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Geopolitics of Denial: Turkey's 'Armenian Problem'

The nation building project in Turkey has been a long process of organized eradication, forgetting and denial of the identities of the non-Turkish ethnic communities of Anatolia. The Anatolian Armenians were one of the first ethnic groups among those whose existence was regarded as a threat to the territorial integrity and existential identity of the late Ottoman State. Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the nationalists attempt bridge the gap between ethnicity and territoriality in the settlement of the Turkish national identity within a homogenized space that manifested itself by a series of sustained policies of demographic engineering, re-inventing history, ethnic cleansing and suppression of the non-Turkish people of the Anatolian lands.¹ In the eyes of the founders of the Turkish nation-state any internal or external interference in the construction of the imagined continuity between history, territory and national identity posed a constant existential threat to the 'indivisibility and integrity' of the Turkish national sovereignty.² This existential anxiety is still an important factor that persists in different discursive forms of utterances, speech acts, and defensive claims in the state-mentality of the Turkish society and institutions. 'Turkishness' in today's Turkey is still a dominant official identity of the state but this dominance has not necessarily been a secure one. The official denial policies of the Turkish governments as a strategy of nation building is still an integral part of the official state ideology.

The aim of this article is to understand and explain the underlying official policies of the Turkish diplomatic statecraft in the form of sustained denial policies deployed by the diplomatic state craft and geopolitical reasoning through practices of banalization and normalization of the sufferings of the Anatolian Armenian communities. The denial in this sense can be treated as a form of racism that others the victims of the state violence as a collective ethnic or religious entity. For the purposes of this article, I will focus on this form of state sponsored racism distinguishing it from other forms of societal and individual racisms that are not necessarily endorsed or mediated by the state. In a state sponsored racism, racist discourse is produced and re-produced by diplomatic and geopolitical state craft to sustain the continuity between state sovereignty, cultural racial identity, history and territorial space as a defensive ideology.³ In this sense, racist discourse in its subtle and unsubtle forms manifests itself as a permanent process of defending the nation.⁴

From collective amnesia to the emergence 'the Armenian Problem'

For most of the Republican period, at least until mid-1960s, the state elites, diplomats, media and historians in Turkey maintained a collective social amnesia and largely ignored the crimes committed against the Armenian populations as an integral part of the Turkish history. The breaking out that silence came about as a reaction to the external events beyond the control of the Turkish state.⁵ In 1965, the Armenian diaspora for the first time in Lebanon commemorated the 50th anniversary of the atrocities committed against the Armenians of The Ottoman Empire. The first crack in the wall of the Turkish collective amnesia of silence, however, started to appear following the Armenian militant groups attacking the Turkish diplomats and embassies abroad by Armenian diaspora military organization ASALA in the 1970s. These attacks prompted the Turkish government to provide training for Turkish diplomats and officially encourage historians and the intellectuals of the state craft on how to respond to questions on the Armenian claims of genocide.⁶ It should be noted that by the concept of 'intellectuals of statecraft' I refer to a whole community of state bureaucrats, leaders, foreign policy experts, historians diplomats and advisers who have claims to 'expert opinion and

legitimate knowledge' regarding the Armenian 'problem'. In the Turkish context, these so called officially endorsed intellectuals of the state craft are deployed in the service of geopolitical reasoning and 'raison d'état' to bridge the geopolitical gap between the Turkish state, history and territory and national identity. The intellectuals of the diplomatic statecraft are not only involved in discursive practices; they also have the positional power within institutions to influence and inform the activities and policies of the state.⁷ In this context, I treat discourse not just as language and grammar but as a constructed link between language *and* practice. I am mainly interested in the production of geopolitical codes in the Turkish official discourse of denial and how this discourse informs and is formed by Turkey's grand state strategy. In this sense discursive statements must be distinguished from ordinary narratives. The state practice only makes sense in the light of discursive formations as regimes of truths in different settings. Discursive formations function as strategies to construct grand strategies and often masquerade as geopolitical ideologies.⁸ In the next section, I will pose the questions: What disciplinarian language does one speak with claims to truth? From which official position of power does one talk? In the following, I will try to outline the key, but necessarily exhaustive, narratives approaching to the question of Armenian Genocide. Some of these are disciplinarian practices while other are more discursive in their nature.⁹

If we accept the anthropological view that all knowledge is a situated knowledge, reflecting author's own position and experience leading to this publications may also be a necessary scholarly exercise. In the early 1980s, I was a student at Faculty of Political Science in Ankara. After a competitive internal exam I secured a place in the Diplomacy and International Relations Department where most of the Turkish diplomats were trained to enter into the diplomatic service.¹⁰ It was during this time when we were instructed to attend newly introduced 'the Armenian Question', Ermeni sorunu in Turkish seminar series in the faculty. Since all dissident academics were dismissed by the Military government these were convened by the senior or retired ambassadors. In the 1980s, a substantial body of pamphlets also started to emerge, in both and Turkish, using Ottoman sources, with titles like Documents on Ottoman Empire. These were not attempting to write a critical history but polemical documents mainly sponsored and published by the Turkish government and institutions of the state to encounter Armenian claims. Some of them simply were selectively reproduced copies of Ottoman Documents.¹¹ These publications largely are intended to claim that the Ottoman Government deported the Armenians from the war zones for security reasons and the regime went to considerable trouble to protect the lives and the properties of the Armenians. We had to study these documents published by the state institutions to learn the official position of the State.¹² Whenever a critical dissent was raised during these seminars we were told by our instructors that our job as trainee diplomats was to serve the national interest not to question the official line. This was however in the authoritarian period following the Military Coup d'état during which the dominant official discourse was to defend the state against the internal and external enemies of the Turkish nation. The attacks by the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) had broken the official wall of silence, but not the wall of denial.

