shall be increased by one third.

Expressions of thought intended to criticize shall not constitute an offence.

On 30 April 2008, the article was amended and “Turkishness” became “the Turkish nation”.

19 January 2007, he stepped out of his office and was shot in the head three times by a boy wearing a white beret. When the 17-year-old assassin Ogün Samast was caught twenty hours later in the northern city of Samsun, he was still carrying the gun, and still wearing the white beret that had also been recorded by the surveillance cameras. Samast confessed his crime quite proudly by saying, “I shot the Armenian because he had insulted Turkishness”. Since he was under age and only eligible for a light sentence, many people thought that Samast had been chosen to carry out the murder by the state. Shortly after Dink’s murder, thousands of people gathered in front of his office to protest against the assassination. Dink’s funeral turned into an unprecedented rally against discrimination towards the Armenians in Turkey. About one hundred thousand people from all walks of life and faiths marched in the wide avenues of Istanbul shouting, “We are all Armenians.” Dink’s murder was an attempt to intimidate those who wanted to create openness, transparency and historical responsibility in Turkey.

In 2007 the International Hrant Dink Foundation (IHDF) was established in Istanbul. Its mission is to work for equal opportunity, ensure the recognition of cultural diversity, contribute to the democratization of Turkey and develop closer ties between Turkey and Armenia. Since 2007 the foundation has organized many conferences, seminars and workshops. These activities included an exhibition (*Armenian Architects of Istanbul in the Era of Westernization*), conferences (*Adana 1909: History, Memory, Identity from a 100 Year Perspective*, *Cultural Interactions in the Ottoman Empire*) and workshops about the social and economic history of the Diyarbakır and Mardin regions. In 2011, with financial support from the Swedish NGO Olof Palme International Centre, IHDF initiated an oral history project, which aimed to trace the vanished cultural life of the Armenians in a number of Turkish cities. The interviews conducted for this project were published in three books by Ferda Balancar: *The Sounds of Silence I - Turkey’s Armenians Speak*, *The Sounds of Silence II - Diyarbakır’s Armenians Speak* and *The Sounds of Silence III - Ankara’s Armenians Speak*. This project, together with these publications, was of vital importance for Turkish society to be able to understand the suppressed lives of the Anatolian Armenians since the genocide.

Another example is a campaign called *I Apologize* [Özür Diliyorum], launched by numerous Turkish professors, journalists, human rights activists and politicians in December 2008. It was an Internet signature campaign calling for an apology to the Armenians for the genocide. Within a couple of months 30,837 signatures had been collected. The statement of the campaign reads in English:

My conscience does not accept the insensitivity shown to and the denial of the Great Catastrophe, which Armenians were subjected to in 1915. I reject this in-

justice and I, for my part, empathize with the feelings and pain of my Armenian brothers and sisters. I apologize to them.

Turkish nationalists were quick to respond to the campaign, condemning the project and offering counter anti-apology campaigns online. A new campaign called *I do not Apologize* obtained even more signatures. President Abdullah Gül was very positive when the campaign was initiated in 2008. He said that this campaign illustrated the fact that democracy was thriving in Turkey. The opposition parties criticized his statement and one Turkish MP “accused” Gül of having an Armenian mother. By taking the accusation as an insult, the President denied the claims and started legal actions against this MP.

Meanwhile, not only in journalism but also in the cultural sphere, debates and exhibitions about the memory of the Armenian genocide started to take place. For instance, DEPO, a space for critical debate and cultural exchange located in the heart of Istanbul in Tophane, has held innumerable exhibitions and eye-opening debates since 2009. *Burning Eyes: Memories of the Armenians*, Antoine Agoudjian’s exhibition, was also organized at DEPO in 2011. It displayed the photographs that Agoudjian had taken since 1988 whilst travelling to countries such as Armenia, Georgia, Lebanon and Turkey, to document the conditions of the Armenian communities. In 2013 DEPO hosted another exhibition, *Never Again! Apology and Coming to Terms with the Past*. It aimed to explore the strategies of coming to terms with the past and the act of apologizing as the first step of reconciliation. In April 2014 the exhibition of Silvina Der-Meguerditchian, *Memory without a Place*, opened at DEPO. By taking inspiration from her ancestors who migrated from Anatolia to Argentina, Der-Meguerditchian highlighted the cultural heritage of the diasporic Armenian communities.

