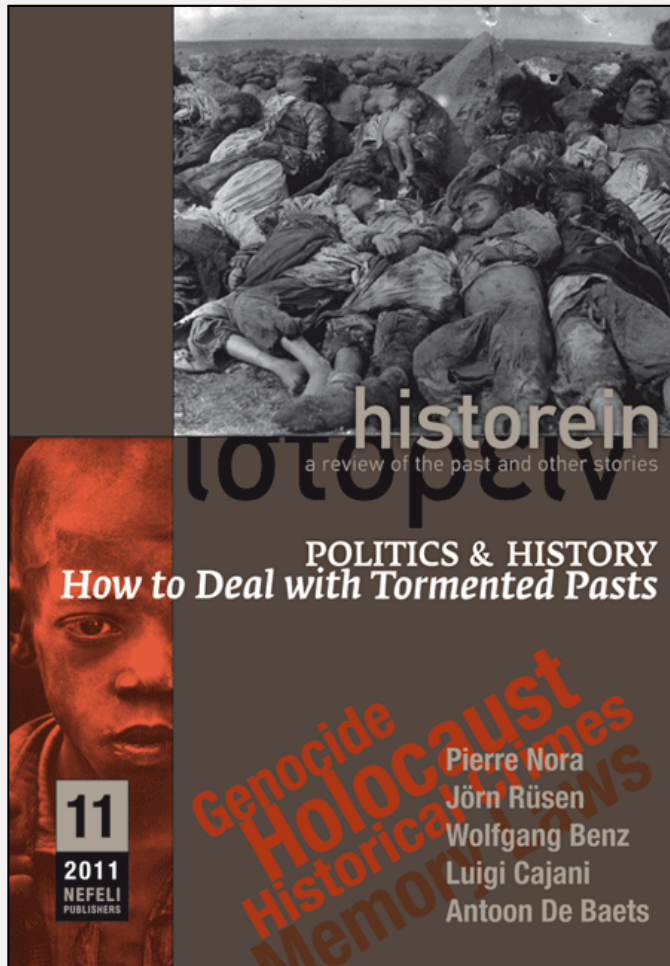


## Historein

Vol. 11, 2011



### From Oblivion to Obsession: The Uses of History in Recent Public Debates in Turkey

Kechriotis Vangelis      Boğaziçi University  
<https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.143>

Copyright © 2012 Vangelis Kechriotis



#### To cite this article:

Kechriotis, V. (2012). From Oblivion to Obsession: The Uses of History in Recent Public Debates in Turkey. *Historein*, 11, 99-124. doi:<https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.143>

### *Debating history*

In early 2011, two scandals related to history tormented Turkish public opinion. The first one was the television series *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* [The magnificent century], which refers to the era of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (1494–1566), and the second the film *Hür Adam: Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* [The free man: Bediüzzaman Said Nursi], which refers to the Muslim Kurdish scholar and political leader (1868–1960) of the early republican period who was at odds with the elite of the newly founded state. For more than a week, the productions dominated television talk shows and some newspaper front pages. The television series, in particular, triggered a huge uproar. Even before the series began, tens of thousands of people emailed the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), which supervises broadcasting, complaining about the trailer. When the first episode was broadcast, an angry mob gathered in front of the private television station airing it. Some among the crowd were even dressed up in Ottoman attire to protest against what they perceived as the mistreatment of their glorious forefathers. Judging from the spokespersons, both at the demonstrations and later on television talk shows, it was clear that the reactions had been orchestrated by Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) and Great Union Party (Büyük Birlik Partisi, BBP) circles, namely the political extreme right which also claims a devout Muslim identity. Thus, the problem was twofold. On the one hand, the series insulted Muslim sentiment by presenting Sultan Süleyman, who, let us not forget, had inherited from his father, Sultan Selim I (1470–1520),

## *From Oblivion to Obsession: The Uses of History in Recent Public Debates in Turkey*

**Vangelis Kechriotis**

**Boğaziçi University**

the title of the caliph, the leader of Islam, a title that Selim himself had taken from the Mamluk dynasty, whose authority he brought to an end when he conquered Egypt in 1517. How was it possible that the leader of Islam spent his time hanging around with a cup in his hand, occasionally filled by his servants, and indulging in the temptations of his concubines? In vain, the producers tried to explain that the cup did not contain alcohol but *şerbet* (a sweet and spicy beverage) and that the harem existed because the sultan made frequent use of it. Surrealistic arguments made it into the press. Did the sultans and caliphs drink or not?<sup>1</sup> Did they have sexual intercourse with women who were not officially their wives or not?<sup>2</sup> How does this correspond to a devout Muslim identity?<sup>3</sup> All this noise boiled down to the puritan, conservative morality dominant among a large part of the population in Turkey today.<sup>4</sup> The channel was even threatened with the banning of the series by the RTÜK, at the encouragement of Bülent Arınç, a vice-premier in the pro-Islamist Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) government, who raised the issue in parliament. The radical Islamist newspaper *Yeni Şafak* played a role in voicing discontent. In the first of a series of articles entitled *Muhteşem Rezalet* [Magnificent ridicule], one of Süleyman's biographers, Okay Tiryakioğlu, explained that "The fact that Turkish TV series have in recent times been sold abroad has had an impact. Profit is the aim. The viewers will deliver the necessary punishment. There is even a gay scene; such nonsense is unacceptable." The audience had a different view, though, as the TV series had the highest rating ever. Another historian, Mustafa Armağan, with respect to the same issue, claimed: "The first person who wrote that *Kanuni* [the lawgiver, a moniker attributed to Süleyman because of the legislation he introduced], used to drink was [the historian] Halil İnalcık. I do not know where he got the information from. *Kanuni* was a sultan who prohibited alcohol."<sup>5</sup> When, in the following episodes, the sultan led the Ottomans to glorious victories, the reactions started to dwindle. However, it was not only the political circles sensitive to religious issues that had a certain opinion on that. Eventually, the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) took a position in favour of the series. Its vice-president, Engin Altay, expressed his support for free expression<sup>6</sup> and denounced what he described pejoratively as *osmanlılık* (obsession with the Ottomans).<sup>7</sup>

CHP members, however, have been busy trying to defend Atatürk's legacy. In the film *Hür Adam*, the heroic role attributed to an Islamist and Kurdish leader who openly denounced the abolition of the caliphate and the exclusively Turkish character of the state, caused frustration among Kemalist circles. Much of the criticism focused on three scenes. When Said Nursi was asked by a local bureaucrat to wear a European hat and remove the Islamic *sarık*, he said that the latter could only be removed together with his head. The second one was the scene where an officer in prison together with Said Nursi was so much affected by the latter's words that he took off his uniform, lay it down and performed the Islamic prayer (*namaz*) on it. The third and most controversial refers to a presumed meeting between Said Nursi and Mustafa Kemal. There, when the latter explained that they should show certain laxity over the use of alcohol and the people's attire, the former got distressed and left the room, slamming the door behind him and leaving the future founder of the republic in contemplation. Many historians claim that such a dramatic exchange never actually took place.<sup>8</sup> On the evening of the opening reception, a group of twenty people protested in front of the theatre. They were supporters of the National Party (Ulusal Parti), a marginal, ultra-Atatürkist party. They denounced what they said was the slandering of Atatürk and they described Said Nursi not as a "free man" but as a "miserable/disgusting man"

(*sefil adam*).<sup>9</sup> Atatürkists also accused the director of producing an artefact of propaganda for the Nurcu movement, the dominant religious order both in Turkey and abroad, is inspired by the *Risale-i Nur* (Path of divine light), Said Nursi's seminal publication, and which is led by the strong hand of the hugely influential Fethullah Gülen. Moreover, it was claimed that only members of the order watched the film.<sup>10</sup> Adding to the tension, even before the launching of the film, the chief state prosecutor in Ankara filed a lawsuit against the entire production team "for insulting the spiritual personality of Atatürk and for inciting the people and society to endorse hatred and commit a crime; for slander, terrorist propaganda and activities aiming at destroying the Turkish Republic".<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, when the culture minister, Ertuğrul Günay, a very moderate politician, was interviewed about it, he argued that "if in this country there is going to be democracy and pluralism based on freedom of speech and thought, we should get used to films, books [and] publications on Bediüzzaman, Kanuni Sultan Süleyman or Atatürk".<sup>12</sup>

All this time, I kept asking my students whether they had seen the television series or the film. Most of them were appalled and wondered how I could have expected them to watch such nonsense. My response was the aim of this paper. For a society like the Turkish one, which, everyone agrees, used to suffer from a purposeful amnesia, it is noteworthy that everything somehow has now become historicised and that so many spend so much energy to claim their arguments in pseudo-historical debates, at a time when so many and important problems still preoccupy the Turkish people. Esra Özyürek, in her introduction to a relevant volume she edited, argues that the systematic efforts "to foster forgetfulness" did not eliminate memories altogether. Past experiences coexist in individual memories.<sup>13</sup> Nowadays, as multiple means provide access to all sorts of information about the past, the latter is challenged and reshaped according not only to current political and social concerns but also those individual memories. To be sure, this is a much broader phenomenon and does not only apply to Turkey. As Frank Ankersmit has demonstrated, there has been, of late, a shift from the grand schemes that provide history with meaning to individual experience and subjectivity. The new subject, however, is not the self-confident subject of modernity but the suffering, suppressed or transgressive subject. What is crucial, however, is that memory does not only reflect individual experience but rather it elaborates and reorganises the latter so that it makes meaningful what has been part of living experience as well. Thus, the past is reshaped and filtered through personal experience. This is what the Dutch historian describes as the "sublime historical experience".<sup>14</sup>

More specifically, however, my purpose here is to argue that all these debates and conflicts resulting from the apparent unleashing of memories, images and concepts which are mediated through new channels of information do not eventually alienate those inspired by them from more pressing social and economic issues. On the contrary, they become metaphors that point directly to current preoccupations. In other words, they are highly political. Such overlapping, of course, is related to the process of transformation that Turkish society has been undergoing over the last decade as a result of domestic demand but also the attraction that European accession still represents for many, even though this has fallen in recent years. What is crucial in this process is that a society that used to live in the present has come to realise that, in order to move faster towards a widely longed-for future, it has to set the record straight as regards the past. As Meltem Ahiska, who has studied the Occidental tenet underlying the process of modernisation in Turkey, argues: "The