Relatively speaking, today, the Turkish society is much more open and pluralistic and has undergone many changes since then. After a long lapse on serious scholarship on the issue, the wall of silence started to crumble.¹³ In 2005, A Turkish University in Istanbul held a two day conference investigating the event of 2015.¹⁴ The murder of Hrant Dink (editor of the Turkish-Armenian newspaper Agos) by nationalist vigilantes in 2007 was another turning point: it sparked a reaction in civil society and academia. Over the last decades, the discursive debates on the Armenian genocide issue have multiplied and several schools of thought proliferated

with a high volume of publications disseminated by both sides as well as academic institutions and scholars. It is not the aim of this article to give an exhaustive and comprehensive survey of the field but identify several discursive narratives that operate within their own disciplinarian regimes of truth.

Discursive debates

G-Word¹⁵

One of the most enduring controversy concerns the word 'genocide': the legal discourse of labelling the crimes committed against the Armenian communities in Anatolia. This debate around the criminal responsibility of the Ottoman state. The term 'genocide' was not used until the end of the Second World War. In 1948, under the shadow of Holocaust, the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crime of Genocide produced the official definition of genocide. At the core of the definition are 'acts committed with intent to destroy in whole or in part a national, ethnic or racial group.'¹⁶ Two elements are crucial here. First is the question of the state intent: did the crime occur as a result of the systematic policy of the Ottoman State to commit mass murder with genocidal intent? Second, were non-combatant Armenians targeted as the objects of extermination in order to eliminate them all from a given territory? This causal link is implicit in the definition: a necessary condition for genocide to occur is vulnerability of a specific group and real or purported connection with threats to the security of the state. So the civilian targets that make up an integral part of a religious or ethnic group and the structurally violent consequences of the crime, rather than an explicit or even officially proven 'intent', determines the scale and the nature of the crime. If we move beyond semantic discussions about the legal construction of the crime the fact still remains that whether the G-word is used or not, makes little difference to the Armenians who suffered as a result of the policies and practices by the Turkish Ottoman administration. It is difficult to refute the fact that a substantial number of Armenian communities were subjected to a state endorsed atrocities committed by sponsored agencies of the state apparatus against the Armenians of Anatolia, including children, women and families. The causal link therefore is inherent in the definition: a necessary condition for a crime of this scale to occur is the existence of a vulnerable group belonging to a specific ethnic group and real and ostensible connection with threats to the integrity and security of the Ottoman state. I will return to the geopolitical reasoning below.

A leading legal scholar in international criminal law, Schabas rightly observes that the legal discourse is 'penetrated with the elements of symbolism with the stigma attached with the term...the epithet of 'denier' often is employed not with respect to what actually happened but rather about the legal qualification of the events'.¹⁷ In this context, he adds, the distinction between the facts and the legal construction of the crime is often blurred.¹⁸ He suggests, instead of 'genocide', the concept of 'crime against humanity' may provide historically and conceptually more representative 'narrative that is accepted by both sides (to the extent one can speak of sides, given that there is a spectrum of views among Turks and Armenians) has been expressed frequently, most recently in the call for an intergovernmental , most recently in the call for an intergovernmental historical commission in the protocols on normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia reached in Zurich in later 2009'¹⁹. This is directly related the construction of the 'historical facts'.

Historiography versus memory²⁰

Who has the right authority to decide on the issue is not only confined to the labelling practices of the crime but also related to disciplinarian professional discursive practices. A leading lawyer defending the term genocide claims: 'genocide is a matter for legal judgement, not a matter of historians, there is no dispute about the Armenian genocide among legal scholars'.²¹ In an interview he argued that 'as historians do not know law, it is quite clear that a number of denialist historians deny the Genocide. They don't understand what genocide means, and they profess no understanding of law or have no experience in applying it, so they are not qualified to answer the legal question of whether or not these crimes were genocide.'²² This discursive professional claim begs some pertinent questions to be answered: Who has the right authority to decide on the issue? Given the historicity of the crime what constitutes reliable and valid evidence? Where can the reliable and valid evidence to be located? What is the role of an historian as a witness? Rather than addressing the nature and the responsibility of the crimes committed 'the politics of labelling or framing' has become a discursive field in itself.²³

What is striking, at the expense of generalization is that the general trend in these professional, disciplinarian debates is the lack of critical-reflectivity. Each speech act or utterance is being made within its own disciplinarian and professional paradigmatic practices with its own epistemological claims in an attempt to re-frame the issue. If we are to grasp the use of historiography or legal scholarship that ties these labelling practices with claims to authority, attending to the disciplinarian sites of these claims is necessary. Discursive nature of these narratives appear not necessarily rational but function as rationalizing practices and discursive claims. Each claim speaks from its own position of authority, epistemological and historical position and claims to expertise in a cycle of production of claims and counter-claims. A prominent historian, Hanioglu, for instance, who is a critical voice in Turkish historiography, observes that in Turkey the historian is not treated like a scholar who tries to understand what actually happened in history but 'a servant who knows how to press the past through the filter of perfection and present it for the service of the state ideology'.²⁴ It is seen as the task of the Turkish scholarship to 'reinvent' the history according to the demands of the state ideology.²⁵ This general officially conformist tradition in Turkish historiography and scholarship, except for some scholars: Akcam, Hanioglu, Ungor, Gocek and others who dare to speak the truth to power, seriously undermines the reliability of Turkish historiography in terms of academic honesty and integrity. The Armenian historiography on the other hand is largely absent in these debates.²⁶ So far substantial critical historiography on the Armenian genocide has not really existed; but in recent years there has been a growing body of scholarship that is engaged with the documents and archives critically and innovatively.²⁷ As Tambar observes 'Efforts to query what Foucault called the politics of truth are particularly crucial in post-Ottoman geographies, where national sovereignty and the rights of citizenship it protected were premised on mass political dispossession.'²⁸ The habitus of these disciplinarian claims and the production of competing epistemological truths often undermine the reliability and validity of the state sponsored claims but also function as discursive incitements that stands in the way of solution and construction of common historical narrative.

