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7. The calm after the storm: the politics of memory

If the Party could thrust its hand into the past and say of this or that event, *it never happened* – that, surely, was more terrifying than mere torture and death.¹³⁶⁰

In the previous chapters we have explored how Young Turk elites molded the population of the eastern provinces through a wide range of population policies, involving mass destruction, deportation, settlement, and the politics of cultural assimilation. But the Young Turk grand project of crafting a modern nation state included more than these policies that affected multitudes of human beings physically. Mentally, the young nation state was still blank and needed a memory. The continuous process of defining and fine-tuning a national identity entailed a parallel process for a national memory. This chapter will focus on aspects of Young Turk memory politics. How did their memory politics intervene in existing patterns of memory in the eastern provinces, in particular Diyarbakir? And how was the mass violence of the last Ottoman decade remembered by the population and the government?

Silencing the violence: the organization of oblivion

After so much violence in the Ottoman territories, it was only logical that hundreds of thousands of people were physically wounded and psychologically traumatized. Demobilized soldiers came home with frightening stories of mass death, entire neighborhoods had been emptied, families had lost their male populations, widows were begging by the roadside, miserable orphans were roaming the streets naked. War, genocide, famine, flight and displacement had thoroughly scarred the memory of all participants and witnesses. Despite the self-healing ability of families and communities, the violence had caused severe lasting damage to the psychological development of the region and society at large. How did the Young Turk regime deal with this legacy of violence? In 1937 Şükrü Kaya addressed parliament on the question of the violence of bygone days: “If we do not want to return to those bitter memories and relive that painful life... in any event the Turkish nation has to be Turkist and Nationalist.” The speech was followed by a long applause and chants of “Bravo! Live long!”¹³⁶¹

¹³⁶⁰ George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1949), p.35.

¹³⁶¹ Ekrem Ergüven (ed.), *Şükrü Kaya: Sözleri - Yazıları 1927-1937* (Istanbul: Cumhuriyet Matbaası, 1937), p.236.

One good illustration of the vicissitudes of Young Turk memory politics was the representation of the Greco-Turkish war. Speaking in March 1922, Mustafa Kemal denounced the “atrocities” of the “Greek princes and generals, who take particular pleasure in having women raped.” The general continued to decry these acts of “destruction and aggression” that he considered “irreconcilable with humanity” and most of all, “impossible to cover up and deny.”¹³⁶² But after the establishment of the Republic the tide turned and the accusatory tone of moral indignation was dropped. The 1930s saw a diplomatic rapprochement between Turkey and Greece as relations improved with the signing of several agreements and conventions. By the time the Greek Premier Panagis Tsaldaris (1868-1936) visited Turkey in September 1933, the same Mustafa Kemal now spoke of the Greeks as “esteemed guests” with whom the contact had been “amicable and cordial.”¹³⁶³ Throughout the interbellum, the Turkish and Greek nations were portrayed as having coexisted perennially in mutual respect and eternal peace.¹³⁶⁴ Friendly inter-state relations in the service of Turkey’s acceptance and stabilization into the nation-state system had gained precedence over old grief, without any serious process of closure or reconciliation in between.

Lacking statehood, the Armenians and Syrians were not accorded the same treatment as Greece. They were either deeply traumatized survivors living in wretched refugee camps or terrified individuals keeping a low profile in ruined villages.¹³⁶⁵ The



Photo 47: Şeref Uluğ
(Beysanoğlu, 1996)

Kemalist regime continued on all fronts the preceding Young Turk policies of effacing physical traces of Armenian existence: churches were defaced and buildings rid of their Armenian inscriptions.¹³⁶⁶ Although the Armenians were gone, in a sense they were still deemed too visible. In Diyarbakir city, a landmark event that marked the decay of Armenian existence was the collapse of the church, Surp Giragos.¹³⁶⁷ Another important stage was the razing of the local Armenian cemeteries. One of the men mainly responsible for the destruction of Armenians, Müftüzâde Şeref Uluğ, who had

¹³⁶² Nimet Arsan (ed.), *Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1959-1964), vol.I, p.241.

¹³⁶³ *Cumhuriyet*, 6 and 9 September 1933; Arı İnan, *Düşünceleriyle Atatürk* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1991), p.162.

¹³⁶⁴ For a study of Turkish-Greek rapprochement after 1923 see: Damla Demiröz, *Savaşın Barışa Giden Yol: Atatürk-Venizelos Dönemi Türkiye-Yunanistan İlişkileri* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2007).

¹³⁶⁵ Thomas H. Greenshields, “The Settlement of Armenian Refugees in Syria and Lebanon, 1915-39,” in: John I. Clarke & Howard Bowen-Jones (eds.), *Change and Development in the Middle East* (London: Methuen & Co., 1981), pp.233-41.

¹³⁶⁶ Anush Hovannisian, “Turkey: A Cultural Genocide,” in: Levon Chorbajian & George Shirinian (eds.), *Studies in Comparative Genocide* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), pp.147-56. This was not different in Diyarbakir’s districts. For the example of Ergani see: Müslüm Üzülmez, *Çayönü’nden Ergani’ye Uzun Bir Yürüyüş* (Istanbul: n.p., 2005), chapter 4.

¹³⁶⁷ In the 1960s the roof collapsed into the deserted building and in subsequent decades the structure was stripped of its assets and neglected into dilapidation. For a website commemorating Surp Giragos see: <http://www.surpgiragos.com>

become mayor after 1923, ordered the erasure of one of the city's last vanishing Armenian landmarks two decades after the genocide.¹³⁶⁸ That this was not merely a function of “urban modernization” but a conscious expunction of the Other's memory appeared from the fact that not only on the west side (where “modernization” was carried out) but also on the east side of town, Armenian cemeteries were either willfully neglected, simply flattened, or used for paving stones in floors or roads. No Armenian ever had a say in this process, since most deportees and survivors were illiterate peasants living under cover or in Syria.



Photo 48: Christian cemetery, undated (Republican Archives)

For the same reason the Diyarbekir Armenians had no chance of writing and publishing their memories. Thus, the production of memory among them did not take off until decades later or until later generations. The killing and displacement brought by Young Turk rule created an archipelago of nuggets of memory spread across the world.¹³⁶⁹ Well before groups of survivors could formulate narratives about what had happened, a master narrative was being constructed by the perpetrators. In one of his speeches in parliament in 1937 Şükrü Kaya asserted that

¹³⁶⁸ Bedri Günkut, *Diyarbekir Tarihi* (Diyarbakır: Diyarbekir Halkevi, 1937), pp.150-1.