'present' cannot simply be reduced to a naturalised and privatised time embedded in everyday life or to a segment in the national-durational time of modern history that connects past and future in the moment. The present has its own politics of time and space that is overdetermined by what is called history, itself a geographical-temporal representation."<sup>15</sup> In this sense, she is critical of Nilüfer Göle, who, in her works, has reflected on the notion of alternative modernity, maintaining that due to the "time lag" stigmatised and internalised as "backwardness", non-westerners are "alienated from their own present which they want to overcome by projecting themselves either to the utopian future or to the golden age of the past".<sup>16</sup> Commenting on the notion of the "time lag", Ahıska observes that, although it looks like "a timeless element of the self-definitions of the non-Western", it should yet not be essentialised and identified with a past heritage. The past itself is related to "the historical dynamics of modernity".<sup>17</sup> Such an assessment invites us to reflect on the equally time-bound quality of the newly emerged narratives of the past, not with respect to their subjective or collective character but in recognition of the fact that they are organised according to a specific conceptual repertoire and a meaning of historical process heavily marked by the postnational or postmodern condition. Building on these arguments, I will briefly discuss two main historical *topoi* of Turkish public debate, namely the exchange of populations and the Armenian genocide. Both events represent two traumatic moments in the process of the transformation of the empire into a nation-state. Both refer to the fate of the non-Muslims of Asia Minor/Anatolia and, in this respect, to the essential other of modern Turkish identity. Finally, both have been consistently silenced in the process of nation-state building. This discussion will demonstrate, I hope, that the engagement with personal experience, which surfaces at a time of a widespread demand for the democratisation of Turkish society, leads inevitably to cracks in the edifice of what has been described as the official narrative. Having said that, some clarification is required here. It might be the case that the narratives that replace the older ones reflect the contested historical past more accurately. However, the recent challenges might also eventually lead to a new official narrative, which will establish its own hegemony in the political and cultural sphere. After all, the cases I discuss do not concern but a rather limited part of the entire population. From this point of view, it can be argued that they have little to offer to democratisation, a process which entails, first and foremost, broad participation in decision-making. What is important, though, is that not only the official narrative but those agents that the latter has so far legitimised, namely certain state-sponsored elites, are placed in doubt. The demand for a new hegemony may eventually fail to integrate the cases I discuss here, as new elites emerge and take advantage of the current fluidity to set their own rules. It is clear to me, however, that large parts of the population welcome such transformations since they could not easily fit the earlier modernist project.

### ***Oblivion as a means of creating a new society***

The Republic of Turkey from the very beginning tried to sever all bonds with the Ottoman past. This was not an easy task. Yet, it was a necessity. Already, by the end of the eighteenth century, the glorious days of the empire were a remote past. If we take as a landmark the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca of 1774, which gave the Russians a free hand in the Black Sea and authorised their intervention on behalf of the Orthodox Christian subjects of the empire, for the next century and a half, the Ottoman Empire struggled against the symptoms of a deep crisis, which was

fiscal, demographic but also social and political in character. When, inspired by European liberal ideas as well as deteriorating domestic conditions, the Balkan nations, in the geography that was considered as the stronghold of the empire, began achieving independence one after the other, the empire reacted by introducing reforms. The tensions triggered by the uneasy coexistence of domestic dynamics, social and economic transformations and external intervention led eventually, through a protracted period of war in 1911–1922 (the Italian–Turkish, Balkan, First World and Greek–Turkish wars), to the demise of the empire and the emergence of a new republic and a new nation. The end of empires and the triumph of nation-states in the post-First World War period gave birth to a new paradigm both in institutional as well as cultural terms. The very notion of empire was discredited and was considered synonymous with authoritarian rule, the lack of democratic institutions, the ethnic engineering of populations, and cultural and social decline. This prevented for decades politicians and theorists alike from addressing the Ottoman Empire within the global framework of colonial experience and the subsequent independence movements, the Turkish one notwithstanding, as part of the anticolonial struggle. As Ahiska has pointed out: “In parallel to the manoeuvre of the Kemalist discourse that rendered the dynamics of the colonisation of the coloniser Ottoman invisible, social theory has also not fully addressed the complexities involved. Consequently, the Turkish ‘replica’ of modernity is either taken too literally or remains invisible in theories of modernisation, Orientalism and postcolonial criticism.”<sup>18</sup> It is only recently, for reasons also related to the crisis of the paradigm of nation-state domination, that interaction and continuities between the Ottoman Empire and nation-states both in the Balkans and the Middle East have attracted more attention.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, eventually, Ottomanists broke this condition of peculiarity for the Ottoman Empire and introduced to its study the literature on Orientalism and postcolonial criticism.<sup>20</sup>

The elite of the new state thus, on the one hand, with the enthusiasm fuelled by the final victory in a war of independence against all odds and, on the other, as a result of the tremendous suffering and loss that the collapse of the empire had entailed for everyone, set out to create not only a new state but also a new society and identity. Both the sultanate and the caliphate were abolished. The connection between the two in the public sphere but also in the popular sentiment was so intimate that in the “hegemonic imagination” the monarchy was identified not only with absolutism and authoritarianism but also with the dominance of religion. On the contrary, the republic was automatically equated with democracy and the rule of law. It has been very difficult for secular Turks, even today, to accept that there are several countries in Europe where the regime is monarchical and not republican and where democracy and human rights are much more developed than in Turkey. One of the main concerns of the republican elite was to eliminate religion from the public sphere. Religious schools (*medrese*) and shrines (*türbe*) were closed down and all pious foundations came under the jurisdiction of the Directorate General of Pious Foundations (*Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü*). Even the use of Arabic in prayer was banned. The language also had to be Turkified and cleansed of Arabic and Persian elements, more typical being the replacement of the Arabic with the Latin alphabet. Legislation had to be tuned with European law. The same applied to attire, with the compulsory introduction of the European hat and the ban on the fez, which had, in its turn, been introduced by Sultan Mahmut II, the mastermind of the nineteenth-century reforms.<sup>21</sup> Together with all this, the institutionalisation of language and history through the foundation of relevant institutions liberated the republican elite



from the recent past, it was presumed, and allowed it to experiment with theories on the historical provenience of the Turkish nation in antiquity and in Asia, in a different time and space.<sup>22</sup> All this, of course, apart from stressing the rupture and delegitimising the Ottoman past, relied on the vast demographic transformation that had led to the extermination through deportation or genocide of the non-Muslim population in Anatolia, which was destined to become the territory of the new Turkish state.

As Keyder has pointed out, both the population exchange and the Armenian deportations played a key role in the formation of the nation-state ideal, which can only be understood in its interrelation with the aforementioned developments. In other words, “the Turkish nation was itself formed through this process of ethnic unmixing”.<sup>23</sup> Keyder also demonstrates the major difference in state-citizen relations before and after the foundation of the republic. During the late Ottoman period and as a result of the economic and social reforms of the second half of the nineteenth century, the state had partly endorsed “the idea of self-limitation”, which allowed for a civil society to emerge based on the rule of law.<sup>24</sup> Especially, the respect for property rights is considered an achievement in the establishment of an efficient liberal regime. The 1858 legislation, in particular, by way of defining individual property rights on land, opened up the Ottoman Empire to the world land market. However, as nationalist strife proliferated during the 1910s and the Greeks and the Armenians were forced to leave, it was “locally powerful or politically connected individuals” that took over landed property. Actually, all abandoned property was considered “nationalised” and thus belonged to the state. However, many properties that were not seized by the state were granted by local political patrons to their clients.<sup>25</sup> This system of distribution of practically abundant lands reversed the liberal economic policies of the late Ottoman period and this resulted in a suppression of a capitalist mentality. As Keyder concludes: “The republican state became a reincarnation of the classical patrimonial Ottoman state, dispensing land and benefits to its trusted clients, thereby able to perpetuate its patron status above the law . . . This distribution served both to expedite the creation of a native bourgeoisie and also to make it beholden to the state.”<sup>26</sup> These newly created elites were more dependent on the republican state, which is described as “much less accountable and therefore more autocratic and arbitrary” than the Ottoman one. The debates on the exchange of populations and the Armenian deportations will be addressed within this conceptual frame.

### *The exchange of populations*

The experience of forced migration which determined the fate of populations in the Balkans and Asia Minor as an outcome of the long First World War in the region resulted not only in a reorganisation of the ethnic and religious profile of large areas but also in the development of new economic and social conditions. These conditions necessitated the permanent resettlement and integration of the newly arrived Muslim populations. This integration would be achieved through state policies which functioned on two levels: on the one hand, the resettlement of areas which were abandoned by departing populations as well as the distribution of land holdings and appropriate equipment aimed at the social and economic support of the refugees. On the other, state education and army conscription would accelerate their cultural assimilation. This demographic and social engi-

neering<sup>27</sup> led to the formation of a particular sense of belonging. These populations, having undergone a violent process of “separation”, found themselves in a state of “liminality”, since they had definitely departed from their society of origin but were never fully incorporated into the receiving society.<sup>28</sup> In fact, during this period the term “refugee” was used in order to differentiate all these populations that were displaced as the result of the breakup of the empire at the end of the First World War from “immigrants”, a term marking a much older practice of population movement. The difference in the twentieth century was that there was considerably less territory available to accommodate these populations than in the past and that these forced migrations attracted the attention of political leaders. Therefore, state policies were based on the attempt to provide new roots for the uprooted “since the demarcation of new nations and territorially bounded states demanded the allocation of particular people to particular spaces”.<sup>29</sup> These refugees represented for the host countries not only a burden that they had to deal with but also a potential domestic political threat and, until they were incorporated, a challenge to the social order. In the case of Turkey, the exchange aimed at the cultural homogenisation of society.<sup>30</sup> Actually, it has been argued that the notorious *Vatandaş Türkçe konuş* (Citizen, speak Turkish) policy of the interwar period, which banned any language other than Turkish from public spaces, was only partly addressed to non-Muslims: Greeks, Armenians and Jews. Its main target were the Muslim but ethnically diverse populations – Albanian, Bosnian, Pomak, Cretan, Circassian, Laz, Aphaz, Arab, etc. – who were obvious candidates for integration.<sup>31</sup> Yet, the individual experience of national identity, as Barbaros Tanc has demonstrated with respect to the refugees of the population exchange, may differ from the official version which forms the basis for state building.<sup>32</sup>

Recently, Turkish society has witnessed an increasing interest in the ethnic origins of the populations that originate in the Balkans and the Caucasus. Since I arrived in Istanbul eleven years ago, what has struck me has been the attraction that anything related to Greek culture (music, language, food, etc.) especially has had on a particular, educated and socially well-off part of the population. Initially, I was sceptical of this trend, as I thought that it was related to the recent Greek–Turkish rapprochement.<sup>33</sup> Soon, however, as I became more familiar with the language and the people and I consulted with colleagues who specialised on similar issues, I found out that this interest was not only pertinent to Greek culture but it concerned anything related to the Balkans. In this respect, the recent political developments in the Balkans and the whole of eastern Europe have played a key role. During the war in Yugoslavia, in particular, many Turks, whose families had originally fled these very lands devastated now by warfare, saw images from forgotten, imagined or even mystified homelands that television brought into their homes on a daily basis. Moreover, a new wave of refugees, those who had already started to flee from Bulgaria since 1986 due to the policies of Bulgarisation implemented by the last communist government, or the Bosnians and the Kosovars who fled from the war in their territories, brought Turkish public opinion into contact with an experience and a process which lay at the origin of the foundation of the Turkish Republic and which the state-building process had wiped out. In popular memory, however, these origins had never totally faded away.