Other cultural institutions such as Anadolu Kültür, a cultural NGO, also contributed to the remembrance of the Armenians in Turkey. In 2009 it initiated an oral history project named *Speaking to One Another*. The main aim of the project was to use oral history projects as a bridge between Turkish and Armenian society. Led by Leyla Neyzi and Hranush Kharatyan-Araqelyan, the outcome of the research was published in Turkish, Armenian and English. Oral history projects were carried out in Istanbul, Yerevan, Tbilisi, Nicosia, Berlin, Paris, Antakya and Batumi for the book *Speaking to One Another: Personal Memories of the Past in Armenia and Turkey*. This research shed light on the perceptions of the two communities about each other and presented the challenges on the way to reconciliation.

In addition to these developments, the works published by publishing houses Aras, Belge and İletişim sparked debates about the Armenians and about events in the Ottoman Empire in 1915. A personal initiative from Osman Köker also

resulted in book projects by the publishing house Bir Zamanlar Yayıncılık, which printed highly acclaimed books such as *Armenians in Turkey One Hundred Years Ago with Post-Cards from the Collection of Orlando Carlo Calumeno*, *Armenians in the Diyarbakır Province* and *Once Upon a Time İzmir*.

The work of historian Uğur Ümit Üngör, published in 2011, has greatly contributed to the academic debates in Turkey. His book co-authored with Mehmet Polatel entitled *Confiscation and Destruction: The Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Property* (2011) and *Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913-1950* (2011) examine the relationship between nation-building, genocidal campaigns and the creation of an amnesiac Turkish Republic with the benefit of confiscated Armenian properties.

In 2011 the Truth Justice Memory Centre [Hakikat Adalet Hafıza Merkezi] was set up in Istanbul. It aims to uncover the truth concerning past violations of human rights, strengthen the collective memory about those violations and support survivors in their pursuit of justice. In collaboration with the World Policy Institute in New York and the Fetzer Institute in Michigan, the Truth Justice Memory Centre created a website project entitled [www.memorializeturkey.com](http://www.memorializeturkey.com) in 2011. The website lists a number of Turkish memorialization projects, such as the restoration of the Surp Khach church in Van, the renovation of the Surp Giragos church in Diyarbakır and the Dersim massacre memorial.

In 2004 Fethiye Çetin's *Anneannem* [My Grandmother] started a debate in Turkey about Islamized Armenians. *Torunlar* [The Grandchildren: The Legacy of "Lost" Armenians in Turkey], edited by Fethiye Çetin and Ayşe Gül Altınay, moved the discussion one step further by collecting testimonies from grand-children and great-grandchildren of Turkey's forgotten Armenians. *Kılıç Artıkları* [The Remnants of the Sword], published by Laurence Ritter and Max Sivaslian, is another oral history project about the surviving Islamized grandchildren of those exterminated by the Ottoman Empire. The latest contribution to the discussion about the Islamized Armenians will be the forthcoming book of Avedis Hadjian, *A Secret Nation: The Hidden Armenians of Turkey*.

For nearly a decade now Armenian genocide commemorations have been taking place in the Taksim Square of Istanbul. In 2013 the Turkish Human Rights Association [IHD] organized a full-scale commemoration in different parts of the city. Demonstrators carrying the pictures of the 236 Armenian elites in front of the Turkish Islamic Art Museum, former main prison [Merkez Cezaevi], commemorated the Armenians. For the first time, members of the Syriac community also attended the commemoration. The Assyrian intellectual Şabo Boyacı explained how the Assyrian Christian communities of Anatolia had also been massacred during the genocide in 1915. On this special day an exhibition, *Before 1915: Assyrian Life in the Ottoman*

*Empire*, opened at the IHD head office. In addition to Istanbul, commemorations organized by human rights associations took place in İzmir, Diyarbakır, Adana, Batman, Ankara and Bodrum. Moreover, Ara Sarafian, director of the Gomidas Institute in London, and members of the IHD visited the grave of Faik Ali Ozansoy in Zincirlikuyu to pay homage to his altruistic deeds throughout the genocide. During World War I, Ozansoy served as governor of Kütahya and saved the lives of thousands of Armenians by refusing to deport them.