¹³⁶⁹ For similar process of dislocated memory see: Pamela Ballinger, *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Lubomyr Y. Luciuk, *Searching For Place: Ukrainian Displaced Persons, Canada, and the Migration of Memory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

it has been the livelihood of certain politicians to foster the notion that there is an eternal enmity between Turks and Armenians... Turks and Armenians, forced to pursue their true and natural interests, again instinctively felt friendliness towards each other. This is the truth of the matter... From our perspective the cordiality expressed by the Armenian nation towards us has not diminished.¹³⁷⁰

Such an assessment of Turkish-Armenian relations in the wake of the genocide was to be expected only from a political elite pursuing a distinct memorial agenda. Ever since its rise to power, the Kemalist dictatorship continued the CUP policy of suppressing all information on the 1915 genocide. The 1931 Press Law served as a catch-all for any texts the regime considered as dissent. When the regime caught wind of the memoirs of Karabet Tapikyan, subtitled *What we saw during the deportation from Sivas to Aleppo* (Boston: Hairenik, 1924), the book was prohibited from entering Turkey for “containing very harmful writings.”¹³⁷¹ Marie Sarrafian Banker, a graduate of the İzmir American College, had written her memoirs in 1936.¹³⁷² Her book too was prohibited from entering the country. All existing copies were ordered confiscated and destroyed for containing “harmful texts.”¹³⁷³ When Armen Anooosh, an Armenian survivor living in Aleppo, in 1922 wrote his memoirs entitled, *The History of a Ruined City: Urfa*, the volume was denied entry and existing copies that had found their way into the country were ordered confiscated.¹³⁷⁴

At times the policy extended beyond the prohibition of genocide memoirs and included ‘normal’ history books. This contradicted the ideas of some of those who had contributed to the development of those histories. A few days before he committed suicide in 1919, Dr. Mehmed Reshid spoke with a leading Young Turk and answered the question whether he feared “historical responsibility” as follows: “Let other nations write about me whatever history they want, I couldn’t care less”.¹³⁷⁵ Most other Young Turks, however, did care. When Turkish customs intercepted Arshak Alboyajian’s two-volume classic *History of Kayseri*, sent from Syria to Istanbul by surface mail, it was ordered confiscated, destroyed, and prohibited.¹³⁷⁶ An Armenian-language book published in Cairo in 1940 on the small town of Bahçecik was prohibited simply for the fact that it produced a history of a region which fell under Turkish national jurisdiction.¹³⁷⁷ What is striking about these prohibitions is that they

¹³⁷⁰ *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Zabıt Ceridesi*, vol.17, period V, session 45 (1937), 7 April 1937, p.26.

¹³⁷¹ *BCA*, 030.18.01.02/46.49.5, Prime Ministry decree, 10 June 1934.

¹³⁷² Marie Sarrafian Banker, *My Beloved Armenia: A Thrilling Testimony* (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1936).

¹³⁷³ *BCA*, 030.18.01.02/79.82.14, Prime Ministry decree, 28 September 1937.

¹³⁷⁴ *BCA*, 030.18.01.02/118.98.20, Prime Ministry decree, 10 February 1949.

¹³⁷⁵ Mithat Şükrü Bleda, *İmparatorluğun Çöküşü* (İstanbul: Remzi, 1979), p.59.

¹³⁷⁶ *BCA*, 030.18.01/127.95.11, Prime Ministry decree, 31 December 1951.

¹³⁷⁷ *BCA*, 030.18.01.02/95.60.3, Prime Ministry decree, 10 July 1941.

generally limited themselves to the Turkish Republic. For the regime it did not matter much that Armenians wrote and circulated memoirs among themselves – as long as memory was produced and consumed within an Armenian milieu and did not trickle back into Turkey. One of the exceptions to this rule was the September 1935 incident between the United States and Turkey over plans by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer to film Franz Werfel’s novel *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*. After strong diplomatic pressure from the Turkish embassy the idea was abandoned.¹³⁷⁸ The regime had already officially prohibited the book itself in January 1935.¹³⁷⁹ The same fate befell Paul du Véou’s less fictional book on the Musa Dagh Armenians on the eve of the Turkish annexation of Hatay province.¹³⁸⁰ That book, too, was blacklisted and barred from entry to the country.¹³⁸¹ The Young Turk dictatorship feared these narratives would enter local history and memory, of which, as we shall see later, they claimed a strict monopoly.

Whereas and perhaps because the official position of the political elite was one of amnesia and denial, there is scant information available on how the remaining population felt in the years and decades after the destruction of their Armenian neighbors. Regional life was too disturbed to return back to normal and people undoubtedly felt something was permanently lost. Whether the genocide was remembered, and how, is a question difficult to engage. The British official Harold Armstrong traveled through the southern provinces of Turkey and met an imam in a village, whose eyes became “hard and dangerous” when speaking of Armenians. The imam responded, “If one came back I would kill him with my own hands,” adding that he personally had led the villagers in the destruction of the Armenians, cutting off the conversation: “Let us talk of other things.”¹³⁸² The Danish engineer Olaf Rygaard toured the eastern provinces in 1929 and asked local Turks about what had happened to the Armenians. A group of Turks sitting in a coffeehouse pointed at a spot where Armenians had been massacred in August 1915. “While laughing coarsely they remind each other about how they then tried to find out how many victims a single rifle bullet could penetrate.”¹³⁸³ Similar experiences were observed by Patrick Kinross, who during a trip to Turkey visited a village and asked the same thorny question about what had happened to the local Armenians. The villagers laughed and pointed down: “The Armenians are under the

¹³⁷⁸ Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.204.

¹³⁷⁹ *BCA*, 030.18.01.02/51.3.2, Prime Ministry decree, 13 January 1935.

¹³⁸⁰ Paul du Véou, *Chrétiens en péril au Moussadagh! Enquête au Sandjak d'Alexandrette* (Paris: Baudinière, 1939).

¹³⁸¹ *BCA*, 030.18.01.02/90.12.7, Prime Ministry decree, 25 January 1940.

¹³⁸² Harold Armstrong, *Turkey and Syria Reborn: A Record of Two Years of Travel* (London: J. Lane, 1930), p.145.

¹³⁸³ Olaf A. Rygaard, *Mellem Tyrker og Kurder: En Dansk Ingeniørs Oplevelser i Lilleasien* (Copenhagen: Nordisk Forlag, 1935), p.165.

ground!”¹³⁸⁴ Although many were aware that they were living in the historical landscape of Ottoman Armenians and many others also asserted that life had been better when their Armenian compatriots were around, the genocide was often followed by a general apathy and indifference among the bystander communities.