In Turkish historiography, the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey had been largely ignored. As Fikret Adanır has demonstrated in a relevant review article, the very few works that appeared in the period from the 1950s to the 1980s concerned mainly issues of geo-



politics and demography.<sup>34</sup> It was only during the last two decades that relevant works have been published, this time dealing with the contentious issues of the reception and integration of the refugees or the importance of their origins for self-identification. Kemal Arı has narrated the efforts of the administration to deal with the exchange of populations in a text which might be considered a rather canonical one, in the sense that it has set the framework of the debate but also because it reiterates certain tenets of the official ideology.<sup>35</sup> The responses from other scholars were various. Mehmet Ali Gökaçtı<sup>36</sup> focused on the political rivalries of the exchange and drew attention to the issue of converted Muslims, which has not been discussed much in the literature. Ayhan Aktar, on the other hand, has argued that the exchange of populations was efficiently manipulated by the republican administration in the course of the efforts to create a national bourgeoisie through the removal of non-Muslims.<sup>37</sup> Finally, historiographical accounts have been accompanied by memoirs or travelogues which cover the period between the Balkan Wars and the forced migration in 1923.<sup>38</sup>

The most recent literature regarding the issue assesses the fact that the experience of the Muslims who were forced to migrate from Greece to Turkey resembles the one on the other side of the Aegean. Despite the long-standing belief that, due to the considerable smaller scale of migration and the abundance of land and property left behind by the departing Greek-Orthodox populations, Muslims were provided with adequate means of survival, especially in western Anatolia, new studies have shown that actually the problems they had to deal with were similar. Moreover, their cultural and social assimilation was not accomplished until much later.<sup>39</sup> Equally important is the fact that in recent years a younger generation has taken over studying the way this policy was implemented in diverse localities.<sup>40</sup> As Tutku Vardağlı has pointed out, more recent studies, as is the case with similar works on refugees on the other side of the Aegean, have followed the new trends in historiography and especially the cultural turn and the broader acceptance of oral history methods.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, a series of oral history projects was launched focusing on the last survivors of that dramatic period.<sup>42</sup>

However, the experience of these divided populations was at least in one point different from that of the Greek Orthodox. They lived through the first years of the republic in a period when a new national identity was emerging. Thus, while suppressing their particular cultural legacy, they had to participate on equal terms in the development of what was going to become their new identity. This offered them the chance to claim their own space in a nation which had yet to be created. An interesting field where one can trace this interweaving of state ideology and self-identification is literature. With respect to literature, Herkül Millas has argued that in the course of an effort to create a national identity based on the Turkishness of Anatolia, all irredentist discourse and references to lost motherlands were prohibited. Therefore, the issue was highly politicised and therefore "it was very difficult for authors to make literary references to the exchange without connecting it to some kind of political criticism directed either at the idea of forced exchange itself or at the practical consequences of its implementation".<sup>43</sup> This attitude has followed two paths. The most mainstream one in support of this policy is that the exchange was beneficial for the Turks since the state achieved national homogeneity. The other, opposing, view considers the Greek Orthodox as faithful Turks who belonged in Anatolia. These paths have been described by Millas as the ethnic and the civic one, accordingly. Moreover, for the Turkish authors, the moth-

erland used to be the land over which the Ottoman or the Turkish states had established sovereignty. Even when certain authors such as Yaşar Kemal are critical of the deportation process, they criticise the state and not individuals.<sup>44</sup>

Parallel to the developments in the literature portrayed above, which demonstrate the plurality in the approaches, recently there has been a popular assessment of this transformation which underscores the competence of postnational collectivities to claim their own place in public culture. The normalisation of political life after the mid-1990s played a crucial role in the search for a new identity. As already described above, the influx of Muslim-Turkish populations from Bulgaria and Albanian populations from Kosovo brought to Turkish society a new awareness about the contemporary problems of Muslim Turks in the Balkans and led to a regeneration of the interest in the experience of previous migrations. Both the newcomers but also the descendants of those who arrived from the Balkans became active, founding associations and seeking to reiterate a particular sense of identity, through rediscovering long-abandoned customs, languages and places. Without abandoning their share in Turkishness, their specific origin became a denominator of a different quality which allowed them to claim a heritage far richer and more encompassing than the one their forefathers had to assimilate to.

Dwelling on the Greco-Turkish population exchange, Aslı İğsız has described the emergence of nostalgia at two different levels: the first refers to a prenation-state “multiculturalism” or diversity which has become common in public representations of a community identity. This is the kind of nostalgia that has been dominant among the Greek Orthodox community of Istanbul since the early 2000s, “which became emblematic of a selective nostalgia for Istanbul’s ‘past cosmopolitanism’”.<sup>45</sup> In that context, personal histories have created an alternative and “brought a plurality or polyphony to the more straightforward nationalist official historiography that contains homogenising tendencies of the past and present peoples in Turkey”.<sup>46</sup> Second, İğsız argues, while, as has been already mentioned, official identity politics and nationalist historiography aimed to erase diversity and produce a “homogeneous” nation of the Muslim *millet* that would figure as “Turks” over a nationalised territory, from the 1990s onwards, there has been a trend to personalise this geography by using familial attributes and memories for self-identification which lead to maps of “origin”.<sup>47</sup>

However, this narrative of conviviality and of a paradise lost occasionally coalesces with an equally powerful nationalistic discourse, especially among migrant populations from more recent periods of republican history, who have cut their bonds with their homelands in the Balkans. Esra Bulut has studied the way “religion” affected official Turkish responses to the ethnic tensions and conflict that have occurred in southeastern Europe since the end of the Cold War, focusing on the conflicts in Bosnia Herzegovina and Kosovo, and to a lesser extent on the case of relations with the Republic of Macedonia. She has studied the intertwining of religion and Turkish national identity and the central place that the issue of religion occupies in politics over Turkey’s past, present and future.<sup>48</sup> Despite the instrumentalisation of religion, however, as Sylvia Gangloff has argued, it seems that the only real policy of solidarity towards these communities has been accepting, almost without any restrictions, refugees from the Balkans who could find shelter in Turkey.<sup>49</sup> Yet, these discursive strategies have played an important role in the reappropriation in Turkey of the Ottoman past. The Islamist dailies, in particular, have frequently highlighted the cultural affinities between Turkey and

the Balkans, as well as the tolerance and peace that reigned under Ottoman rule. Thus, this discourse insists on “the duty of the Turks, as heirs of the Ottomans, to save oppressed Muslims”.<sup>50</sup> The overall issue of recent migration of Muslim populations from the Balkans to Turkey goes far beyond the horizons of this paper. Suffice to say, it has been tackled by anthropologists and sociologists alike, occasionally with an emphasis on the policies of discrimination implemented by the Turkish authorities with respect to different migrant groups from the Balkans and the Middle East.<sup>51</sup>

Yet, interestingly, this has developed alongside a discourse on reconciliation and understanding promoted particularly by those descendants of the Muslims who arrived in western Anatolia during the exchange of populations. An example will better illustrate this claim. A decade ago, in 2001, largely as a result of the earthquake diplomacy between Greece and Turkey, second-generation descendants of that period founded in Istanbul the Foundation of Lausanne Treaty Emigrants (Lozan Mübadilleri Vakfı, LMV), which, according to its own proclamation, aimed to pave the way for a debate on issues concerning the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey.<sup>52</sup> The founding members of the association, most of them with a background of leftist activism, have persistently employed an antinationalist discourse. Following the electronic forum that the LMV established several years ago, which now must count more than a thousand members, has been an interesting experience. Forum members seek information about the places in Greece from where their grandparents originated. It is obvious that, in most cases, it is the first time they have been able to address such a forum and their excitement is genuine. They do not even know the present Greek name of their hometown or village and this is what they begin with.<sup>53</sup> One can assume that it is the existence of such a forum that gives these people the incentive to publicly investigate their origins somewhere else and share this feeling of belonging with former compatriots. Interestingly, even if this forum has brought to life the notion of a “lost homeland” among the descendants of the refugees, the way this notion is constructed is significantly different from nationalist imaginations in Turkey and elsewhere. First of all, the emphasis is not on the suffering of their ancestors due to their uprooting and the hard conditions they came across when they arrived in Turkey. It is mainly based on shared cultural elements, such as language, food, ceremonies, etc. Secondly, the foundation has been very active in organising trips to the places in Greece where the refugees derive from, mainly Macedonia, Epirus and Crete. Typically, participants later describe their impressions in relevant postings. They are full of emotion and surprise for the new places and the people they came across on the trip, but they do not, despite their dismay at the destruction of Ottoman buildings and monuments, employ a resentful discourse or express hard feelings against the way the locals treated them. Moreover, this forum has been used by historians and anthropologists, among others, who have profited from the interaction with the descendants of the exchangees but also responded to questions and publicised their research which is relevant to the purposes of the association. The LMV itself organises similar activities, more prominent being the two conferences entitled “Our Common Heritage”, which took place in Mustafa Paşa (in Greek Sinasos) and Rethymno (in Turkish Resmo) in September and October 2004, respectively, and was even awarded an international prize.<sup>54</sup>

This does not mean, of course, that there is nobody among the forum’s members who thinks differently. The following event will illustrate the tensions which can be triggered and demonstrates the ambiguous impact that territorial displacement can have on the formation of social and ethnic identities in a postnational context. On 30 January 2005, on the 82nd anniversary of the

signing of the protocol for the exchange of populations, the journalist Deniz Madanoğlu published an article in the leftist newspaper *Birgün* which referred to scholarly works on the subject, and particularly one by Ayhan Aktar, who used the terms “Greek Muslims” and “Turkish Christians”, pointing to the fact that the exchange was based on religion and not on ethnicity.<sup>55</sup> The terms Greek and Turkish in this respect referred only to nationality. This article triggered a vivid debate among the members of the group. Some of them, who had already accused the leadership of the association of being pro-Greek, for supporting the local Istanbul Greek-Orthodox population and ignoring the sufferings of Muslim Turks in Greece and Bulgaria, were very adamant in their claim that their ancestors were Turkish “through and through” (*öz be öz*) and nobody had the right to call them Greek. The debate took a nasty turn and the moderators of the group decided to block those who used aggressive nationalistic language.