On the other hand, it would not be entirely inaccurate to suggest that professional and official history often ignores public memory. In his 'On the concept of history' Walter Benjamin, a Weimar intellectual, wrote that there has never been a document of civilization, which is not at the same time one of barbarism. While history is expressed through written texts and often based on archival evidence; memory lives through places and cultural symbols that evoke painful memories of the survivors.²⁹ Memory is a temporal outcome of concrete experiences within specific geopolitical settings and acts as the devices of collective remembrances.³⁰ As

two genocide scholars Huyssen and Neuman suggested: 'Professional historiography must come together with public memory to establish to truth about the past and make that truth an integral part of national self-understanding.'³¹ In the official Turkish historiography the Anatolian Armenians are portrayed as the others of the Turkey's national history.³² The Turkish historiography tends to privilege official archives over the lived experiences and suffering of the Armenians communities and is often told through the gaze of the perpetrators. Garo Paylan, a grandchild of a surviving Armenian family in Istanbul, who has been elected as a member of Turkish Parliament recently, in response to the Turkish suggestion for the establishment of bilateral history commission, registers his objection: 'my grandfather's story is too important to be left to the historians. This is essentially a humanitarian issue.'³³ The use of history in the construction of the denial policy carries its racial undertones.

Denial Discourse as a form of racism

Denial comes in many discursive forms in terms of speech acts, utterances and imaginations and fantasies of the past, each with its own historical, geopolitical and social functions.³⁴ For the purposes of this article I focus on the institutional forms of denial produced, endorsed and disseminated by the state policies and state elites. It is not my intention to deal with individual denial but explore denial as a strategy of an organized diplomatic statecraft to encounter the legitimate humanitarian claims made by the victims. Individual deniers who exercise speech acts, who may have political, psychological and ideological motives are not the subject of this article. Individual denial mainly falls within the legalistic scholarly debates of freedom of speech.³⁵ However, engaging with the individual denial can be counterproductive and may unintentionally function to disseminate and affirm the denial discourse. Institutional denial, on the other hand, have tangible societal and public consequences for the victims who suffer from emotional pain by the negation of their experiences. Lipstad for instance, who prevailed in a British court after being sued by David Irving, an individual denier of Holocaust, for calling him a genocide denier, resisted the idea of using law to limit the expression even of extreme opinion on historical issues. Lipstad, suggested: 'I do not believe that laws against denial are strategically wise. They tend to make martyrs of the accused, arousing sympathy for them. They also render the item which has been outlawed 'forbidden fruit'. Thus it becomes more enticing and appealing to certain segments of society – disaffected youth, for example'.³⁶

As stated earlier, the denial discourse in Turkey is mainly centred on the deportation of the Armenians with the claim that the official intent of the Ottoman government was to deport the Armenians from war zones for security reasons but not to eliminate them. Deportation constitutes only one of the earlier stages in the long and complex process of genocide. This deportation-centred view fails to represent the multidimensional dynamics of the atrocities committed against the Anatolian Armenians. Recently, increasing number of scholars have taken a synthesised view of the mass killings as a complex process. This process oriented approach as a political and social phenomenon enables genocide scholarship to go beyond the restrictive views and limitations of the strictly legal definitions. As explained earlier, the legal debates are generally centred on the applicability of the legal norms and conventions focusing largely on the direct consequences of the state intent; process oriented approach on the other hand takes into account of social aspects and historical continuity and the consequences of the process for the contemporary societies and states. Strictly legal and narrow conventional definition of the genocide label tends to encourage the perpetrators or their contemporary deniers in their attempt to absolve of their social and moral responsibility. As Schabas puts it: 'The real issue concerns the possibility of the state responsibility for the atrocities. Although there are ongoing demands efforts to litigate historic atrocities, such as slave trade and persecution of aboriginal peoples, in practice they have met with little success. Concern that

recognition of responsibility for crimes against humanity perpetrated a century ago may bring significant legal liability is misplaced'.³⁷ In general, I agree with Schaba's scholarly view, however, I believe, this is not meant to suggest that the denial of these atrocities by the contemporary Turkish governments and the state does not carry any moral, social or historical responsibility. If we follow the legal rationale of retroactivity, the criminal responsibility for these crimes does not necessarily fall on the shoulders of the Modern Turkish Republic. Paradoxically, it can also be argued that by justifying the atrocities on the basis of geopolitical necessity and sanctifying the genocidal actions of the late Ottoman governments, the state elites of the Modern Turkey seem to implicitly legitimize the continuity between the Ottoman Empire and the modern Turkish state identity.³⁸