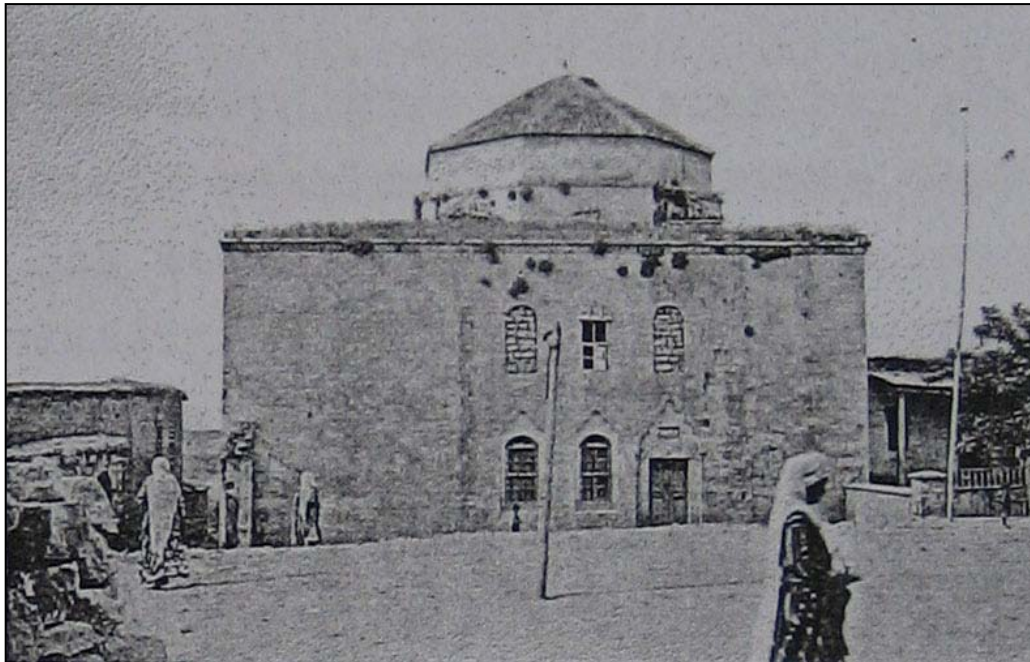


Photo 49: The Armenian church of Silvan in the 1930s (Republican Archives)

Even less leeway was afforded to Kurds who had been deported by the regimes. The 1934 Settlement Law had clearly prohibited memorialization of the past by dictating that “especially the nomads and tribesmen deported to the interior will have to cut off completely all their ties to the past and will have to affix all their goals to the future generations they will raise.”¹³⁸⁵ They were not allowed to commemorate their dead or visit their graves, if there were any. Sheikh Said’s remains had been dumped in a mass grave near the Mountain Gate for the particular reason of thwarting memorialization. Many others had shared his fate. To most surviving family members, who were pious Muslims, this was a breach of Islamic burial customs. In their memoirs they claim to have felt humiliated and shocked at the way their leaders had been treated.¹³⁸⁶ After the repression, under the Young Turk regime a curtain of silence descended on key moments of the near past. Local officials from the northern district of Hani reported to Ankara, “This is a town where Sheikh Said’s movement convened for

¹³⁸⁴ Patrick Kinross, *Within the Taurus: A Journey in Asiatic Turkey* (London: n.p., 1954), p.74.

¹³⁸⁵ *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Zabıt Ceridesi*, vol.23, period IV, session 3 (1934), Appendix no.189: “I/335 numaralı İskân kanunu lâyihası ve İskân muvakkat encümeni mazbatası” (2 May 1932).

¹³⁸⁶ See e.g. the memoirs of Sheikh Said’s grandson: Abdülmelik Fırat, *Fırat Mahzun Akar* (Istanbul: Avesta, 1996).

decisions, and the children and close relatives of those who were sentenced to various punishments after the movement live here. This is a place where we need to work to make them forget their feelings of resentment and agony (*kırgınlık ve ızdırab duygularını unutturmak*)... district governors, gendarmes, and teachers need to operate on the new generation with great care.”¹³⁸⁷ Everything that could remind the people of the violence was banned. One of Sheikh Said’s lectures, recorded on gramophone record, was prohibited from entrance into the country for containing “words harmful to the nation.” All existing copies were ordered to be collected and destroyed.¹³⁸⁸ The survivors themselves were silenced, for writing memoirs was anathema. Even when the violence was remembered and commemorated in the privacy of their homes, it took place under conditions of great fear.¹³⁸⁹ A largely illiterate peasant society with strong tribal structures, such as Eastern Turkey, depended on bards who kept the oral tradition of storytelling alive and passed down narratives of the events from one generation to the next. These troubadours and bards were persecuted for singing laments for the dead Kurdish elites during clandestine nightly storytelling sessions (see Chapter 6). Some saw no other choice than to flee to Syria.¹³⁹⁰

An exemplary story of how the regime dealt with the memorialization of murdered family members was the case of a local Justice Ministry official in the Ergani district. The man, a Kurd by the name of Feyzi Artıkoğlu, reportedly spoke to the townsmen about the grave of a local leader named Şevki, who was killed in 1925 by the Turkish army. He had pointed out the grave and impelled the locals to put cobblestones on it to commemorate his death. Those who did not remember whose grave it was, he rebuked: “You idiot, how can you forget Şevki, go place a stone.” According to the report written by local officials, a small pile of stones had been heaped up on the grave in memory of the dead. Artıkoğlu would assemble people at the mosque after Friday prayers, walk them to the grave and pray in memory of Sheikh Said and his men. Government officials strongly disapproved of this practice which “perpetuated devoutness and the kurdist mentality.” Feyzi Artıkoğlu was censured as “a Mardinite fluent in arabic, kurdish, and zazaki... whose employment as a civil servant can absolutely not be permitted here from the perspective of our national ideal and revolution.” His deportation to the western provinces was considered “urgent”. In the correspondence, the party official who received this letter heavily underscored this text with the handwritten note:

¹³⁸⁷ *BCA*, 490.01/996.850.1, Dr. Münir Soykam to RPP General Secretariat, 12 May 1941.

¹³⁸⁸ *BCA*, 030.18.01.02/71.8.6, Prime Ministry decree, 28 January 1937.

¹³⁸⁹ Şeyhmus Diken, *İsyân Sürgünleri* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2005), *passim*.

¹³⁹⁰ Salihê Kevirbirî, *Bir Çılgın Yüzyıl: Karapetê Xaço* (Istanbul: Sî, 2002), pp.59-60.

“Needs to be reported to the Ministry of Justice.”¹³⁹¹ Not much later Artıkođlu was arrested and deported west for producing a memorial narrative that deviated from the official one.

All in all, violence was repressed and ousted from public memory. The massive disruption of the first decades of the twentieth century was disposed of through silence, amnesia, and repression, instead of reflection, discussion, processing, and memorialization. The striking aspect of this process was that the violence that was repressed was not only that in which Young Turks had been perpetrators, but also that in which they had been victims. A whole century of Muslim victimization in the Caucasus and in the Balkans, in particular during the twin Balkan wars, was dismissed and forgotten in favour of “looking towards the future” and amicable inter-state relations with Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, and the Soviet Union. Ottoman minorities who were targeted in this victimization, such as Armenians, Kurds, Syriacs, and Arabs, did not have a chance of healing their wounds or memorializing their losses. The new memory of the nation did not permit cracks, nuances, shades, subtleties, or any difference for that matter. Like the new identity, it was total, absolute, and unitary.