Two years later, another interesting controversy broke out. In the spring of 2007, on the eve of the election for the presidency of the republic, which so much divided Turkish society, the US-based sociologist and diasporic Muslim culture specialist Mücahit Bilici made an interesting claim, in an article in the pro-Islamist newspaper *Yeni Şafak*.<sup>56</sup> In his view, in Turkey there were two countries, or two societies. On the one hand, those who were indigenous, from Anatolia and were ethnically Turks, and, on the other, those who came from the Balkans and the Caucasus and, though they were ethnically different, were eventually Turkified. In an attempt to compensate for their ambiguous origins, the latter imposed, under the guise of secular Turkism, an authoritarian regime over those whose Turkishness was more genuine but was also attached to Islam. One can see this division between the two parts even geographically, said Bilici, with the former dominating only in the west and partly the south of the country, where their immigrant forefathers had settled. Of course, the clear implication here is that the AKP and its presidential candidate, Abdullah Gül, represented the indigenous population whereas the opposition CHP party the “foreigners”. This, as schematic as it may seem – for instance, there are immigrant communities in other areas of Anatolia as well – is an attempt to reverse the quite dominant discourse of recent decades in Turkey of a division between “white Turks”, namely the westernised urbanised ones, and the “dark Turks”, the Anatolian mob. This discussion exceeds the limits of this paper, but one should not fail to mention that many of the ideological shifts that have taken place recently in Turkey can be attributed to the rising bourgeois awareness of these “dark Anatolians” and their claim to a hegemonic role. Similar racist references occasionally appear with reference to particular ethnic groups, as it has recently been the case with the Circassians. Such an article, however, was considered by many LMV members as an attack against those who originated from Rumeli (the Ottoman Balkans). One of the leading figures claimed that, in reality, the target was Mustafa Kemal (who was himself from the Balkans) as well as modern democratic values and the secular and multicultural way of life. Their forefathers who had come with the exchange were intimidated with monikers such as infidels (*gâvur*) or half-infidels (*yarım gâvur*). More recently, they themselves seem to have been exposed to racism and religious fanaticism, being described as Salonican converts (*Selanik Dönmesi*) or Sabbateans (*Sabetayist*).

We have seen the result of racism and religious fanaticism with the assassination of an Italian priest in Trabzon, the murder of Hrant Dink in Istanbul and of three missionaries in Malatya in 2007.<sup>57</sup> This parallel unfolding of a pluralistic perception of the past- and criminal-ethnic nation-

alism constitute equally important aspects of the painful implementation within Turkish society of policies based on universal civic and human rights. Issues of identity are treated by the authorities with much more sensitivity than in the past. I believe, however, that we should not lose sight of the fact that despite the attempt of scholars to study the phenomenon within a post-national context, certain identities as they become accepted and integrated into the mainstream might become convenient elements for the elaboration of a new hegemonic discourse that will eventually appear to be as hierarchical as the previous one, always relying on power relations, albeit dominated by new divisions. For instance, nowadays one can easily imagine a government official taking part in the commemoration of the hardships that the exchangees suffered as a result of state policies. The same would be out of the question for a ceremony commemorating the hardships of the Armenians. There is, of course, the crucial element of difference that can still be accommodated among us, as in the case of the exchangees, as opposed to the one which cannot, as in the case of the Armenians.

### ***The Armenian question***

References to the murder of the Turkish Armenian journalist Hrant Dink in 2007, which, apart from the shock it triggered internationally, was a dark chapter of the controversy that has tormented public opinion more than anything else in the last past decade, are quite common. The Armenian question for decades had been forgotten. Then it reappeared in the 1980s as a byproduct of the civil war in Lebanon. The militant Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) based there propelled the issue back onto the international agenda through carrying out a series of assassinations of Turkish diplomats. As it could be expected, this infuriated Turkish public opinion and the already dormant prejudice against non-Muslims and especially Armenians resurfaced as open hostility. It was within this atmosphere that the debate on the Armenian genocide was generated. Turkish public opinion was caught by surprise. It was totally preposterous for Armenians to have the nerve to claim to be victims of Turkish atrocities when actually it was Turks who were assassinated by them and for no obvious reason, it was thought. Decades of thick silence about anything regarding the treatment of non-Muslims during the dramatic decade before the foundation of the republic did not allow for a dispassionate debate.

In the last decade, there has been a lot of passion and resentment involved in this debate on both sides, but the issue has also expanded far beyond the level of political controversy. It is true that politics is always at the centre. For instance, every year, as April 24, internationally recognised as Armenian “Genocide Remembrance Day”, approaches, Turkish authorities as well as public opinion are on the alert to prevent the US president from using the term “genocide”. The same is true for Armenians, especially of the American diaspora, who try to push the US government into recognising the genocide. For the latter, these efforts are much older. Already in the 1960s, Armenian communities, disenchanted by the attitude of the Turkish state, were trying to push local parliaments into making resolutions. However, the first dramatic instance that shook Turkish public opinion was in 2000 when Bill Clinton intervened to convince the House of Representatives to postpone the vote on a similar resolution on the grounds that at such a precarious moment – it was the beginning of the second Intifada – it would not be expedient to alienate Turkey,

a strategic ally in the region. Ever since, with mounting tension, a similar scenario is repeated every year. Not only regular newspaper columnists, but also diplomats,<sup>58</sup> academics,<sup>59</sup> and even businessmen have been mobilised in the international arena to support denialist views.<sup>60</sup> Most interesting was the reactions triggered by the use in 2009 by President Barack Obama of the term *Yerz Megern*, which the Armenians themselves use to describe the genocide. It was a very controversial decision as it was apparently thought of as a face-saving measure. Before he was elected, Obama had explicitly declared that he endorsed the view that the 1915 events were a genocide. He had also stated in the Turkish parliament, during his first visit to a Muslim country, that he had not changed his views. Therefore, this was a way to avoid disappointing either side. The result was, of course, that neither was really satisfied.

What is more important for our purpose here is that in recent years, another perspective has emerged, supported by academics, intellectuals and journalists, leftists and liberal democrats.<sup>61</sup> Let me briefly describe the arguments of both sides. Fatma Müge Göçek, who has studied Turkish historiography regarding the Armenian question, distinguishes three periods: the Ottoman investigative narrative (1910s), the republican defensive narrative (1953 onwards) and the post-nationalist critical narrative (1990s onwards).<sup>62</sup> According to the defensive thesis, which has been dominant until recently, despite certain internal divisions, clashes had already broken out by the late nineteenth century when armed bands, under the guidance of the Armenian Hunchak and Dashnaksutiun organisations, terrorised not only the Ottoman authorities but also the native Muslim populations. The argument, therefore, is that Armenian separatists were first to begin exterminating Muslims and then simply faced the consequences of their actions. During the First World War, a large segment of Armenians living in the provinces bordering the Russian Empire collaborated with the advancing Russian troops against the Armenians' own homeland. For this reason, and as a preventive measure of military security, it was decided that the entire Armenian population of a large area would be "relocated" and resettled in safer territories. In the process, it is claimed, miscalculations may have been made; certain cadres of the security forces or the army may have proved overzealous; and, along the way, the deportees may have fallen victim to attacks by Kurds enraged by the criminal activities of Armenian separatists. Be that as it may, the central government had – as much as possible, especially considering wartime conditions – taken measures for the safe transport and resettlement of the population. In any event, the archives are open and whoever wishes can study the relevant documents. Everything else is wild speculation. Today, those who oppose Turkey's accession to the European Union are proceeding to exploit a series of obstacles that will finally force Turkey's political leadership into exhausting its compliance and abandon its effort. The "Armenian genocide" stands as a major issue, which, among other things, swells a sense on the part of Turks of being unfairly treated because they are not Christians.

As for the opposition to these views, and despite internal divisions, there is an agreement that the separatist activity of the Armenians never took on the mass character attributed to it, while their aim was not independence but rather the implementation of reforms and certain rights of self-government. The decision for expulsion described by the Turkish word *tehcir* (relocation) did not refer only to strategically sensitive areas. Armenian populations were also expelled from the regions of İzmit and Edirne (in present northwestern Turkey), which were very far from any



war zone. Armenians were expelled to the Syrian deserts where survival was impossible and, therefore, expulsion equalled death. Moreover, as early as the Balkan Wars, the Young Turks had put together a secret group, the Special Organisation (Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa), a precursor of today's National Intelligence Organisation (Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı, MİT), which was in charge of "security" and undertook all sorts of "special operations". These measures were deemed necessary as reprisals for the violent uprooting of hundreds of thousands of Muslims during the Balkan Wars. But the First World War gave the Young Turks the opportunity they sought to do away with the Armenians, as they eventually did with Greeks and Assyrians as well. It is well known that there are cases of military commanders who refused to collaborate in these activities because they felt that these actions would tarnish the honour of the Ottoman army.

The crimes against the Armenians were acknowledged in the trials against the Young Turks following the empire's defeat and collapse. Furthermore, when the leadership set out to win the support of the local elders of Anatolia's *vilayets* during Turkey's war of independence, one of the first things they had to pledge was that seized Armenian fortunes would henceforth belong by right to those who had seized them. An interesting aspect has to do with the accountability of modern Turkey. Although the latter has utterly appropriated the Ottoman past, the fact is that all these events occurred within the context of an empire that was breathing its last and against which the Turks themselves finally won their independence. Therefore, political leaders and the academic world should express their regrets over these tragic events, but that should be the end of it. More important would be denouncing the mentality that led to these crimes, contributed to the repression of minorities and even today prevents the full democratisation of Turkish society. As regards the term "genocide", there is no unanimity. Many refuse to use it while others claim that it does not really matter as long as everyone agrees on the magnitude of the disaster. There is, however, a very strong legal aspect to the issue. Recognition of the events of 1915 as a "genocide" would pave the way to reparation claims. This is the purpose of certain parts of the Armenian diaspora. The more radical ones go as far as claiming back land, as they have never recognised Turkish sovereignty over the eastern provinces, which they still describe as Western Armenia.<sup>63</sup>

A first landmark in the process of enhancing a new awareness in Turkish society on this issue was the conference that took place in late September 2005 entitled "Ottoman Armenians during the Decline of the Empire: Issues of Scientific Responsibility and Democracy". The event had been postponed from the previous May, when nationalist associations as well as government officials had chastised and overtly threatened the organisers, who were going to hold it at Boğaziçi University. Now again, two days before the conference, Istanbul's fourth administrative court ruled in favour of an appeal submitted by the Great Jurists' Association,<sup>64</sup> which summoned the organisers to account both for their sources of funding and the participants' academic credentials. The conference eventually took place, this time with the support of the government which was afraid of the damage that such ridicule would entail for Turkey's European profile.