In 2014, Fatma Müge Göçek's book entitled *Denial of Violence: Ottoman Past, Turkish Present and Collective Violence against the Armenians* came out. In this study Göçek has analysed 315 memoirs published in Turkey from 1789 to 2009 in addition to numerous secondary sources, journals and newspapers. It is an important book, which looks at the denial of collective violence committed against the Armenians and demonstrates the historical process of that phenomenon.

On 23 April 2014, the day before the international Armenian genocide commemoration, the Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan offered condolences to the victims of the Armenian genocide. This unprecedented action came one day before the 99<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the massacres that wiped out the Armenian communities of Turkey. Erdoğan refrained from using the word "genocide" and he repeated calls to set up a joint historical commission by Armenia and Turkey to conduct a credible research about what happened in 1915. Erdoğan's message was published in many languages on the website of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>22</sup> During his speech he said: "It is a duty of humanity to acknowledge that Armenians remember the suffering experienced in that period, just like every other citizen of the Ottoman Empire". In 2011 Erdoğan also offered his condolences for the Dersim massacres that took place in the 1930s and resulted in the killing of more than 14,000 Kurds. Since Erdoğan equated the Dersim massacre and the Armenian genocide with secularist government killings, he did not link it to his current government. In both cases the Prime Minister merely repeated the already adopted discourses of the Turkish state regarding the Kurds and the Armenians. It was perceived as a political gesture and as a sign of willingness to open up the debate around the genocide. However his message did not offer an apology nor did it acknowledge the 1915 events as genocide.

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22 For the message of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan about the events of 1915 see: <[http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkish-prime-minister-mr\\_-recep-tayyip-erdogan-published-a-message-on-the-events-of-1915.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkish-prime-minister-mr_-recep-tayyip-erdogan-published-a-message-on-the-events-of-1915.en.mfa)> [accessed 24 April 2014].

## Objectives and Structure of the Thesis

Despite the continuing silence and censorship, there is a plethora of initiatives that commemorate the Armenian genocide in Turkey. None however has remained unchallenged. As I outlined it is often outside the sphere of “official” history that most breakthroughs take place. In this study, I want to focus on one particular sphere, i.e. the cultural sphere. My question is: how do cultural texts, which broach the question of memory, function within this specific political and social setting? What aspects of history can they make visible?

By raising this question I situate myself squarely in the tradition of the project of memory studies, which analyzes interdisciplinary media that helped to refashion a new collective remembrance about the Armenians in modern Turkey in the twenty-first century. However, since it cannot offer a comprehensive survey of all texts, films, and exhibitions that engage with the Armenian memory in Turkey, I have chosen certain cultural texts and left out many others. Thus for this thesis I have chosen the novel of Markar Esayan titled *Karşılaşma* [Encounter], the art works of four contemporary artists Ayşe Erkmen, Hrair Sarkissian, Tayfun Serttaş and Kutluğ Ataman, the musealization of the Surp Khach church and the animation film *Chienne d'histoire*. Rather than providing a generalizing overview, I seek to understand the specific textual dynamics of a small body of works.

Two motives have lurked into the selection process while I was choosing these corpses. First of all, since I want to figure out how these corpses function in the context of modern Turkey, I chose works, which were publicly available to the Turkish public. Due to state censorship not all cultural products are broadcast, screened or published in Turkey. However, these media were the ones that reached a large number of Turkish citizens between 2000 and 2014. That is why they were important cultural texts to analyze the memory conundrum of Turkey regarding the Armenians and the Armenian genocide. Secondly, these interdisciplinary works represent different media such as novels, visual arts, commemorative architecture and films in order to widen the question of collective memory about the Armenians to the larger question of cultural production. I want to see how different types of media and different genres of texts allow for an exploration of the past. Thirdly, the artists that I have chosen for this thesis have hyphenated identities and diasporic lives, which resemble the transnational character of the politics of memory regarding the Armenian genocide. For instance, Ayşe Erkmen lives in Berlin and Istanbul and Syria-born Armenian Hrair Sarkissian now lives in London after a few years spent in Amsterdam. That is why I have chosen these works to scrutinize the relationship between memory, history, national identity and collective remembrance.