Damnatio memoriae: destruction and construction of memory

Besides locating and delimiting the nation in space, the Young Turks also devised and developed ideas of delimiting the nation in time. In other words, the question *where* the nation was needed to be supplemented with the question *when* the nation was. They argued that the Turkish nation had just been born, its father being Atatürk and its mother the fertile lands of Anatolia. As early as 1922 Mustafa Kemal had emphatically proclaimed, “The new Turkey has absolutely no relation with the old Turkey. The Ottoman state has gone down in history. Now, a new Turkey is born.”¹³⁹² As true millennialists, the Kemalists saw 1923 as the “Year Zero” and rejected all prior history, culture, and tradition of the Ottoman Empire.¹³⁹³ This way, periodization of the nation defined inclusion and exclusion into it: the “new Turkey” was not foreseen to be a state and society for anyone interested in Islamic history. By defining the confines of Turkish history, they attempted to cut off the population’s gaze beyond their political era and launched themselves as the origin of the nation. By monopolizing memory the regime had monopolized identity. As an official 1938 booklet on Diyarbakir read, “In this beautiful country, which we inherited in a wretched and miserable condition from Ottoman rule, today everywhere the lights of civilized life are shining... free from the legacy of

¹³⁹¹ BCA, 490.01/996.850.1, Dr. Münir Soykam to RPP General Secretariat, 30 April 1941.

¹³⁹² Arsan (ed.), *Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri*, vol.III, pp.50-1.

¹³⁹³ Mustafa Kemal explicitly declared 1923 to be “the First National Year”. Ibid., vol.I, p.240.

yesterday's dark mentality."¹³⁹⁴ 1923 represented a *Year Zero* when darkness gave way to light. In 1928, the temporal boundaries of the nation would be carved out in a most radical way.

On 9 August 1928 Mustafa Kemal publicly presented the new Turkish alphabet after many months of discussion on the possible Romanization of the centuries-old Ottoman-Turkish script.¹³⁹⁵ From 1 November 1928 on, the latter was officially changed in favor of Latin characters as part of a general reconfiguration of the Turkish language. The Latin alphabet was supposed to bring Turkey closer to “modern European civilization” – ignoring the fact that no “European” country bordering Turkey used that alphabet. To the Young Turk modernists, the Arabic alphabet was a strong dimension of Ottoman culture and a constant reminder of Turkey's fundamentally non-European past. But the Eurocentric and Orientalist view that Arabic was the very antithesis of Western thought pervaded the minds of the modernizers. They thus developed a discourse discrediting Ottoman and favoring its abolition, arguing that the alphabet was “difficult to learn” and “unfit for the Turkish language.”¹³⁹⁶ These concerns were obviously not simply linguistic: the attack on the Arabic alphabet was a thinly disguised symbolic attack on the Islamic Ottoman past. The change of alphabet was part of a wider Turkish-nationalist cultural revolution, but in its intent and public manifestations it was a quintessential act of memory politics.

Radical Young Turk thinkers advocated the alphabet change by maintaining they had “no time to listen to such objections that insistently point out to us the risk which our culture and traditions may run. The foremost thing in our minds is the present and the future. Let those who are fond of the past, remain in the past.”¹³⁹⁷ Dissenting voices were ignored and silenced, and before the opposition knew it, they saw themselves facing a *fait accompli* with the government announcing that the reforms would be put on the fast track. Foreign observers did not misperceive the impact the alphabet change had on the collective memory of society. The Danish scholar Johannes Østrup noted, “For the generation that is growing up now all the Turkish literature that was printed before 1929 will be like a closed book, only accessible to philological specialists.” A Turkish writer with whom he once spoke about the alphabet change answered his reservations about the far-reaching consequences of the reform: “We don't worry about such things; for us, the history of our people begins with the War of

¹³⁹⁴ *Cumhuriyetin 15inci yılında Diyarbakır* (Diyarbakır: Diyarbakır Matbaası, 1938), pp.21-2.

¹³⁹⁵ “Mustafa Kemal Pasha's Address on Launching the New Characters,” in: Lutfy Levonian (ed.), *The Turkish Press 1925-1932* (Athens: School of Religion, 1932), pp.90-1.

¹³⁹⁶ Geoffrey Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹³⁹⁷ “Some Extracts from the Address of Mustafa Şekip Bey, Professor of Psychology in the University of Constantinople,” in: Levonian, *The Turkish Press*, p.87.

Liberation and the establishment of the Republic, and what lies before that is ordinary world history without national value.” But Østrup was not convinced and concluded, “One cannot run from one’s own past.”¹³⁹⁸

How successful was this ambitious project, in particular in the peasant society that was Eastern Turkey? When Şükrü Kaya went on an inspection tour to the East he reported to Kemal Atatürk that the new Turkish alphabet did not seem to be in use among the people. Kaya deplored that “most intellectuals among the people conduct all their business with the Arabic alphabet” and urged for “new signs and directives” from Mustafa Kemal.¹³⁹⁹ However, the dictator did not have to adjust his policy since time was on his side. Textually, society was being blanked, as the persistence of the policy began to yield its fruits so quickly that “by the time of Atatürk’s death (1938), many a school child could not remember any life but that of the Republic.”¹⁴⁰⁰ What these school children did and did not “remember” was both experienced and constructed memory. They were too young personally to remember Ottoman times, and educated in such a way that they were oblivious to the wider Ottoman past. Indeed, already a generation after the change, scholars wrote that

no Turk under thirty-six or thirty-seven can ordinarily read anything published in his own language before 1928. Very few older works have been transliterated into the new letters. To teach or use the old letters is (or was) technically illegal. Actually they are still widely used by the older generation, but the younger generation has had its principal bridge to its own cultural past burnt for it... Atatürk would have rejoiced at this, for he was out to kill the past.¹⁴⁰¹

Within just a few years it was as if the Arabic script had never been used. But for the regime the slate was still not clean enough.

During their rule, the Young Turks outlawed, confiscated, and destroyed innumerable books, manuscripts, and other texts in non-Turkish languages. Similar to the reorganization of the population through exclusion and inclusion of people, the reorganization of memory required an exclusion and inclusion of the cognitive process of remembering. Having entered the age of information, the Young Turks acknowledged the power of knowledge and realized that certain bodies of knowledge had to be produced and others had to be destroyed.¹⁴⁰²

¹³⁹⁸ Johannes Østrup, *Det Nye Tyrki* (Copenhagen: n.p., 1931), p.180.

¹³⁹⁹ *BCA*, 030.10/12.73.4, Şükrü Kaya to Mustafa Kemal, 22 June 1929.

¹⁴⁰⁰ Lewis V. Thomas & Richard N. Frye, *The United States and Turkey and Iran* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), p.86.

¹⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.82.