For the two days that the conference lasted, it was the lead story on most television news bulletins, which featured extensive reporting and interviews on it. In this broad coverage, the interest centred not so much on what was being discussed as on what was taking place outside the meeting venue: protest marches, fiery speeches, slogans, eggs, tomatoes, threats from the extreme right

or from organisations such as the Great Jurists' Association that were clearly linked to them. But these groups could no longer mobilise large crowds. As for the content of the conference, it suffices to say that for three days, the entire community of dissident academics, journalists and intellectuals engaged themselves in a dialogue of historic dimensions. I will only refer to the admittedly most influential intervention, that of the journalist and publisher Hrant Dink.

As the publisher for ten years of the bilingual Turkish-Armenian newspaper *Agos*, he had inspired many Turks and Armenians with his writing, but had also annoyed the Turkish political establishment. Indeed, he had been a short time before subjected to a kangaroo court trial for an article that allegedly "insulted" the Turkish people and their "national identity", and given a six-month suspended sentence, just a few weeks before the conference. At the conference, he argued that, regardless of the term used to describe the tragedy of 1915–1916, nothing changed in the end, because those who had experienced it and transmitted their memory to the coming generations were not going to alter their feelings because of a particular word. But the climax in Dink's address came when he recounted the story of an aged Armenian woman who had visited her birthplace somewhere in Anatolia and breathed her last there. Local people asked that she would be buried as one of their own, in a Muslim cemetery. Dink concluded: "They're afraid that if the genocide is recognised, we shall have our eye on compensation and the return of land. Well, yes, we do have our eye on that land, but not to have it returned; rather, to be buried deep within it."<sup>65</sup>

Hrant Dink was assassinated on 19 January 2007, in front of the building housing his newspaper's offices, by a teenager carefully chosen by his instigators for his age so that he would face a lower punishment.<sup>66</sup> For Turks, Armenians and others in Turkey and abroad, Dink's assassination marked a turning point in their lives. Many saw in it the absolute failure of Turkish society to transform itself into a really democratic, plural one. Many, on the contrary, saw in the crowd of hundreds of thousands that followed his funeral the renewed hope and the possibility of change even at a grassroots level of public culture. The black banners these people carried at the funeral were inscribed with messages such as "We are all Armenians", "We are all Hrant Dink", "For Hrant, for justice", etc., in Turkish, Armenian but also in Kurdish, Greek and English.<sup>67</sup> Since his killing, several events have been organised to honour his memory and several publications have appeared related to his powerful personality.

The most recent controversy with regard to the Armenian question has been the apology campaign. In December 2008, a group of intellectuals, including Ahmet İnsel, Ali Bayramoğlu, Baskın Oran and Cengiz Aktar, initiated a campaign with the following text: "My conscience does not accept the insensitivity shown to and the denial of the Great Catastrophe that the Ottoman Armenians were subjected to in 1915. I reject this injustice and for my share, I empathise with the feelings and pain of my Armenian brothers and sisters. I apologise to them." The text was published in several languages and within few months it was signed by more than 30,000 people, all over Turkey.<sup>68</sup>

This initiative is related to an international conjuncture. In February 2008, the Australian prime minister, Kevin Rudd, apologised to the Aborigines for the stolen generations, followed by his Canadian counterpart, Stephen Harper, in June of the same year, for the Indian residential school

system. Another example is the US government's apology and financial reparations for the internment of Japanese Americans during the Second World War. This is the example taken up by Marc Mamigonian, who criticised the apology campaign.<sup>69</sup> The author puts forth two arguments. He first points out that the declaration is not an official or state-sanctioned apology. This is true and, therefore, it cannot be compared to the above-mentioned apologies. Yet, it is interesting that among the authorities, the campaign triggered different reactions. On the one hand, the Turkish prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, denounced the campaign outright, claiming that his ancestors had done nothing that he should be ashamed of. Then, the newly elected state president, Abdullah Gül, commented that that was a step towards reconciliation. In a very interesting turn of events, though, Canan Aritman, opposition CHP MP for Izmir and a well-known Kemalist, who would prove herself a racist as well, accused the president for taking such a favourable position because he himself was partly Armenian.<sup>70</sup> In his turn, Gül, instead of using the opportunity to chastise the MP for racism and give a message of civic patriotism which would not make any distinction between ethnicities, sought to prove that there was no Armenian blood in his family and he even filed a complaint against Aritman, demanding compensation of one lira for moral damage.<sup>71</sup> In general, very few politicians welcomed the campaign. Only the members of the Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) supported it<sup>72</sup> as well as the independent leftist MP Ufuk Uras. The support on the part of the Kurds becomes all the more important, as one of the alternatives of denialism has been to put the blame on the Kurdish tribes for the extermination of the Armenians, whitewashing thus the involvement of the state administration and the army. On the other hand, though, there is a strong sentiment among many Kurds that they helped the state in this dirty business only to find themselves, eventually, having the same fate.<sup>73</sup> At any rate, the involvement of the political elites was very telling of certain, more general attitudes.

The other issue that Mamigonian points out in his article regards the terminology employed.<sup>74</sup> On the one hand, there is no indication of the perpetrator, someone to be held responsible for these events. There is also no call for action, such as urging, for instance, the Turkish state to recognise the genocide. Instead, the entire discussion remains at the level of conscience. Even more important than that is the use of the term "genocide". Turkish intellectuals use the term *Medz Yeghern* (literally "great catastrophe") in order, according to the author and the vast majority of Armenian diaspora, to avoid the G-word. To dismiss the criticism, one of the initiators of the campaign, Cengiz Aktar, argued that the decision to exterminate the Armenians had a devastating impact not only on the Armenians, for whom the term "genocide" would be appropriate, but on the region as a whole, including most certainly its Muslim populations: "In this sense, the Armenian genocide is a common tragedy of Anatolia, and even today what is uttered in the villages of Anatolia as part of the old stories is the tally of an unprecedented catastrophe."<sup>75</sup>

There are more practical and material aspects to this debate as well. One is the issue of property, more precisely what is described as *Emval-i Metruke* (abandoned property). This is a term used to describe all the property that was left behind when Armenians, but also others such as Greeks and Assyrians, were deported or massacred. Therefore, it is a euphemism to conceal the fact that this property was not deliberately abandoned. Actually, one way or another, this property was taken over by Muslims, mostly local notables but in some cases by the common people, who thus built a new future for themselves.<sup>76</sup>

The other issue regards the survivors of the genocide. Recently, a human and tragic aspect of the genocide has dominated part of the public debate. In the midst of despair in the long, lethal marches, many women left their children, infants or toddlers to the care of local Muslims. Many of these children were taken into orphanages by missionaries and relief workers and some managed later to reunite with their families.<sup>77</sup> Many others, though, and girls in particular, were adopted by Muslims families, converted to Islam and lived among Turks or Kurds for the rest of their lives. Many of them were still alive until recently, alive but silent. In some cases, their families knew. In others, some might have trusted their grandchildren enough to tell them the truth in their final years. In the early 2000s, such stories started to surface for the first time. Ayşe Gül Altınay and Yektan Türkylmaz have studied both historical and literary accounts related to the women survivors of the genocide. Their departure point is Fethiye Çetin's memoir *Annaan-nem* (My grandmother), as well as İbrahim Ethem Atnur's study *Türkiye'de Ermeni kadınları ve çocukları meselesi (1915–1923)* (The issue of Armenian women and children in Turkey), both published in 2005 and which broke the silence on the matter.<sup>78</sup> Conversion was a way for Armenians to escape death already before 1915,<sup>79</sup> but it turned to a widespread phenomenon in the following years. The discourse on the “merciful” and “humanitarian” dimension of the Turkish people, the authors conclude, ignores the traumatic experience of Armenian women who had to adopt a new identity, lived always in the fear of the possibility that the old one might be revealed, even though they were considered to be “dead” in both Turkish and Armenian historiography.

I first came to learn of these stories in September 2005, at the conference on the Armenians mentioned earlier. In two papers, the lawyer Fethiye Çetin, author of the novel mentioned above, which became a bestseller in Turkey, and the medical doctor İrfan Palalı, author of the novel *Tehcir Çocukları* (The children of deportation) narrated the story of their grandmothers, who had converted to Islam, as had thousands of others: children in the vortex of the disaster.<sup>80</sup> It is interesting that in the days following the conference, similar stories sprang up constantly in the newspapers. One had the impression that Turkish society had begun to realise the self-evident: that all those Christians who were not privileged enough to emigrate to a country with a population of their coreligionists, as it was the case of Greece for the Greek Orthodox, but managed to escape the slaughter and hardship, were perforce incorporated into Turkish society, changing their religion and identity. Contrary to the narrations of survivors from the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey, though, in these instances of postnational reappropriation of identities there is a very strong gender aspect. Out of this wave of personal confessions, especially of women who contacted Çetin, the latter, together with the anthropologist Ayşe Gül Altınay, carried out interviews with 25 of them and published the results in a book that really shook public opinion in Turkey. As the editors put it, “this book, more than being about 1915, is, in Hrant Dink's words, a book about not being able to get out 'of a 1915-metre deep well'”. It is a book following the deep traces that the human disaster of 1915 has left today to those who live in these lands.<sup>81</sup> This shift was also mirrored in literature. Elif Şafak, a young prolific writer, with an acute sensitivity on issues of suppressed identities, published, in 2006, her novel *Baba ve Piç* (Father and bastard), which is based on a survival story. An American Armenian family and a Turkish Muslim one discover their common great-grandmother, an Armenian by the name of Shushan, who escaped the 1915 massacre, converted to Islam, married a Turkish man and lived ever after as Shermin. Şafak's heroes from both families meet in Istanbul to trace the common origins.<sup>82</sup>