Genocide process is driven by complex overlapping dynamics. Recent scholarship increasingly use structure and agency synthesis to explain the complex underlying dynamics of genocidal processes.³⁹ Stanton, for instance, observed that genocidal process develops in ten stages: classification, symbolization, discrimination, dehumanization, organization, polarization, preparation, persecution, extermination, denial.⁴⁰ Each genocidal process has its own dynamics and contextual factors. More specifically regarding the Armenian genocide, Ugur Umit Ungor draws our attention to three overlapping contextual developments under which the atrocities against the Armenians were committed: the Ottoman losses of the wars in the Balkans; the Military coup d'état of the Committee for Union and Progress; the outbreak of the First World War.⁴¹ According to Ungor, each of these overlapping factors led to the radicalization and violent revanchist reaction against the Armenian communities in Anatolia. This policy consisted of a series of overlapping processes that resulted in the intended and planned destruction process: mass executions of the Armenian intellectuals in Istanbul following in the aftermath of the Gallipoli Campaign; expropriation of the Armenian assets and properties; deportations across Anatolia beyond the war zones; forced assimilation; artificial famine zones; and destruction of the material culture. What is missing, however, in these sequence of processes is the final stage which is the policy of sustained denial in an attempt to be exempted from legal, moral and material responsibility. Denial of the genocide is indeed the final stage of the genocide which aims to 'reshape history and demonize the victims and rehabilitate the perpetrators'.⁴² It is what Ellie Weisel has described as a 'double killing'. Denial aims to eradicate memory and re-construct history but also degrades the memories and painful experiences of the victims.⁴³

Historical sociologist, Fatma Muge Gocek argues that denial is a multi-layered, historical process with four distinct yet overlapping components: the structural elements of collective violence and situated modernity on one side, and the emotional elements of collective emotions and legitimating events on the other.⁴⁴ According to Gocek, denial emerged through four stages: the initial imperial denial of the origins of the organized violence committed against the Armenians commenced in 1789 and continued until 1907; the Young Turk denial of the act of violence lasted for a decade from 1908 to 1918; early republican denial of the actors of violence took place from 1919 to 1973; and the late republican denial of the responsibility for the collective violence started in 1974 and continues today. This last stage can only be completed by a social closure and reconciliation when the crimes are recognized and victims are acknowledged. Without this social closure the process of genocide remains unfinished.

Having explained the dynamics of the denial as the final stage of the genocidal acts, I would like to move on to explain the underlying official denial discourse rooted in the enduring state mentality of the Turkish state and governments as a racial discourse. Denial process is maintained by the diplomatic state craft and geopolitical reasoning through practices of

banalization and normalization of the gross atrocities committed against and the sufferings of the Anatolian Armenian communities.

The centenary of the Armenian genocide recharged the old and new debates in Turkey. The resurgence of the Armenian issue and how to respond to the claims and accusations of the Armenian lobby and campaigners has been recently raised to the top of the Turkish diplomatic agenda.⁴⁵ The intellectuals of the Turkish statecraft have been actively mobilized in the construction and production of denial discourses to confront the Armenian claims on the centenary of the Armenian genocide. In the remainder of this paper I will identify several discursive strategies that constitute the geopolitical underpinnings of Turkey's denial politics as part of its grand strategy. These current intersecting discursive practices of state craft that inform and drive Turkey's denial policy are: Neo-Ottoman exceptionalism; apology; just memory concept; decentring remembrance and memory; and finally the gradual racialization of the Armenian problem.

Turkish Nationalism to Neo-Ottoman Exceptionalism:

Since the resurgence of 'the so called Armenian genocide' debates in the mid-1970s as an official problem of the state, the denial policy of the Turkish state has been a permanent feature of the Turkish foreign policy and diplomatic state craft. Denial policies remain at the heart of the Turkish geopolitical grand strategy to construct policies to confront and defend the Turkish-Islamic national identity. Even though the central claim 'Turks did not commit crimes against the Armenians but deported them for security reasons' persists, the 'Armenian problem' has now been placed in the context of Turkey's Neo-Ottomanist grand strategy. Until the rise of the JDP to power in 2002, the Armenian problem was part of the Turkish National Security strategy sanctioned by the military. The recognition of the Armenian genocide is still regarded as a threat to Turkish national identity and security. This permanent state mentality is aptly explained by Akcam: 'The mind-set that an open discussion of history engenders a security problem originates from the breakup of the Ottoman Empire into nation-states beginning in the 19th century. From late Ottoman times to the present, there has been continuous tension between the state's concern for secure borders and society's need to come to terms with human rights abuses.'⁴⁶ This geopolitical anxiety also reflects the legal rationale undermining the basic premises of the freedom of speech in Turkey. The Turkish government defended 'genocide denier' Perincek's freedom of speech in his appeal to the ECHR. In Turkey, on the other hand, in a ruling in 2007 against two Turkish-Armenian journalists—Arat Dink, the son of Hrant Dink, and Sarkis Seropyan, a Turkish court in Istanbul suspended sentences of a one-year imprisonment for using the term genocide; denying this right to freedom of speech in Turkey.⁴⁷