¹⁴⁰² Cf. A.Öğuz İçimsoy & İsmail E. Erünsal, “The Legacy of the Ottoman Library in the Libraries of the Turkish Republic,” in: *Libri*, vol.58, no.1 (2008), pp.47-57.

Concordant with national guidelines, the destruction and construction of memory involved the “reorganization” of existing bodies of knowledge in the peripheries. Besides continuing the CUP practice of confiscating and destroying Armenian libraries and collections, the Kemalists attacked and banned all texts that were either non-Turkish or “non-Turkifiable” – i.e. unfit to be cast retrospectively as “Turkish”, as they defined it. This policy continued unabated and was pursued relentlessly. During the sixth Turkish Hearths congress in 1928, Hasan Reşit Tankut presented an account of his work as “Eastern Inspector,” which meant the conduct of “ethnographic research” in the eastern provinces, including Diyarbekir. He was emphatic in pointing out that he had “confiscated many books written in foreign languages.” This included minority languages as Kurmanci, Zazaki, Syrian Aramaic, Arabic, and especially Armenian.¹⁴⁰³ During those same tours through the eastern provinces, in autumn 1940 Tankut passed through Bitlis, home town of the sixteenth-century Kurdish chronicler Sharaf Khan, and reported with content that his book the *Sharafname*¹⁴⁰⁴ was not read anymore among Kurds: “I believe that the pages of the Sharafname and its Kurdish sagas are not read any more or are read with less excitement than before.”¹⁴⁰⁵ Tankut’s attack on Sharaf Khan’s classic was matched by practical intervention in the field: during the 1920s and 1930s the dictatorship confiscated and destroyed copies of the book. For the sake of intelligence, the Hearths gathered lists of other books on Armenians and Kurds as well.¹⁴⁰⁶

Among the hundreds of books prohibited and confiscated by the regime figured: Kamuran Ali Bedir-Khan & Herbert Örtel, *Der Adler von Kurdistan* (Potsdam: Ludwig Doggenreiter, 1937); Sureyya Bedir Khan, *The Case of Kurdistan Against Turkey* (Philadelphia: The Kurdish Independence League, 1928); Cigerxwîn, *Dîwana Yekem: Prîsk û Pêtî* (Damascus: n.p., 1945); a 1932 booklet on the Circassian alphabet published in Syria; Abdulaziz Yamulki, *Kürdistan ve Kürt İhtilalleri* (Baghdad: n.p., 1946); Kamiran Alî Bedir-xan, *Xwendina Kurdî* (Damascus: Çapxana Tereqî, 1938), and many others.¹⁴⁰⁷ These books were literary, linguistic, and historical studies, as well as outright nationalist pamphlets. What they had in common was their language, often Kurdish and Armenian, and topic, often Kurds and Armenians. Besides these books, all Armenian and Kurdish-language periodicals were individually identified and categorically banned.

¹⁴⁰³ “Türk Ocakları Altıncı Kurultayı,” in: *Türk Yurdu*, vol.4/24, no.29/223, May 1930, p.85.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Sharaf al-Dîn Bitlîsî, *The Sharafnâme: Or the History of the Kurdish Nation, 1597*, transl. and ed. Mehrdad R. Izady (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2005).

¹⁴⁰⁵ *BCA*, 490.01/1015.916.4, Hasan Reşit Tankut to RPP General Secretariat, 16 October 1940.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Füsün Üstel, *İmparatorluktan Ulus-Devlete Türk Milliyetçiliği: Türk Ocakları (1912-1931)* (Istanbul: İletişim, 1997), pp.215, 333, 394.

¹⁴⁰⁷ See the various decrees from the file: *BCA*, 030.18.01.02.

As in the case of nation formation, the destruction of memory always went hand in hand with the construction of it. The change of alphabet and the destruction of unwanted texts represented a radical departure from all existing schools of thought. On the emerging *tabula rasa* the building blocks could now be constructed. An aspect of central importance of the alphabet change was that the Young Turk regime became the sole custodian of the past. After the reform, newspapers and journals needed financial support from the government to sustain their press run, and so critical newspapers were deprived of those pivotal subsidies and thus were reduced to impoverishment and bankruptcy.¹⁴⁰⁸ This conveniently silenced the intellectual opposition and “gave the state a chance to control the whole process of publishing all writings as well as transcriptions of existing ones.”¹⁴⁰⁹ Besides teaching the population history at various levels of mass education, the dictatorship had now monopolized the means of and access to knowledge production in Turkey. It could now pursue its memorial agenda more directly. This agenda consisted of a mix between remembrance and oblivion, because for Kemalism history consisted of a series of erasures, emendations and amalgamations. The new Turkey was manifestly and consciously a state of memory.¹⁴¹⁰ Whatever the past was, its depiction depended on how the nationalist elites felt in the 1920s and 1930s. Their subjective experience of the past and perception of contemporary realities produced an archaeology of knowledge possibly quite similar to that of other totalitarian dictatorships in the European 1930s. Now, the time was ripe to write and rewrite history.

There was a clear prehistory of 1930s Kemalist history rewriting for reasons other than intellectual ones.¹⁴¹¹ The CUP issued a decree for the establishment of a committee, assigned to “write brochures *to prove the historical existence of the Turks* and the immigrants in Syria, Iraq, Aleppo, and Eastern Thrace, and to collect information on the Kurdish element.”¹⁴¹² This sudden interest in historiography emanated as the underpinnings of an early archaeology of the Turkish nation. “Proving” not the contemporary but the historical existence of “Turks” would accord a level of surety to entitlement and political legitimacy over the region. The level of prioritization of writing history was characterized by the fact that in times of pressing military concerns (as early as October 1920), the first Kemalist government program read that

¹⁴⁰⁸ Henry E. Allen, *The Turkish Transformation: A Study in Social and Religious Development* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), p.126.

¹⁴⁰⁹ Yılmaz Çolak, “Language Policy and Official Ideology in Early Republican Turkey,” in: *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol.40, no.6 (2004), pp.67-91 at p.73.

¹⁴¹⁰ For a collection of articles dealing with this see: Esra Özyürek (ed.), *The Politics of Public Memory in Turkey* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006).

¹⁴¹¹ “History-Writing in the Late Ottoman/Early Republican Era,” in: Ebru Boyar, *Ottomans, Turks and the Balkans: Empire Lost, Relations Altered* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), pp.9-28.