***From oblivion to obsession***

The narratives that have surfaced recently have not replaced the older ones, yet they have created a space of innovative contention. Why, at this particular juncture, have scholars, politicians and common people decided to adopt these narratives, at a high risk in cases, is a question that can only partly be addressed by this paper. The 1990s witnessed a growing increase in interest for the past in Turkey, as elsewhere. Political changes, social developments and demographic reshuffling have led broader layers of the literate public to become engaged in the study of the past, not only out of curiosity or as a source of legitimacy for the existing order. New images and concepts came to dominate the media and the by then sophisticated channels of communication. Whether as a result of a instinctive reaction to the failures of modernisation, or, on the contrary, of an emerging civil society which was the outcome of such modernisation, individuals and groups started tracing their stories back to the founding years of the republic and asking questions about their origins as well as the role of their revered forefathers in the painful experiences that marked the transformation of the empire into a nation-state. In this respect, individual memories regenerated connections and reshuffled what is perceived as public culture. As a result, gradually, the state and its elites, the academic elites among them, began to lose their monopoly over the legitimacy to organise and interpret the past. As this past was transformed into experience, different groups, each with its own agenda, were given the chance to join the festivity of claiming their own individual origins which, they hoped, would alter their place in the genealogy of Turkish society, shattering thus the notion of its homogeneity. It is clear that claiming a new identity is always a risky endeavour. It entails ruptures, psychological dislocation and even violence. It was not an easy task for the descendants of the exchange of populations to opt to claim their difference as a people, whose origins can be found in long-lost lands and whose ethnicity, hence, has been placed under scrutiny. It is even harder for those of Armenian descent to publicly claim such origins, let alone take a step further to “correct” the historical injustice by converting back to Armenianness. There are quite a number of such cases and they have occasionally made the headlines. There is, however, an element of serendipity which alleviates the pain and the risk. Even for societies where democracy and human rights are still put frequently to the test, difference and particularity have lost their totally negative connotations. In a lecture she gave at Princeton in March 2011, Judith Butler recalled her short stay for a lecture in Ankara, where she saw demonstrators calling for the recognition of the Armenian genocide march next to transsexuals, all of them protesting against an authoritarian state. Yet, this serendipity should not blind us to the fact that there are levels of accepted difference. These and similar cases, of course, have been studied intensively by anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists. It has often happened, however, that in relevant accounts, the role of historicity as such is instrumentalised, is considered a strategy and thus lost in the name of shedding light on identity politics *stricto sensu*. I hope that this article has contributed to demonstrating that references to history, far from being a mechanism of legitimation, have become an arena where the present and the future, the private and the public, and fear and hope confront each other. This has resulted in new spaces of imagination, hitherto unthinkable, that have “redeemed” entire social or ethnic groups from collective stigma and allow them, after having successfully achieved what they believe amounts to awareness, to claim with a new confidence their place in society and the world. This dynamic process, however, is not independent of the efforts of newly emerging

elites to undermine the authority of older ones and, in the process, establish their own hegemony. Thus, the new spaces in public culture can be integrated into the mainstream in ways that are time bound, politics oriented and eventually equally contingent to circumstances as the notion of the past they claim to refute.

## NOTES

- \* I would like to thank Antonis Liakos for inviting me to contribute to this special issue. I am also grateful to Oktay Özel for his very useful comments and suggestions. Moreover, it is clear to me that I would not have been able to write this article were it not for the hospitality and support of the Program in Hellenic Studies at Princeton University, as a Stanley J Seeger Visiting Research Fellow, during spring 2011. Finally, this article owes a lot to the two anonymous referees, even if I did not feel compelled to integrate all their comments.
- 1 Fatih Altaylı, a popular but controversial journalist, often hosts mainstream figures such as the well-known historian and director of the Topkapı Museum, İlber Ortaylı. On that occasion, "Ortaylı" answered that the sultan used to drink wine, of the best kind imported from the islands. The same was argued by Murat Bardakçı, another popular figure who has his own history programme on the same channel, Habertürk, called *Tarihin Arka Odası* [History's backroom], and also publishes his own popular history journal, *Tarih dergisi* [History journal]. See [www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/fatih-altayli/589315-verilmedi-sinirlandi](http://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/fatih-altayli/589315-verilmedi-sinirlandi), accessed 21 Jul 2011. It is interesting that Süleyman's son Selim II (reign 1566–1574) became known as Selim mest (Selim the Drunkard) or Sarı Selim (Selim the Blond).
  - 2 Ümit Kıvanç, a famous documentarist and columnist at *Taraf*, mocks the picture of the sultan who spent his time praying and fighting and would unwillingly accept to spend some time with a lady only for the purpose of maintaining the dynasty. Ümit Kıvanç "Sultan şöyleydi, böyleydi. Nah öyleydi!" [The sultan was like this, the sultan was like that. You bet he wasn't], *Taraf*, 10 Jan 2011, available at [www.taraf.com.tr/umit-kivanc/makale-sultan-soyleydi-boyleydi-nah-oyleydi.htm](http://www.taraf.com.tr/umit-kivanc/makale-sultan-soyleydi-boyleydi-nah-oyleydi.htm), accessed 21 Jul 2011. In 1999, on the occasion of the 700th anniversary of the establishment of the Ottoman state, one of the state-sponsored institutions that contributed to the glorification of that period, the Osmanlı Araştırmaları Vakfı (Ottoman Research Foundation), published the study *700. yılında bilinmeyen Osmanlı* (The unknown Ottoman on the 700th anniversary), by Ahmed Akgündüz and Said Öztürk. The book is in the form of questions and answers. Interestingly, the largest entries are the ones referring to the harem and alcohol.
  - 3 It is important for the record to point out that İnalçık is the doyen of Ottoman history, totally devoted to promoting the glory of Turkish history. Orhan Turan, "Muhteşem Rezalet", *Yeni Şafak*, 31 Dec 2010. Available at [yenisafak.com.tr/Gundem/?t=31.12.2010&i=295412](http://yenisafak.com.tr/Gundem/?t=31.12.2010&i=295412), accessed 21 Jul 2011.
  - 4 This obsession with morality is not only pertinent to Islamist circles but also secularist ones. Mustafa (2008), the most controversial of a number of films on Atatürk, by the acclaimed journalist and documentarist Can Dündar, takes a certain distance from the official narrative. Throughout the movie, the hero is also attributed with human weaknesses. He drinks a lot, smokes, is a womaniser, maintains correspondence with a French girlfriend while fighting at Çanakkale, the battle that made him famous. The purpose of the film was obviously to present a sympathetic figure, behind the austere leader. Interestingly, however, it enraged diehard Kemalists. It also came as a surprise to the state. Official support



for the film was withdrawn and complaints were filed against the director, for insulting the memory of Atatürk. See Nora Fisher Onar, "Confronting the Ottoman Legacy In Turkey and Beyond: Towards a Comparative Framework", unpublished paper presented at the Mediterranean Research Meeting of the European University Institute (EUI), Montecatini, Italy, 26–28 Mar 2010.

- 5 In the very same weeks that these discussions were taking place, the government publicised its intention to pass a law that would prohibit any transaction or commercial related to tobacco and alcohol on television and on the internet. Available at [www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetayV3&ArticleID=1033850&Date=24.12.2010&CategoryID=80](http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetayV3&ArticleID=1033850&Date=24.12.2010&CategoryID=80), accessed 21 Jul 2011.
- 6 Referring also to recent films on the life of Atatürk and the reactions among Atatürkists who were offended, Altay made the ambiguous statement that: "As long as it does not insult anyone, it is fine." Available at [www.haber7.com/haber/20110114/CHPden-Muhtesem-Yuzyila-destek.php](http://www.haber7.com/haber/20110114/CHPden-Muhtesem-Yuzyila-destek.php), accessed 21 Jul 2011.
- 7 See Nora Fisher Onar, "Echoes of a Universalism Lost: Rival Representations of the Ottomans in Today's Turkey", *Middle Eastern Studies* 45/2 (2009), 229–241.
- 8 Uğur Vardan, "Hür Adam'ın üç sahnesi çok konuşulacak" [Three scenes from the Free Man will be discussed a lot], *Radikal*, 30 Dec 2010, available at [www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalEklerDetayV3&ArticleID=1034477&Date=30.12.2010&CategoryID=41](http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalEklerDetayV3&ArticleID=1034477&Date=30.12.2010&CategoryID=41), accessed 21 Jul 2011.
- 9 "Said-i Nursi filmine protesto" [Protest against the movie Said-i Nursi], 5 Jan 2011, available at [haber.mynet.com/detay/guncel/said-i-nursi-filmine-protesto/549316](http://haber.mynet.com/detay/guncel/said-i-nursi-filmine-protesto/549316), accessed 21 Jul 2011.
- 10 Okan İşbecer, "Hür Adam'ın hüsrani" [Free Man's frustration], 24 Jan 2011, available at [www.kemalist-gencler.com/hur-adamin-husrani](http://www.kemalist-gencler.com/hur-adamin-husrani), accessed 21 Jul 2011.
- 11 Kürsat Oğuz, "Biz hep Mustafa Kemal'in posta koymasına alışmıştık" [We had been used only to Mustafa Kemal chastising others], 29 Dec 201, available at [www.haberturk.com/kultur-sanat/haber/586300-biz-hep-mustafa-kemalin-posta-koymasina-alismistik](http://www.haberturk.com/kultur-sanat/haber/586300-biz-hep-mustafa-kemalin-posta-koymasina-alismistik), accessed 21 Jul 2011.
- 12 "Kültür ve Turizm Bakanı Ertuğrul Günay, Hür Adam filmi için ne dedi?" [What did the Culture and Tourism Minister Ertuğrul Günay say about the film Free Man?], 11 Jan 2011, available at [www.internethaber.com/bakan-gunay-hur-adam-icin-ne-dedi-320537h.htm](http://www.internethaber.com/bakan-gunay-hur-adam-icin-ne-dedi-320537h.htm), accessed 21 Jul 2011.
- 13 Esra Özyürek (ed.), *The Politics of Public Memory in Turkey*, Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2007, 6. Özyürek discusses the use of the terms social and cultural memory against which she opts for the term public memory, inspired by Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge's use of the term public culture on the grounds that it is "less embedded in western dichotomies like high versus low, elite versus mass, or popular versus classical". Ibid., 8.
- 14 Frank Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*, Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005.
- 15 Meltem Ahıska, "Occidentalism: The Historical Fantasy of the Modern", *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102/2-3 (2003), 351–379, 353.
- 16 Nilufer Göle, "Global Expectations, Local Experiences: Non-Western Modernities", in Wil Arts (ed.), *Through a Glass, Darkly: Blurred Images of Cultural Tradition and Modernity over Distance and Time*, Boston: Brill, 2000, 48.
- 17 Ahıska, 355.
- 18 Ibid., 360.
- 19 With respect to Greece, for instance, see Kostas Kostis, "The Formation of the State in Greece", in Faruk