This thesis revolves around the question of how the Armenian genocide is being represented in literature, the visual arts, commemorative architecture and films. I am specifically interested in the way in which memory is constructed under the conditions of censorship and state pressure. For a century, Turkish governments have successfully silenced the country's Armenians. Moreover, those who wished to make statements about their existence were marginalized, criminalized or declared *persona non grata*. Even though I want to focus on the unique and singular case of the Armenian genocide, I also believe that my interdisciplinary approach to the question of memory in Turkey regarding the Armenians will provide lessons applicable beyond the Armenian genocide. Hence, this research speaks to the theoretical questions surrounding the full spectrum of historical circumstances where memory, history, violence, remembrance and cultural productions intersect.

Finally, my research also has a moral and political motivation. It seeks an alternative way for memory studies to create hope for coming to terms with the haunting past and provide new road maps between Armenia and Turkey for reconciliation. For Elazar Barkan, “memory and the narrating of memory shape the politics of countries, the ability to reconcile with enemies or deteriorate into war” (Barkan 2007, 389). Hence, it is of vital importance to bring back to the surface the omitted memories of the Armenians in Turkish society, in the first instance to generate awareness and provide lessons for future generations and subsequently to pave the way for reconciliation between Armenia and Turkey. This thesis is an attempt to reconstruct the muted violent past by breaking the monopoly of the Turkish state over the memory of the genocide.

## Overview of the Chapters

Apart from the introduction and conclusion, this thesis is organized in four chapters.

Chapter I, *Exploring Postmemory in Markar Esayan's Novel Karşılaşma*, attempts to offer a survey of experiencing the history of remembrance of the Armenian genocide as a memorial practice in Turkey. In this chapter I analyze *Karşılaşma* [Encounter], a novel by the Istanbulite-Armenian author Markar Esayan, to explore the repercussions of the remembrance of the genocide on later generations. In doing so I take advantage of the concept of postmemory, which emphasizes the survivors' transmission of memory to the following generations. However, what the following generations bear witness to is nothing but a vague connection to a subject they have not experienced: learnt memory is treated as a witnessed memory. This chapter is an attempt to shed light on the postmemory of following generations in Turkey. Markar Esayan's book *Karşılaşma* does not shy away from adopting explicit references to the

Armenian genocide in his narrative. The plot of the novel revolves around the question of memory in two ways: by means of dedication and through the modes of narration. Chapter 1 aims to examine the difficulty of transgenerational memory and trauma manifestations through an analysis of terrains of dedication and the politics of remembrance of the Armenians. I elaborate on the concept of postmemory by examining the theoretical approaches developed by Marianne Hirsch, Ernst van Alphen, Dori Laub and Gary Weissman. Readers come across two dedications in the narrative: one to late Hrant Dink and the other to anyone who lost their life in Anatolia in the name of the Gomitaz Vartabed. In this chapter I also elaborate on the reasons of these dedications and examine their meanings. In addition to these dedications, the novel's characters play an important role in terms of portraying the historical amnesia and transmitting the unknown part of the Turkish-Armenian history to the following generations. That is why, I first of all describe the plot of the novel, and then proceed to I analyze the modes of narration to delineate the manifestations of memory. Ultimately, this chapter asks several questions about the multiplicity of narrators and their relationship vis-à-vis memory.

Chapter 2, *Art Projects as Counter-Monuments in Istanbul*, is an analysis of the work of four contemporary artists whose works were exhibited in Turkey. This chapter outlines the artistic commemorations produced outside the negationist official memory, which seek to commemorate the genocide. In this chapter I analyze the works of Ayşe Erkmen, Tayfun Serttaş, Kutluğ Ataman and Hrair Sarkissian. They are four of the few contemporary artists whose work has dealt with the Armenian genocide in modern Turkey. These artists do not represent the memory of the genocide; rather their work represents the absence of this meaning. They address their vicarious knowledge of the genocide as it has been passed down to them. In this chapter I examine their works of art to see whether we could classify them as “counter-monuments” in the light of the concept developed by James E. Young. In Young's definition, counter-monuments allude to an artistic criticism of monuments, which is a conscious departure from the traditional iconography of monuments through which the past is rigidified in monumental forms. They then produce a new discourse of representation by enhancing an active relationship between spectator and object. Counter-monuments posit the visitor's role in the memorial space so that visitors invest them with new meanings. These projects provide an important window into questioning the official war narratives. *Two Siblings* [İki Kardeş] by Ayşe Erkmen, *Foto Galatasaray* by Tayfun Serttaş, *Testimony* [Tanıklık] by Kutluğ Ataman and *Istory* [Benim Hikayem] by Hrair Sarkissian are the works that I examine. Chapter 2 traces the shifting role these artists played with their projects. I examine how these works contest the celebratory record offered by the Turkish government through its denialist policies. In what way do these projects