¹⁴¹² *BOA*, MV 213/30, 26 November 1918, emphasis added.

the government should “make intellectuals produce works of history, literature, and sociology that will augment our national spirit.”¹⁴¹³ Writing history was now a priority and predominantly a matter of serving politics. In the next three decades, the consolidating dictatorship would lay the foundations of a hegemonic canon of official history that would last and persist up to today. This ‘mythistory’¹⁴¹⁴ comprises an enormous number of books and articles and still constitutes the backbone of the Turkish national narrative.¹⁴¹⁵

Mustafa Kemal’s personal role in rewriting history was considerable. The general was a fervent reader of history books,¹⁴¹⁶ and during his rule personally directed and interfered in the historiography. After the climax of the Greco-Turkish war, Mustafa Kemal gave a grand speech on Ottoman and Islamic history in order to delegitimize and abolish the sultanate. In the speech heavily influenced by CUP mythistory, Mustafa Kemal laid out a template for a narrative of the Turkish nation, tracing its roots from Genghis Khan to the Seljuks and ending with the last Ottoman Sultan.¹⁴¹⁷ The speech epitomized the victory of national sovereignty over monarchical sovereignty as Kemal highlighted the nation as the only legitimate site for securing state identity and political power. Later he would add to this furious diatribe against the House of Osman: “From now on, the nation will read in its history books the legends of sultans and padishahs, of these tyrants and usurpers.”¹⁴¹⁸ By providing a narrative of the nation, Mustafa Kemal also drew an official version of history. In 1927, he would do this again in a 36-hour speech delivered personally to the Turkish Grand National Assembly. The “Speech” (*Nutuk*) covered the events between 1919 and 1923 and in essence represented an official version of the War of Independence.¹⁴¹⁹ Since Kemal believed that the new Turkey should not be mired in the past, from the late 1920s on he ordered a thorough rewriting of history, arranged to suit his ideological parameters and nationalist imagination.

Others had opinions about history as well. İsmet İnönü wrote about previous cultures that they were “erased root and branch by the Republic.” In order to create the new Turkey,

¹⁴¹³ Nuran Dağlı & Belma Aktürk (eds.) *Hükümetler ve Programları, vol.1, 1920-1960* (Ankara: TBMM Basımevi, 1988), p.4.

¹⁴¹⁴ There is a huge and growing body of literature on the crucial role that historical myths play in the construction of communal identities. The task of historiography is to illuminate these fictions and explain how they shape human societies. Joseph Mali, *Mythistory: The Making of a Modern Historiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp.1-35.

¹⁴¹⁵ According to estimates, during their rule the Kemalist dictatorship published between 1,5 million and 3 million books. Uluğ İğdemir, “Halkevleri Üzerine,” in: *Yılların İçinden* (Ankara, 1976), p.237; Hasan Taner, “Halkevlerinin Kitaplık Çalışmaları,” in: *Ülkü*, vol.2, no.15 (March 1948), p.12.

¹⁴¹⁶ Leman Şenalp, “Atatürk’ün kütüphanesi,” in: *Türk Kütüphaneciliği*, vol.16, no.2 (2002), pp.171-8; Id., “Atatürk’ün Tarih Bilgisi,” in: *Uluslararası İkinci Atatürk Sempozyumu* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Yayınları, 1991), vol.2, pp.717-27.

¹⁴¹⁷ Arsan (ed.), *Atatürk’ün Söylev ve Demeçleri*, vol.1, pp.269-80.

¹⁴¹⁸ *Cumhurbaşkanları, Başbakanlar ve Milli Eğitim Bakanlarının Milli Eğitimle İlgili Söylev ve Demeçleri* (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1946), vol.1, p.9.

¹⁴¹⁹ Hülya Adak, “National Myths and Self-Narrations: Mustafa Kemal’s *Nutuk* and Halide Edib’s *Memoirs* and *The Turkish Ordeal*,” in: *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol.102, no.2/3 (2003), pp.509-27.

the long-time Prime Minister noted that “it was not only necessary to eradicate centuries-old traditions, beliefs, and customs, *but to efface the memory as well.*”¹⁴²⁰ These general directives were received and acted upon at various levels by loyal subordinates such as Şükrü Kaya. During one of his monologues in parliament, Kaya boasted,

Again it was proven by a Turk, with the Turks’ hands and the Turks’ blood, that the outcome of history is not inevitable and predestined. We have changed the course of history... (applause) They tried to eliminate the Turks from this geography and erase them from the future of history... In our opinion every nation makes its own history...¹⁴²¹

Kaya’s exhortations could not have better characterized the relationship between power and the production of historical narratives. According to them, those who held power held the unforfeitable right to write history as they pleased. It would not take long before this attitude crystallized into the first concrete steps towards the (re)writing of history. As with most other intellectual and cultural pursuits under Young Turk totalitarianism, this would not be a multi-centered and democratic affair but a strictly top-down managed operation with minimum dissent. After a preparation period, Mustafa Kemal instituted the Association for the Study of Turkish History (*Türk Tarihi Tetkik Cemiyeti*) in the summer of 1930. The association employed veteran Young Turks as well as younger historians educated under CUP rule and would play a leading role in the construction of a hegemonic paradigm of Turkish historiography.¹⁴²² In the early 1930s, the Association was ordered to produce history books on the Turks. The first product was a 605-page volume entitled *Outlines of Turkish History (Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları)* and reflected the very ontology of nationalist mythistory.¹⁴²³ Many other volumes with similar content followed.¹⁴²⁴ These books chiefly traced the roots of the Turkish nation to prehistoric times, ascribed Turkishness to the Hittites, Sumerians, Akkadians, Kelts, Irish, Mongols, Russians, and Chinese, argued that “Turks” had spread “civilization” across the globe, and in general transcendentalized the nation.

Perfectly consistent with the current *Zeitgeist*, racism was one of the driving ideologies behind the production of these official histories. Textbooks offered to secondary

¹⁴²⁰ İsmet İnönü, *Hatıralar* (Ankara: Bilgi, 1987), vol.2, p.272, emphasis added.

¹⁴²¹ *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Zabıt Ceridesi*, vol.16, period V, meeting 2 (1937), p.59.

¹⁴²² Étienne Copeaux, *Espaces et temps de la nation turque: analyse d'une historiographie nationaliste 1931-1993* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 1997), pp.190-6.

¹⁴²³ Afet İnan et al., *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları* (Istanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1930).