In Turkey, the national security mentality of the state penetrates deep into the large sections of society and institutions and the pendulum in the construction of Turkish national identity historically has swung between Turkish nationalism and Islam which is embedded in the geopolitical continuity of the state identity as a homogenous territorial and sovereign entity. Since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) Neo-Ottomanism new geopolitical vision has gradually replaced Turkish secular nationalism in Turkey's relations with the neighbouring countries and beyond. The integration of the dominant Sunni Islamic identity into the national identity of the Turkish state has become a key feature of the grand strategy in JDP's 'restoration' of the Turkish society and institutions. The Islamization of the Turkish society and state, referred to as 'Neo-Ottomanism' (Although the JDP sometimes object to this term) is not new and dates back to the 1980s but was not fully developed as an integral part of the

grand strategy of the Turkish state until the AKP regime. In this new geopolitical discourse the revival of the Ottoman Empire is glorified as a 'lost paradise'. In the eyes of the JDP cadres, this exceptional model is not only good for new-Turkey but also for other Islamic countries. In this relativist human rights discourse, Turkey presents itself as the defender of the Sunni Muslims. Erdogan for instance accused of China, Serbia and Israel committing genocidal acts against the Muslims. For instance, in 2009, during the visit of Sudanese Omar Al Bashir indicted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity, Erdogan asserted in support of Bashir's controversial visit 'a Muslim can never commit suicide'.⁴⁸ This statement underlines Erdogan and his party's religious conservative Neo-Ottomanist ideology that is not particularly conducive to the recognition of the sufferings of the Christian Anatolian Armenian populations during the late Ottoman period. The Sultan Abdulhamid seems to be the favourite sultan of the ruling elites in the JDP. The reign of authoritarian Abulhamid, known as the red Sultan in this Hamidian era, was the period of Pan-Islamization in the Ottoman history, coincidentally the first state sponsored atrocities against the Armenians started in this period.⁴⁹

The Prime Minister of Davutoglu, formerly in charge of the Turkish Foreign policy, has been the main strategist behind this neo-Ottomanist drive. His concept of 'strategic depth' can be located within this new transitional Pan-Islamist geopolitical vision.⁵⁰ Strategic depth is the new geopolitical discourse about Turkey's position that provides a new direction to increase the power of Turkey in those regions with which Turkey has privileged national interests and close religious and cultural ties that stem from the legacies of the Ottoman Empire as the protectorate of the Sunni Muslims. Davutoglu's key argument is that the civilizational conflict between Christian west and the Islamic Turkey in the long run is irreconcilable, instead Turkey needs to increase its influence by utilizing its geostrategic location and its Ottoman legacy.⁵¹ This policy can be clearly observed in Turkey's foreign policy actions towards Syria. Since the Syrian crisis unravelled Turkey openly adopted a sectarian policy supporting the Sunni opposition forces against Asad regime by proxy at the expense of other Kurdish and Armenian minorities in the Middle East.⁵² Davutoglu and Erdogan's discursive denial strategies must be read in the context of their own conservative Islamic habitus inspired by their own understanding of Ottoman history and traditions. As a project of restoration the re-construction of Turkish national identity accentuates its Sunni Islamic religious identity which privileges the experiences of the Sunni citizens of the Ottoman Empire above the other minorities. As Libaridian explains this transformation from nationalist to Neo-Ottomanist world view is not fully conducive to the recognition of the sufferings of the Christian Armenians during the late Ottoman Empire but indicates a discursive contextual shift in the official diplomatic state craft of the denial.⁵³

Rebranding the Denial through Apology and Just memory

In 2014, Erdogan, in his official statement on the anniversary of the Armenian genocide in 1915, offered Turkey's condolences to the grandchildren of Armenians who lost their lives in 1915. In the statement, which was translated into nine languages including Armenian, he described the events of World War I as "our shared pain": "Having experienced events which had inhumane consequences - such as relocation - during the First World War, (it) should not prevent Turks and Armenians from establishing compassion and mutually humane attitudes among towards one another," He concluded " Regardless of their ethnic or religious origins, we pay tribute, with compassion and respect, to all Ottoman citizens who lost their lives in the same period and under similar conditions." But he also added in the statement that it was "inadmissible" for Armenia to use the 1915 events "as an excuse for hostility against Turkey" and to turn the issue "into a matter of political conflict"⁵⁴ This new official rhetoric of 'common

pain' is nothing new as it has been repeatedly put forward by the intellectuals of the state craft but has now become the integral part of the government's diplomatic strategy. Erdogan's tactical apology reads more like an official statement rather than an attempt to engage with the suffering and the losses of the Armenians. The banality of this non-apology is that it trivializes and normalizes the Armenian trauma as part of a great geopolitical catastrophe. It removes the agency from the act of killing by pretending that the cause of deaths and sufferings were the natural outcome of this great catastrophe: the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. As he puts '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.' He asserts: 'The incidents of the First World War are our shared pain. To evaluate this painful period of history through a perspective of just memory is a humane and scholarly responsibility.'⁵⁵ Regardless of the motivations, this apology marks an important stage in the official denial policy that the suffering of the Armenians was for the first time registered publicly and officially at the highest bureaucratic level.

On the other hand, whether this was a genuine apology is worth investigating as it has implications for the recognition of the crimes of the late Ottoman Empire against the Armenian communities.⁵⁶ Recently, there has been a great interest in the speech acts of apology as a diplomatic tool. According to the scholarly analysis offered by Kampf and Lowenheim, the speech act of apology involves three types of rituals: 'purification – that is, asymmetrical rituals in which the offender issues an apology in order to purify his or her dismal past but does not necessarily need the approval of an offended party; humiliation – that is, asymmetrical rituals in which the offended party forces the offender to participate in a degradation ritual as a condition for closure; and settlement – that is, symmetrical rituals in which both sides strive to restore relations.'⁵⁷ Erdogan's 'apology' does not seem to be genuinely seeking reconciliation or approval from the victims but reads more like a speech act to 'to purify' the Ottoman history and the Muslim citizens of the Ottoman Empire. In Erdogan's apology there is no genuine attempt at closure or settlement. Erdogan's style of apology lacks humility. Despite several references to the common history and shared pain with the Armenian populations of the Ottoman Empire, there is neither concrete commitment to reconciliation nor an offer of establishing diplomatic relations with Armenia as a first step towards reconciliation.⁵⁸ Human rights scholar, Marrus has also pointed out that genuine apology comprises: acceptance of responsibility; acknowledgment of the wrong doing; expression of regret and remorse; and commitment to reparation, reconciliation and closure, all of which is omitted in Erdogan's apology.⁵⁹