complement, undermine or criticize the official history of Turkey is an important question that I ask. In addition, I analyze how these projects unveiled in Istanbul challenge, extend or apply Young's counter-monument concept. With the role of these works in mind, I also scrutinize the specificity of these projects. Since some of these projects have been unveiled in the vicinity of militaristic sites or close to Atatürk statues, I also explore the meanings generated by the conscious choice of specific settings. Positioning these personal artefacts nearby official monuments intervenes in the urban setting of Istanbul. I address how this memory of past times shapes the understanding of the present moment and reflect on the contributions of these works to the way Turkey deals with its controversial past.

Chapter 3, titled *Transformation of the Church of Surp Khach into Akdamar Museum* takes a close look at the reopening of a religious site as a museum. The Armenian church of Surp Khach is situated on an island in Lake Van in the eastern part of Turkey. In 2005 the renovation of the 1,100-year old Surp Khach church began and lasted for two years. Since 2007 the church has been functioning as a museum. The ultimate transformation of the church from a sacred place into a museum is an emblematic example of creating a *lieu de mémoire* (site of memory) as Pierre Nora calls it. This concept, developed by Nora, analyzes certain "site of memory" places in France invested with symbolical significance for ideological and political purposes. In October 2012 I conducted fieldwork in the region to analyze the current situation of the church. I claim that the inauguration of the church, the transformation of a religious terrain into a museum and the memories belonging to different ethnic groups in relation to the church can be analyzed to decipher different conflicting narratives attached to the site. In this chapter I discuss the fetishization of Turkish flags placed on the island, the question of ownership and what the appropriation of the site by the Turks means for the Armenian memory. I also highlight what musealization involves and what "dark tourism", "trauma tourism", "memory tourism" or "roots-seeking-trips" mean for the Armenians coming to this island from all over the world.

Chapter 4, *Visualizing Genocide in the Animation Film Chienne d'histoire*, offers a reading of an animation film, shot by the Armenian-French director Serge Avédikian in 2010, entitled *Chienne d'histoire*. The animation film is set five years before the Armenian genocide, in 1910, when the streets of Constantinople were overrun with stray dogs. These dogs roamed freely in the city until the newly established Ottoman government decided to get rid of them. They proposed the deportation of the dogs to Oxia, a deserted island of barren and steep cliffs, located in the Marmara Sea. All dogs were rounded up and transported to the island, which turned out to be an open-air dog pound. In the end approximately 80,000 dogs were exterminated. In this chapter, I broadly examine "how" Avédikian constructs

the story of Constantinople's stray dogs. I elaborate on the concept of allegory by examining the theoretical approach developed by Angus Fletcher. I analyze which elements in the film make this allegorical reading possible. As a rhetorical trope, allegory is able to portray complex concepts and ideas by establishing a narrative that has another meaning under the surface. It conveys a hidden message through actions, figures, symbolic events and representations. As an extended metaphor it also gives a new interpretation of the phenomenon. I then scrutinize the role of the three Ottoman pashas in *Chiienne d'histoire* followed by an analysis of the way the dogs are exterminated in the film and the Armenians were deported during the genocide. During my analysis, I offer responses to the questions: What does the allegory bring out? What does it tell us about the genocide? What does it mean to compare the plight of the Armenians to that of the dogs? And finally, why is allegory such a helpful strategy in the case of modern Turkey?

Although 24 April 2015 marked the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian genocide, the Armenian question still remains as a highly contested topic in Turkey. In the light of these developments it seems that my thesis is rather timely. It is important therefore to remind the reader that this dissertation covers events up to the third quarter of 2015.