¹⁴²⁴ For a treatment of the hegemonic canon of Turkish-nationalist mythistory see: Büşra Ersanlı, *İktidar ve Tarih: Türkiye’de “Resmî Tarih” Tezinin Oluşumu (1929-1937)* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2003), pp.114-38; Id., “History Textbooks as Reflections of the Political Self: Turkey (1930s and 1990s) and Uzbekistan (1990s),” in: *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol.34, no.2 (2002), pp.337-50.

school students contained passages arguing that “the Turkish race was the race which has preserved its character the most” and that Turks possessed “eternally superior distinct biological qualities.”¹⁴²⁵ Mustafa Kemal closely followed these works and convened the first “Turkish Historical Congress” in Ankara between 2 and 11 July 1932. The dictator personally attended the conference from beginning to the very end, on a balcony elevated above the participants. One of the speakers was Assistant Professor of Anthropology Dr. Şevket Aziz (Kansu) of Istanbul University’s Department of Medicine, who delivered a speech entitled, “The Anthropology of the Turks”. His lecture, frequently interrupted with loud rounds of applause, included charts of skull measurements of various “races” and pseudohistorical arguments for the racial superiority of the Turks. Aziz finished by turning to Mustafa Kemal and perorating: “O Hero, noble and great, strong-willed great man, I salute you with sincerity in the name of Turkish science and Turkish intellectuals.”¹⁴²⁶ The thunderous applause that followed captured the essence of mythistory produced under the Young Turk dictatorship: by deploying racist tropes of Turkish superiority against prevalent racist ideas in Europe that Turks were inferior, the regime was fighting fire with fire. For them, there was nothing ironic about the idea that in their phantasmagoria of battling Europe they had become fundamentally European. In addition, many contemporary European observers saw nothing problematic in this campaign and even offered rhetorical strategies of apologia. As two British authors wrote, “In so far as the ‘new history’ helps the modern Turks to break with the immediate decadent past it no doubt has a beneficial effect... Unlike the Nazi racial theories the Turkish study of the past has not yet reached sacrosanct conclusions.”¹⁴²⁷

Whereas the early history books ignored late Ottoman and Republican history in favour of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, when a history of the Republic was written, the narrative was an elaborate replica of Mustafa Kemal’s famous 1927 speech.¹⁴²⁸ The foundations of the myths and memories of the Turkish nation had been laid for decades to come. But these exercises involved more than the construction of the national narrative. In dismissing and sanitizing the Ottoman past, the Young Turk intelligentsia directly silenced the histories of the Ottoman peoples, many of whom were still existing in Turkey. Circassians, Kurds, Syrians, Arabs, Armenians, Greeks, and others remained unmentioned in the historiography and thus were obliterated from the theaters of memory. RPP party officials did

¹⁴²⁵ *Ortamektep İçin Tarih* (Istanbul: Devlet Basımevi, 1936), pp.20-21.

¹⁴²⁶ Şevket Aziz, “Türklerin Antropolojisi,” in: *Birinci Türk Tarih Kongresi: Konferanslar Münakaşalar* (Istanbul: T.C. Maarif Vekaleti, 1932), pp.271-8.

¹⁴²⁷ John Parker & Charles Smith, *Modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 1940), p.166.

¹⁴²⁸ *Tarih IV: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti* (Istanbul: Devlet Basımevi, 1931).

not fail to emphasize this by denying that Kurds had a history.¹⁴²⁹ Just as society had been cleared of “non-Turkish elements”, at this point so was history. Nationalist intellectuals such as İshak Refet (İşitman) could state during the Turkish Hearths conferences that “the Kurds have no history.”¹⁴³⁰ Lieutenant-Colonel Kadri Perk, who served in the 1925 campaigns, was at least as emphatic: “I have established through historical research that there is no race called Kurds; as for Armenians, they only came here as a result of migration and... quickly disappeared. I know the intricacies of writing history.”¹⁴³¹ Colonel Nuri Bey of the General Staff told a British military attaché that “Kurds are of very mixed and doubtful national origin and have no national unity.” According to him, the Kurds’ historical roots were “very doubtful” and since Kurdish “bears a strong resemblance to the Turkish dialects spoken in parts of Anatolia, such as the lower slopes of Erçiş Dağ,” the Kurds “derive largely from the Seljuk Turks, who preceded the Ottoman invasion.”¹⁴³² Whenever Kurds were mentioned in less radical terms, they still were the stepchildren of history. Writing about the Diyarbakir Kurds during the Ottoman-Safavid wars of the sixteenth century, one author contended that “many kurdish chieftains in this region changed sides during dangerous times in the war... opened fire on our army and in this way stabbed the Turkish army in the back. Throughout history these traitors have exhibited no merits other than banditry.”¹⁴³³ Which ethnic group had a history and which one did not was dictated by the hegemonic canons of nationalist historiography.

It is perhaps surprising to discover that Kemalist eagerness for historiography was only thinly disguised as memory and identity politics. After all, in order to mete out a new identity for society, a new memory needed to be meted out first. The writing of new histories would serve this purpose, and the regime did not make a particular effort to cloak this. One of the main contributors to the new nationalist historiography acknowledged that the creation of a new version of history would “quickly cause this society, consisting of Turks, to gain an identity.”¹⁴³⁴ That people already had identities did not matter. These could be changed, starting with the root of identity: surnames. The 1934 Surname Law, which enforced the adoption and registration of hereditary surnames in Turkish, was manifestly a project of memory politics. By strictly prohibiting all non-Turkish (i.e. Arabic, Persian, Slavic, Syriac,

¹⁴²⁹ İsmail Beşikçi, *Türk Tarih Tezi ve Kürt Sorunu: Güneş-Dil Teorisi* (Istanbul: Komal, 1977), pp.219-37.

¹⁴³⁰ *Türk Ocakları Üçüncü Kurultayı Zabıtları* (Istanbul: Kader, 1927), p.225.

¹⁴³¹ Kadri Perk, *Cenupdoğu Anadolu'nun Eski Zamanları* (Istanbul: İnkılap, 1934), p.71.

¹⁴³² PRO, FO 371/15369/E68, Clerk to Henderson, 5 January 1931, Interview between Major O'Leary and Nury Bey, 22 December 1930, “Some Observations on Kurdistan by Colonel Nuri Bey, General Staff.”

¹⁴³³ Günkut, *Diyarbakir Tarihi*, p.116.

¹⁴³⁴ Afet İnan, *Tarih İlminin Dinamik Karakteri* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi, 1956), p.7, emphasis added.

Greek, Armenian) suffixes and prevalent names such as “Son of a Kurd” (Kürtoğlu) or “Son of an Albanian” (Arnavutoğlu),¹⁴³⁵ the law attempted not only to make identities “legible”¹⁴³⁶ but also cut off their ties with the past. It also prescribed which surnames to assume.¹⁴³⁷ Where “Turkification” needed to be pursued at a more aggressive pace and intensity, such as in cosmopolitan Istanbul or in the eastern provinces, last names including the term “Turk” (*Türk*) or even “Pure Turk” (*Öztürk*) were imposed on non-Turks.¹⁴³⁸ In the eastern provinces, where people often bore a complex combination of personal names and the names of their tribes, households and extended families, this form of identity politics was generally experienced as intrusion into the private sphere.

These national memory and identity politics percolated into the fibres of society at an inexorable pace. The message radiated from Ankara to the nation and became institutionalized in local government, society, culture, education, media, academe, and intellectual life. For every region in Turkey, local historians educated in the Young Turk spirit or Ankara-based official historians assigned to write regional histories began gearing the new memory to local conditions. As was the case on the national level, local practices also consisted of two components: the construction of memory, and the destruction of memory.