The concepts of 'shared pain' and 'just memory' appear to be the key elements of the apology in an attempt at rebranding the denial strategy. In fact, Davutoglu, now President Erdogan's appointed Prime Minister, remains the key architect behind this new passive offensive diplomatic state craft. In a key article published in Turkish Policy Quarterly in 2014, referring to the painful memory of the Armenians, Davutoglu explains: 'The initiative that Turkey launched with Armenia in 2009 is premised on eradicating this sort of mentality. The 'just memory' concept that we have frequently employed during this process is critically important as it highlights how history must be viewed with a one-sided memory, In order for Turks and Armenians what each of them has experienced, it is essential they respect one another's memory.'⁶⁰ In his reproachful style Davutoglu defines the lived experiences of the Armenian communities during the late Ottoman Empire in an attempt to reconstruct and undermine the legitimacy of the Armenian claims. In his neutralizing attempt, he equates the experiences of the Armenian minorities during the late Ottoman period with the Muslim-Turkish citizens of the Empire whose ideology was habitually instated with the nationalist Union and Progress

Party. In Davutoglu's discourse, both parties are presented as victims. But again there is no obvious agency or moral responsibility indicated as if the Armenian populations had died of natural and inevitable causes under normal circumstances. Davutoglu's just memory concept is not a tenable one, as he puts those who are in possession of the executive power with those victims of this executive power in the same category. Davutoglu's claims to historical truth is premised upon his perception of the clash of civilizations thesis between the Christian west and the Muslim west. He contends: 'When a retrospective understanding of history centered upon the relocation is adopted, the emergence of two collective understandings that despise one another is inevitable' In his typically occidentalist manner, Davutoglu is critical of the west : 'The new subject-intellectual prototype that assumed the role of spokes-person for the national awareness of Christian elements, attempted to equate itself with the Euro-centric understanding of history constructed on the foundations of Christianity.'⁶¹ Davutoglu's manichean view is ,however, flawed as the Ottoman rulers were not innocent victims of the western Christian imperialists but they were themselves the rulers of an imperial state who were trying to hold on to the last vestiges of another declining and disintegrating European empire at the end of an imperial European order in the 21st century. In effect, the real victims were the Anatolian citizens of the Ottoman Empire; particularly the Ottoman Christians, Greeks, Armenians and others were the targets of the nascent nationalist ideology of the Union and Progress cadres.

Decentring the remembrance

Decentring the remembrance and memory constitutes another element of the denial policy. The 24th of April carries a particular symbolic significance as a day of remembrance for the Armenian diaspora and communities. This was the day when the Ottoman government ordered the mass arrests and execution of the Armenian intellectuals in Istanbul in 1915. The Armenian elites and intellectuals across the Empire were arrested, tortured and finally murdered leading to the elimination of hundreds of Armenians across Anatolia within weeks.⁶² The purge of the Armenians in Istanbul concurred with the landings of the Ally troops in the Gallipoli. This was not however a pure coincidence as the Ottoman defeats had radicalized the policies of the Ottoman Governments leading to the extermination of the Armenians.⁶³ As Akcam observes the Armenian genocide took place soon after the defeat in the east in the Sarikamis area against the Russian advance and the empire's 'struggle at Gallipoli'.⁶⁴ As I am not a historian, it is not my aim here to investigate the link historically between these two events but explain how the link between the Armenian genocide and the Gallipoli commemoration is constructed by the current Turkish diplomatic state craft as a decentring narrative.

In Turkey, the Gallipoli campaign is conventionally remembered is integral part of the collective national memory as a commemorative narrative that marks the beginning of the Turkish national awakening against the Imperialist west. Until recently, the centenary of the Armenian genocide has been customarily observed on March 18 to mark the end of the naval campaign of the allies. In 2015, however, for the first time the Turkish government decided to shift the observance back to April 24 which concurred with the Armenian commemorations and the centennial of the ANZAC landings on 25 April 1915. Both President Erdoğan and Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan have issued competing invitations for their respective events. In an interview with a French television, in response to the question regarding the shifting the date of Gallipoli commemoration, Erdogan said Turkey is commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Gallipoli Battles and "we are in no position to obtain permission from Armenia". "It is a date in history and it has nothing to do with the ceremonies in Armenia. Quite on the contrary, they fixed their ceremonies to coincide with our date."⁶⁵

This decentering turn in the national commemorative exercise seems to be another deliberate act of rebranding the denial strategy. Erdogan's choice of the Gallipoli commemoration did not just aim to marginalize the Armenian commemoration but an attempt to reframe the history. Erdogan's contextualization of the Armenian suffering, among other things, is intended to publicize his view that the extermination of the Anatolian Armenians was a historical accident resulted from the chaos of First World War. According to this 'chaos theory' narrative, the Ottoman Muslims suffered as much at the hand of the Allied forces. For the Gallipoli event, Erdogan accentuates the religious aspect of the Gallipoli campaign. The national hero, Ataturk who made his reputation there and later founded the Turkish Republic, is demoted to the background as a marginal figure. This newly adopted discourse shifts the official history of the Gallipoli as a nationalist legend, known as 'Canakkale Destani' in Turkish, to a civilizational clash between the east and west. This shift from the old anti-imperialist nationalist discourse to the representations of Gallipoli as a symbolic site of jihad against the Christian west implicitly aims to portray the Armenians as the fifth column representing the interests of the Christian powers within the Ottoman Empire. In the video, produced by Turkey's presidency and simultaneously broadcast on several television networks late April 2014, Erdogan prays the troops kneeling to Mecca, and then he recites a poem:

Do not leave this country, which was kneaded by Muslims,
with no Muslims, my God
Give us strength... Do not leave the field of jihad
with no pahlavan [wrestler], My God!
Do not leave these masses, who look for a hero,
with no hero, My God!'⁶⁶

Decentering the denial is also closely tied to the increasing racialization of the 'Armenian problem' in contemporary Turkey.