- Birtek and Thalia Dragonas (eds), *Citizenship and the Nation-state in Greece and Turkey*, Routledge: London and New York, 2005, 18–36.
- 20 Selim Deringil, “‘They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery’: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate”, *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History* 45 (2003), 311–342; Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism”, *The American Historical Review* 107/3 (2002), 768–796.
- 21 See Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2004.
- 22 Büşra Ersanlı Behar, *İktidar ve tarih: Türkiye’de “resmi tarih” tezinin oluşumu* [Political power and history: the creation of “official history” in Turkey], 1929–1937, Istanbul: AFA Yayıncılık, 1992.
- 23 Çağlar Keyder, “The Consequences of the Exchange of Populations for Turkey”, in Renée Hirschon (ed.), *Crossing the Aegean: An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey*, New York: Berghahn, 2003, 39–52, 43
- 24 Reşat Kasaba, “Economic Foundations of a Civil Society: Greeks in the Trade of Western Anatolia, 1840–1876”, in Dimitri Gondicas and Charles Issawi (eds), *Ottoman Greeks in the Age of Nationalism: Politics, Economy, and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, Princeton UP, 1999.
- 25 See Uğur Ümit Üngör’s pathbreaking *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913–1950*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011.
- 26 Keyder, “The Consequences”, 45.
- 27 Weiner Myron and Michael S. Teitelbaum, *Political Demography, Demographic Engineering*, New York: Berghahn, 2001.
- 28 Barbara E. Harrell-Bond and Effie Voutira, “Anthropology and the Study of Refugees”, *Anthropology Today* 8/4 (1992), 6–12; Anne Norton, *Reflections on Political Identity*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1988.
- 29 Effie Voutira, “Population Transfers and Resettlement Policies in Inter-war Europe: The Case of Asia Minor Refugees in Macedonia from an International and National Perspective”, in Peter Mackridge and Eleni Yannakakis (eds), *Ourselves and Others: The Development of a Greek Macedonian Cultural Identity since 1912*, Oxford: Berg, 1997, 113.
- 30 See for instance Alexandre Toumarkine, *Les migrations des populations musulmanes balkaniques en Anatolie (1876–1913)*, Istanbul: Isis, 1995, and Alexandre Popovic, *L’Islam Balkanique: Les musulmans sud-est européen dans la période post-ottomane*, Weisbaden: Osteuropa-Institut of the Free University of Berlin, 1986.
- 31 Ahmet Yıldız, *Ne mutlu türküm diyebilene: Türk ulusal kimliğinin etno-seküler sınırları (1919–1938)* [How happy to be able to say I am a Turk: the ethnosecular limits of Turkish national identity], Istanbul: İletişim, 2004.
- 32 Barbaros Tanc, “Where Local trumps National: Christian Orthodox and Muslim Refugees since Lausanne”, *Balkanologie* 5/1–2 (2001), available at [balkanologie.revues.org/index732.html#ftn1](http://balkanologie.revues.org/index732.html#ftn1), accessed 21 Jul 2011.
- 33 Aslı İğsız, “Documenting the Past and Publicizing Personal Stories: Sensescapes and the 1923 Greco-Turkish Population Exchange in Contemporary Turkey”, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 26 (2008), 451–487.
- 34 Fikret Adanır, “The Greco–Turkish Exchange of Populations in Turkish Historiography”, in Marina Cattaruzza, Marco Dogo and Raoul Pupo (eds), *Esodi: Transfertimenti forzati di popolazioni nei due dopoguerr-*

ra: *Europa centro-orientale, regione balcanico-egaea, regione istro-dalmata* [Exodus: forced population transfers in twentieth century Europe], Turin: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2000.

- 35 Kemal Arı, *Büyük Mübadele, Türkiye'ye zorunlu göç* [The great exchange of population: forced migration in Turkey], 1923–25, İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1995.
- 36 Mehmet Ali Gökçağı, *Nüfus Mübadelesi: Kayıp Bir Kuşağın Öyküsü*, İstanbul: İletişim, 2003.
- 37 Ayhan Aktar, *Türk milliyetçiliği, gayrimüslimler ve ekonomik dönüşüm* [Turkish nationalism, non-Muslims and economic transformation], İstanbul: İletişim, 2006.
- 38 Zeki Ergas, *Savaş yıllarında Balkanlardan Anadolu'ya bir ailenin öyküsü* [The story of a family in the war years from the Balkans to Anatolia], 1912–22, İstanbul: Gözlem Gazetecilik Basın ve Yayın, 2003.
- 39 Tolga Köker and Leyla Keskiner, "Lessons in Refugeehood: The Reformulation of Ethnic Identity in an Aegean Community", in Hirschon (ed.), *Crossing the Aegean*, 193–208.
- 40 Asli Comu, *The Transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic and the Exchange of Populations: The Cases of Ayvalık, Mersin and Trabzon*, unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2010. See also her recently published MA dissertation: Asli Emine Çomu, *The Exchange of Populations and Adana, 1830–1927*, İstanbul: Libra, 2011.
- 41 Tutku Vardağlı, "In Search of New Genres in the Lausanne Population Exchange Literature", paper presented in May 2010 at the workshop *Conflicting Historiographies* at Boğaziçi University, İstanbul.
- 42 İskender Özsoy, *İki Vatan Yorgunları: mübadele acısını yaşayanlar anlatıyor*, İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları, 2003. Emin Akdağ, *Şahitlerin Dilinden Unutulan Büyük Göç*, İstanbul: Zaman Kitap, 2005.
- 43 Herkül Millas, "The Exchange of Populations in Turkish Literature", in Hirschon (ed.), *Crossing the Aegean*, 221–231, 228. The intellectual impact in Turkey of Millas himself, a Greek of İstanbul, who spends his life between Greece and Turkey, mirrors the clear shift in this country with respect to the perception of postnational identities.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 230.
- 45 Iğsız, "Documenting the Past", 453. Apart from being selective – the same nostalgia is not publicly performed for Armenians, for instance, whose remembrance, as we will see, remains problematic – it also occasionally becomes part of a racist discourse. I have been told by old İstanbulliots how sad they feel that their ancestors chased out the Greeks, who although they were a minority were very well integrated and of a high culture, and they now feel themselves a minority under siege from an uneducated mob from Anatolia with whom they have nothing in common.
- 46 *Ibid.* See also, by the same author, "Polyphon and Geographic Kinship in Anatolia: Framing the Turkish Greek Compulsory Population Exchange", in Esra Özyürek (ed.), *The Politics of Public Memory in Turkey*, Syracuse UP, 2007, 162–190. There, Iğsız discusses the way that specific private initiatives and cultural institutions, such as Belge publishing house that launched the *Mare Nostrum* (Our sea) series, with translations of authors from Mediterranean countries, most notably Greece, and the Kalan music company, which has published a score of albums with ethnic music of the deported populations of Anatolia, create a new vocabulary that translates all past sufferings into current terms and "transforms the rhetoric of

- Anatolia from a homogeneous nation-state territory into a homeland and a mother", *ibid.*, 186.
- 47 İğsız, "Documenting the Past", 453.
- 48 Esra Bulut, "The Role of Religion in Turkish Reactions to Balkan Conflicts", *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 3/1 (2004).
- 49 Sylvia Gangloff, "The Impact of the Ottoman Legacy on Turkish Policy in the Balkans (1991–1999)", CERİ working paper, Nov 2005. Available at [www.ceri-sciencespo.com/archive/nov05/artsg.pdf](http://www.ceri-sciencespo.com/archive/nov05/artsg.pdf), accessed 21 Jul 2011.
- 50 *Ibid.*
- 51 See, for instance, Ayşe Parla, "Remembering across the Border: Postsocialist Nostalgia among Turkish Immigrants from Bulgaria", *American Ethnologist* 36/4 (2009), 750–767, and Zeynep Ülker Kaşlı and Ayşe Parla, "Broken Lines of Il/Legality and the Reproduction of State Sovereignty: The Impact of Visa Policies on Immigrants to Turkey from Bulgaria", *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 34/2 (2009), 203–227.
- 52 See the organisation's website at [www.lozanmubadilleri.org.tr](http://www.lozanmubadilleri.org.tr). "Let these sufferings never again be experienced" is the association's motto.
- 53 In order to deal with this issue, Sefer Güvenç, for many years the secretary-general of the foundation, edited recently an important bilingual reference book entitled *Kuzey Yunanistan Yer Adları Atlası: Mübadele Öncesi ve Sonrası Eski ve Yeni Adları* [Atlas of old and new toponyms of northern Greece before and after the population exchange], Istanbul: LMV, 2010.
- 54 *Mimari Mirasın Korunması ile ilgili Yerel Bilincin Geliştirilmesi Projesi "Ortak Kültürel Mirasımız – Birlikte Koruyalım!"* ["Our common heritage – Let us protect it together." A project of developing awareness relevant to the protection of architectural heritage]. The proceedings were published in the trilingual edition *Κοινή πολιτιστική κληρονομιά: ας την προστατέψουμε μαζί – Ortak Kültürel Mirasımız: Birlikte Koruyalım – Common Cultural Heritage*, Istanbul: Lozan Mübadilleri Vakfı, 2005. More recently, in December 2010, in the context of Istanbul 2010: European Capital of Culture, the LMV organised an exhibition entitled *Hasretim İstanbul* (Istanbul: my nostalgia), where the life stories of Greek Orthodox (Rum) inhabitants of the city who had been deported or compelled to leave under different circumstances were portrayed. The material for the exhibition and the book published on the occasion derived from interviews recorded as part of an oral history project carried out by foundation members.
- 55 Deniz Madanoğlu, "Gelen servettir, giden nimettir" [Those who come is wealth, those who leave are blessing], *Birgün* gazetesini, 30 Jan 2011. She quotes from Ayhan Aktar, *Varlık vergisi ve "Türkleştirme" politikaları*, Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000.
- 56 İki Türkiye ve Cumhurbaşkanlığı seçimi, *Yeni Şafak*, 21 Mar 2007, available at [yenisafak.com.tr/Yorum/?i=36163](http://yenisafak.com.tr/Yorum/?i=36163), accessed 21 Jul 2011.
- 57 Father Andrea Santoro, an Italian Catholic priest, was shot dead in a church in Trabzon, northern Turkey, in February 2006. In July 2006, a Catholic French cleric was stabbed in Samsun, northern Turkey, as well. Three Protestant missionaries, including a German citizen who operated a Christian publishing house, were killed in April 2007. Italian bishop Luigi Padovese was killed in June 2010 by his driver,

who presumably was suffering from a psychological disorder.