Racialization of the denial:

It is futile to seek historical evidence to prove that the gross crimes committed against the Armenian communities was motivated by racist ideology of the Union and Progress Party. Indeed, the Union and Progress Party initially included some prominent Armenians in its ranks. After all, the rulers of the Ottoman Empire lacked any ideological notion of race and ethnic identity.⁶⁷ In the imperial order of the Ottoman Empire, the Sunni Islam was the official religion of the ruling classes. The so called "millet system" only recognized confessional communities, Armenian, Jewish and Greek Christians, 'i.e. 'the people of the book', enjoyed religious freedom and self-rule in exchange for loyalty and taxation.⁶⁸ In effect, the atrocities against the Armenians was essentially a destruction of a largely defenseless Armenian communities by the agents of the late Ottoman government for geopolitical reasons of *raison d'état* rather than a crimes motivated by strictly racist ideologies. This is not to suggest however that the geopolitical reasoning behind these crimes can be used to justify the atrocities. The ensuing denial discourse in Turkey today, in fact, serves as the indictment of the Armenian transgressions of the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. The crimes against Armenian communities are justified on behalf of the existence of the Turkish nation as a geopolitical necessity. The state of exception logic has transformed the Armenian genocide issue into an existential security paradigm. In this logic, geopolitical necessity trumps rule of law and human rights. In effect, the racialization of the Armenian problem as the other of the Turkish national/religious identity has now become an integral part of the official denial policies. For instance, only few months after the official 'apology', during his presidential election campaign, in an attempt to lure the nationalist votes, Erdogan adopted overtly racist rhetoric: 'You wouldn't believe the things they have said about me. They have said I am Georgian. ...they have said even uglier things -- they have called me Armenian, but I am

Turkish.⁶⁹ In 2014, the Armenians in Turkey have become a number target of the pro-government Turkish media.⁷⁰ The hate speech is not only expressed through political statements and media but also disseminated through the educational institutions. Education has been an important vessel for nation building process and citizenship in Turkey.⁷¹ Turkey's discourse on the construction of the Armenian 'problem' has gone through several phases. The educational system through which state's narrative is disseminated has departed from the earlier official silence policies to the repackaging of the denial as part of the educational policy.⁷²

As Cayir, in his study of the national identity on the school text books in Turkey, has recently found, there are serious issues of prejudice and racial stereotyping of the Armenians as others of the Turkish national identity: 'The first is that a very complex historical and political issue is presented from a single perspective and with a simple defensive logic. The second and related problem is that of the negative feelings (that can sometimes turn into violence) towards Turkish citizens of Armenian origin that is created by constant generalization of "Armenians" in the textbooks.' From the first grade level (Grade 7), teachers are requested to pass on to their students 'the state's defensive discourse'. In the teacher's manual for grade 7 teachers of social studies, for instance, teachers are instructed: 'State to your students that the Russians also made some Armenians revolt on this front and murder many of our civilian citizens. Explain that the Ottoman State took certain measures following these developments, and in May 1915 implemented the 'Tehcir Kanunu' [Displacement Law] regarding the migration and settlement of Armenians in the battleground. Explain that care was taken to ensure that the land in which the Armenians who had to migrate were to settle was fertile, that police stations were established for their security and that measures were taken to ensure they could practise their previous jobs and professions.'⁷³ These officially distributed educational material reconstruct the history in line with the denial policies of the government portraying the Armenians as the back stabbers and betrayers who are regarded as a threat to the sovereignty and identity of the modern Turkey.⁷⁴ The racialization of the Armenian 'problem' has now become an integral part of the official denial strategy sponsored by the Turkish government and intellectuals of geopolitical state craft and sustained through the institutions of the Turkish state.

Conclusions

Turkey's 'Armenian problem' stems from its existential geopolitical anxiety regarding the recognition of the Armenian genocide. Since the beginning of the debate the criminal acts committed against the Armenian communities in Anatolia has been sanctioned by the modern Turkish state as a geopolitical necessity, 'raison d'état', which has been the outcome of the nation-state building process in Anatolian lands. The Republican elites made sure that the gap between the territory and the nation is bridged. Even the key motivation behind the atrocities was not originally a racial one, the denial policy has become a part and parcel of the gradual racialization of the general public discourse underwritten by the Turkish state. Due to the external pressures, the Turkish society and state institutions had to depart from the collective amnesia to the gradual construction of a state sponsored denial policy. The centenary of the Armenian genocide in 2015 offered an opportunity to consolidate and reframe the denial policy which has led to the official diplomatic rebranding of Turkey's denial policies. The sufferings of the Armenians are officially registered but not fully recognized. The debate on the Armenia in Turkey is now well beyond the reach of the state that has to face challenges from the civil society in its democratization process.

The context of 'the Armenian problem' has now shifted from the secular nationalist discourse and firmly embedded within the grand strategy of Neo-Ottomanist discourse in the

foreign policy of the Islamist JDP government. The intellectuals of the Turkish diplomatic state craft and institutions have recently employed new discursive strategies to reframe the debate. These included: apology, just memory concept, decentering the remembrance and the gradual racialization of the Armenian problem in the Turkish education and media.

The debate on the Armenian genocide is now one of the key challenges to Turkey's democratization process in the creation of a multicultural society. The opening up of the diplomatic relations with Armenia without any conditionality may be a step forward towards the reconciliation. For these reasons, there is a need to detach the debate from geopolitical discourses and strategies.

¹ U.U. Gungor "'Turkey for the Turks": Demographic Engineering in Eastern Anatolia', 1914-1945 in R.G. Sunny, F.M. Gocek, and N. M. Naimark (Eds) *A Question of Genocide: Armenian and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, Oxford, OUP, 2011 K. Oktem 'Incorporating the time and space of the ethnic 'other': Nationalism and Space in Southeast Turkey in the 19th and 20th Centuries', *Nations and Nationalism* 10 (4) 2004 pp

² See the seminal monograph on the continuity between the late Ottoman and the early Republican period Erik J. Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Ataturk's London*, I.B Tauris 2010; For the constructed nature of the Turkish nation see Ayse. Kadioglu 'The Paradox of Turkish Nationalism and Construction of Official Identity', *Middle Eastern Studies* (32) 4 pp. 177-193

³ Akcam draws our attention to the fact that the atrocities committed against the Anatolian Armenians were not driven by racist ideology of the Ottoman state but mainly geopolitical 'realist' considerations and 'pragmatist' reactions to the hyper-fear of territorial loss, humiliation and defeat what he describes as 'ideology of the lack of ideology' He also suggest that 'trying to seek a racially planned motivations behind the elimination of the Armenian populations' is a futile exercise 'Turk Ulusal Kimligi ve Ermeni, Iletisim Sorunu' (National Identity and the Armenian Question) Ankara, Iletisim Yayinlari, 1994 pp114-18 What I am suggesting in this article that the state sponsored racism as a denial is a modern phenomenon and the outcome of the defensive nation building.

⁴ Until recently denigrating Turkishness was a crime (Article 301 of the Criminal Code). For instance, Turkish novelists Orhan Pamuk and Elif Shafak faced charges for raising awareness of the Armenian Genocide. Following the murder of Hrant Dink, an Armenian dissident journalist in 2008, article 301 was amended by the Turkish Parliament by replacing the word "Turkishness" with the phrase "the Turkish Nation".

⁵ 'Armenian Genocide' started to attract the attention of the International community in 1965 as the 50th anniversary was for the first time commemorated by the Armenian diaspora in Lebanon see interview with Aris Nalci and Serdar Korucu, two journalists who recently published a book on this period 1965: 50 years before 2015, 50 years after 1915 http://www.todayszaman.com/op-ed_our-mistakes-about-1915-started-in-1965-by-alin-ozinian-_350682.html (Accessed 19/06/2015)

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7 G. O. Tuathail and J. Agnew 'Geopolitics and Discourse: Practical geopolitical Reasoning in American foreign policy', *Political Geography* 11(2) 1992, pp. 190-204

8 Each discursive practice produces its own language and its own claims to truth. According to Foucault this 'regime of truth', its 'general politics of truth, that, is the type of discourse it accepts and makes function as true.' M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, (edited and translated by Colin Gordon), Harvester, Sussex, 1980 p.131

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http://www.siyasiilimler.org.tr/docpdf/The_Origins_of_Political_Studies-Ilter_Turan.pdf (Accessed 17/01/2015)

11 Prime Ministry, Directorate General of Press and Information, Documents on Ottoman Armenians (Ankara, 1983)

12 K. Gurun *The Armenian File: The Myth of Innocence Exposed*, London, K.Rustem and Bro. and Weidenfield and Nicholson Ltd, 1985; T.Ataov *Armenian Falcification* Ankara, Sevinc Matbaasi, 1985; Türkaya Ataöv, *Another Falsification: Statement (1926) Wrongly Attributed to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk*, Ankara: Sistem Ofset, 1988;

http://www.politics.ankara.edu.tr/yearbookdizin/dosyalar/MMTY/24/9_turkaya_ataov.pdf]

13 See the seminal work on the manipulation and distortion of history T. Akcam, 'Anatomy of a Crime; The Turkish Historical Society's Manipulation of Archival Documents' *Journal of Genocide Research*, (7) 2, 2005 pp. 255-277

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15 I am not a legal scholar but as political scientist so it is not my aim to discuss the legality of the genocide in this section but to map out the discourses concerning the labelling practices here.

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"If I were an Armenian, I would have continued to say what I have been saying," Likening the Armenian campaign of remembrance to a penalty shootout "Because the 100th year is in a way a penalty shot. We challenge the shot, but they [Armenians] will take it. They see the 100th year as a penalty shot rewarded to them and they will try to convert it into a goal. Our biggest problem here is the belief that the Armenian explanation brings a moral superiority – which in fact is not the case." (Sic) Ambassador Cengizer also published a book 'In the Light of Just Memory'. Turkey needs post-2015 strategy on Armenian genocide claims, says Turkish diplomat, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 10 November 2014 <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-needs-post-2015-strategy-on-armenian-genocide-claims-says-turkish-iplomat.aspx?PageID=238&NID=74089&NewsCatID=510> (accessed 15 December 2014)]

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