- 58 Retired diplomats constitute a really interesting case. Figures such as the late Gündüz Aktan and Şükrü Elekdağ, eventually became MPs on a MHP and CHP ticket, respectively. Having built most of their careers during the Cold War era, more recently, either motivated by patriotic feelings or their failure to understand the changes around them, they have offered lip service to promoting understanding and reconciliation in their country.
- 59 The Turkish government founded the Institute for Armenian Research in 2001, which started publishing its quarterly *Ermeni Araştırmaları Dergisi* [Journal of Armenian Studies], aiming to support the official Turkish thesis. A series of volumes have been also published. See Ara Sanjian in his “Review Article: Öke’s Armenian Question Re-examined”, *Middle Eastern Studies* 42/5 (2006), 831–839, here 832.
- 60 Ibid., 831.
- 61 The first relevant work that appeared in Turkish was Taner Akçam, *Türk ulusal kimliği ve Ermeni sorunu* [Turkish national identity and the Armenian question], İstanbul: İletişim, 1993. Since then the same author has published several books, the more acclaimed being: *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide*, New York: Zed, 2004; *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility*, trans. Paul Bessemer, New York: Metropolitan, 2006. We should also mention Fuat Dündar, *Crime of Numbers: The Role of Statistics in the Armenian Question, 1878–1918*, New Brunswick: Transaction, 2010, and Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Gökçe and Norman Naimark (eds), *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011. The last one is the product of the Workshop for Armenian Turkish Scholarship (WATS), which, including its first in Chicago in 2000, has had seven meetings to date. Two of the initiators of WATS, Göçek and Suny, won the 2005 academic freedom award of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) for their contribution.
- 62 Fatma Müge Göçek, “Reading Genocide: Turkish Historiography on the Armenian Deportations and Massacres of 1915”, in Israel Gershoni, Amy Singer and Hakan Erdem (eds), *Middle East Historiographies: Narrating the Twentieth Century*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006, 101–127.
- 63 See Vangelis Kechriotis, “The Historian, the Philologist, the Minister, and the Traitors: Thoughts from Turkey on a Historical Conference”, 26 Dec 2005 (available at [www.greekworks.com/content/index.php/weblog/extended/the\\_historian\\_the\\_philologist\\_the\\_minister\\_and\\_the\\_traitors\\_thoughts\\_from\\_t](http://www.greekworks.com/content/index.php/weblog/extended/the_historian_the_philologist_the_minister_and_the_traitors_thoughts_from_t)), and “The Jurists, the Laws, and the Outlaws: Thoughts from Turkey on a Conference that Finally Took Place”, 22 Mar 2006 (available at [www.greekworks.com/content/index.php/weblog/extended/the\\_jurists\\_the\\_laws\\_and\\_the\\_outlaws\\_thoughts\\_from\\_turkey\\_on\\_a\\_conference\\_t](http://www.greekworks.com/content/index.php/weblog/extended/the_jurists_the_laws_and_the_outlaws_thoughts_from_turkey_on_a_conference_t)). Both accessed on 21 Jul 2011. The two articles are translations into English by Mary Kitroeff of earlier versions that had been published in *Synchrone Themata* 90 (2005) and 91 (2005).
- 64 The head of the militant association Büyük Hukukçular Birliği, Kemal Keriçsiz, was behind the complaints filed against more than 40 Turkish journalists and authors, including Orhan Pamuk, Elif Şafak and the late Hrant Dink, for “insulting Turkishness”. In January 2008, he was arrested and remains in custody in the context of the Ergenekon plot investigation.
- 65 The proceedings of the conference were recently published as *İmparatorluğun çöküş döneminde Osmanlı Ermenileri, Bilimsel Sorumluluk ve Demokrasi Sorunları*, İstanbul: Bilgi Yayınları, 2011.
- 66 Indeed, a court recently sentenced the perpetrator, Ögün Samast, to 22 years’ imprisonment whereas

- two of his accomplices were sentenced to life.
- 67 See Vangelis Kechriotis, "Hrant Dink ou L'«Intellectuel» post-mortem", in *Le petit théâtre intellectuel Labyrinthe atelier interdisciplinaire* 32/1 (2009), 69–75.
- 68 See the website Özür diliyorum (I apologise), at [www.ozurdiliyoruz.com](http://www.ozurdiliyoruz.com). It is significant that the text was signed by people from all over Turkey as well as all walks of life.
- 69 Marc Mamigonian, "Commentary on the Turkish Apology Campaign", *The Armenian Weekly*, April 2009, special issue on the Armenian genocide, 19–24 (20).
- 70 Murat Yetkin, "Ermeni meselesi, imza kampanyası ve Gül" [The Armenian Question, the petition campaign and Gül], *Radikal*, 18 Dec 2008. Available at [www.radikal.com.tr/Default.aspx?aType=YazarYazisi&ArticleID=913369&Yazar=MURAT%20YETK%C4%B0N&Date=19.12.2008&CategoryID=98](http://www.radikal.com.tr/Default.aspx?aType=YazarYazisi&ArticleID=913369&Yazar=MURAT%20YETK%C4%B0N&Date=19.12.2008&CategoryID=98), accessed 22 Jul 2011.
- 71 "Cumhurbaşkanı Gül'den Arıtman'a dava" [A complaint by President Gül to Arıtman], 22 Dec 2008. Available at [atarsiv.ntvmsnbc.com/news/469808.asp](http://atarsiv.ntvmsnbc.com/news/469808.asp), accessed 22 Jul 2011.
- 72 Selahattin Demirtaş, the leader of the parliamentary group of the Democratic Society Party (Demokratik Toplum Partisi, DTP) and, after the banning of the latter in December 2009, of the new Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi, BDP), was among the signatories. His party was the only one that supported the signing of the protocol of understanding between Turkey and Armenia: "Türkiye–Ermenistan Protokolü Meclis'te Tartışıldı" [Turkey–Armenia protocol discussed in parliament], 21 Oct 2009. Available at [www.bianet.org/bianet/diger/117773-turkiye-ermenistan-protokolu-mecliste-tartisildi](http://www.bianet.org/bianet/diger/117773-turkiye-ermenistan-protokolu-mecliste-tartisildi), accessed 22 Jul 2011.
- 73 See for instance, Orhan Miroğlu, *Barışa Dair Bir Hikayemiz Olsun* [Let it be our story regarding peace], Istanbul: Agora Kitaplığı, 2007. The author, prolific also in studies on Turkish literature, is a regular columnist at the daily *Taraf*, where he frequently writes on the Kurdish question.
- 74 Mamigonian, 21.
- 75 Cengiz Aktar, "Beyond Genocide: The Great Catastrophe", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 24 Feb 2009, available at [www.hurriyet.com.tr/english/opinion/11068921.asp?yazarid=292&gid=260](http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/english/opinion/11068921.asp?yazarid=292&gid=260), accessed 22 Jul 2011.
- 76 Mehmet Polatel, "İttihat Terakki'den Kemalist Döneme Ermeni Malları" [Armenian properties From the Union and Progress to the Kemalist periods], *Toplum ve Kuram* 3 (2010), 113–152; Nevzat Onaran, *Emvali Metruke Olayı: Osmanlı'da ve Cumhuriyette Ermeni ve Rum Mallarının Türkleştirilmesi* [The issue of abandoned properties: The Turkification of Armenian and Greek Orthodox properties in the Ottoman Empire and the Republic], Istanbul: Belge Yayınları, 2010.
- 77 Regarding similar cases, see D.E. Miller and L.T. Miller, *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- 78 Ayşe Gül Altınay and Yektan Türkylmaz, "Unraveling Layers of Gendered Silencing: Converted Armenian Survivors of the 1915 Catastrophe", in Amy Singer, Christoph K. Neumann and Selçuk Akşin Somel (eds), *Untold Histories of the Middle East: Recovering Voices from the 19th and 20th Centuries*, London: Routledge, 2011, 25–53. As the authors argue, already in the first years of the republic, one can come across narratives on the fate of Armenian women and children during the deportations. This category, albeit very blurred, pops up in later historiographical works, as well. See, for instance, their lengthy discussion of Kamuran Gürün, *Ermeni Dosyası*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1983 (translated into English as *The Armenian File: The Myth of Innocence Exposed*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1985),



which has been extensively used by the denialist camp, where it becomes clear that the state itself instructed the local Muslims to adopt children by offering them a measure of financial support.

- 79 Selim Deringil, “‘The Armenian Question is Finally Closed’: Mass Conversions of Armenians in Anatolia during the Hamidian Massacres of 1895–1897”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51/2 (2009), 344–71.
- 80 That very same year witnessed the publication of the memoir “M.K.” *Adlı Çocuğun Tehçir anıları: 1915 ve Sonrası* [The memoirs from the deportation of the child called “M.K.”: 1915 and its aftermath], İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2005, prepared for publication by Baskın Oran, an influential scholar and activist. This is the story of an Armenian, who, after wandering for ten years, eventually managed to escape to Australia. The author of the memoir discloses only his initials. In 2005, again, the Bir zamanlar yayıncılık publishing house in İstanbul published Kemal Yalçın’s *Sarı gelin-Sarı Gyalin*. The first part of the title is Turkish and means “yellow/blonde bride”, while the second part Armenian and means “bride from the mountains”. What is more important is that the same publishing house published, in 2006, Yalçın’s earlier novel *Seninle Güler Yüreğim* [My heart laughs thanks to you], whose first publication by Doğan Yayıncılık in 2000 had been banned and the copies destroyed. All this information has been compiled by Altınay and Türkyılmaz, “Unraveling Layers”, 50.
- 81 Ayşe Gül Altınay and Fethiye Çetin, *Torunlar*, İstanbul: Metis, 2009, 11.
- 82 A lawsuit filed that same year against both the author and her publisher Semih Sökmen for “denigrating Turkishness” ended up in their acquittal in the first trial. The book was also published in English under the title *The Bastard of İstanbul* in 2007.