Memory politics in Diyarbekir

The People’s Houses were partly responsible for publishing these books, for their periodicals were seen as suitable mouthpieces of official historiography.¹⁴³⁹ The canon of local history was written by the same local elites that had collaborated with the previous Young Turk regime. In Diyarbekir these were the Pirinççizâde and Müftüzâde families. As discussed in Chapter 2, it was none other than Ziya Gökalp who had initiated the study of Diyarbekir in the service of nationalist memory politics. Here too, there was a prehistory of CUP history-writing. More comprehensive studies of history were ordered by the Republican People’s Party in the late 1920s and especially the early 1930s. When it was Diyarbekir’s turn, the General Secretariat ordered the People’s House to “conduct scientific research in this region

¹⁴³⁵ “Soy Adı Nizamnamesi,” in: *Resmi Gazete*, no.2805 (20 December 1934).

¹⁴³⁶ Jeremy Mathias, James C. Scott & John Tehranian, “Naming Like a State: The Production of Legal Identities Proper to States: The Case of the Permanent Family Surname,” in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol.44, no.1 (2002), pp.4-44.

¹⁴³⁷ Ahmet Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene: Türk Ulusal Kimliğinin Etno-Seküler Sınırları (1919-1938)* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2001), p.236.

¹⁴³⁸ Meltem Türköz, “Surname Narratives and the State-Society Boundary: Memories of Turkey’s Family Name Law of 1934,” in: *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol.43, no.6 (2007), pp.893-908, at p.903; Beşikçi, *Türk Tarih Tezi*, p.219.

¹⁴³⁹ İlhan Başgöz & Howard E. Wilson, *Educational Problems in Turkey 1920-1940* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), p.155.

that is rich from the perspective of Turkish History and Archeology.” It allotted funds to this end and sparked off a decade of Young Turk historiography.¹⁴⁴⁰

One of the first texts written by the Republican People’s Party on Diyarbekir was a 1935 booklet titled *A Glance at Diyarbekir*. A city like Diyarbekir, with its rich ethnic heterogeneity and diverse architecture, embarrassed the Young Turk intelligentsia, who were continuously seeking to write “Turkishness” into history and society for particular reasons. The conclusion of *A Glance at Diyarbekir*, summarized in the last paragraphs, provided insight into the historical culture of the Young Turks:

The city of Amid [Diyarbekir] is not a city founded by the Assyrians, nor of the Iranians, Arabs or Greeks. It was founded in 2000 BC by Turkish Hittites who migrated westwards from Central Asia, and although in time it suffered invasions by the Assyrians, Persians and Romans, it never lost its Turkishness, national existence and language, and is a city that has always stayed Turkish.¹⁴⁴¹

Through the lens of this particular foundational myth, the origin of Turkish culture was located so early in history that it was lost in the mists of not real but mythic time, which symbolized the timelessness of the nation. The booklet set the tone for much of Young Turk official historiography on Diyarbekir. The first proper history book was the ambitious three-volume *The History of Diyarbekir*, published in 1936 by the party press.¹⁴⁴² It was the local equivalent of the national histories provided by the Association for the Study of Turkish History. The first two volumes expounded on pre-Ottoman history in the same way that national histories had: Diyarbekir was established by the Hittites, the Hittites were Turks, ergo Diyarbekir was Turkish. A second history book was published by Usman Eti, who argued that “Diyarbekir, the foundation of which was laid by Turks, is Turkish and nothing but Turkish from its smallest pebble to the largest tower, and today just like yesterday is a cultural center of the east and a sacred nest of Turkishness.”¹⁴⁴³ History books were written about the districts of Diyarbekir or provincial towns as well. The publication of the book *History of Silvan*,¹⁴⁴⁴ of which 2000 copies were printed, was reported as “the grateful fruit of a labor and effort to present the place of Silvan in Turkish history.” Local officials requested the Party to purchase 1000 copies to “distribute to all People’s Houses and Rooms.”¹⁴⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴⁰ BCA, 490.01/996.850.1, RPP General Secretariat to Fourth Bureau, 3 January 1941.

¹⁴⁴¹ *Diyarbekire Bir Bakış* (Diyarbekir: Diyarbekir Basımevi, 1935), pp.24-30.

¹⁴⁴² Basri Konyar, *Diyarbekir Tarihi* (Ankara: Ulus Basımevi, 1936).

¹⁴⁴³ Usman Eti, *Diyarbekir* (Diyarbakır: Diyarbekir Matbaası, 1937), p.55.

¹⁴⁴⁴ Süleyman Savcı, *Silvan Tarihi* (Diyarbakır: CHP Diyarbakır Halkevi Neşriyatı no.13, 1949).

¹⁴⁴⁵ BCA, 490.01/902.525.1, RPP Regional Inspector of Diyarbakır Frat to RPP General Secretariat, 18 February 1949.

Probably the most significant and exemplary book on Diyarbekir history was written by regime propagandist Bedri Günkut, entitled *The History of Diyarbekir* and published by the Diyarbekir People's House. In his study Günkut ascribed a universal Turkishness to all the regions of Diyarbekir province, harking back to the Assyrian era. But unlike the previous books, Günkut's study went to far greater lengths to identify the "Turkishness" and erase all non-Turkish cultures from Diyarbekir history. His book is worth examining in some detail. The second chapter was titled "History", and "began" history with the Sumerian era: "The Turkish nation, which was living the world's most civilized life even in Prehistory, fled westwards 9 to 10,000 years ago due to natural and inescapable reasons and undoubtedly also passed through Mesopotamia and the vicinity of Diyarbekir..."¹⁴⁴⁶ Günkut went on to state that "the nation first to have eked out a civilized existence in the Diyarbekir area is the Turkish nation." He did not deviate from the party line when portraying the myths of origin: "Despite temporary invasions and destructions by the Assyrian, Persian, Greek, and Roman regimes, the great Turkish race has always lived in this country."¹⁴⁴⁷ Under the title, "Stories about the foundation of this city", Günkut reviewed nine historical narratives about the "origins" of the city: the Akkadian, Persian, Assyrian, Arab, Parthian, Greek, Armenian, Hittite, and Turkish theses. The author evaluated all the myths and dismissed, with increasing severity, disapproval, and contempt, one by one, the first eight theories. For example, according to Günkut, "the claim that Amid was founded by arabs can be nothing else than a lie, a ludicrous fabrication by arabs and arabophiles." Out of disdain the names of non-Turkish ethnic groups were consciously and consistently written not with capital but with small letter: the literature spoke not of Kurds, Arabs, and Armenians, but of kurds, arabs, and armenians. As a grand finale Günkut repeated the regime's mantra: "Diyarbekir city has never lost its Turkishness, its National Existence and has always remained Turkish."¹⁴⁴⁸

With its obviously varied architecture, Diyarbekir needed symbolization and discourse for retrospective "Turkification" of its cityscape as well. Whereas public space in the city was contested in the Ottoman Empire, the Young Turks now held hegemony over it. Nationalist historians such as Günkut went on to deny that any other culture than the Turkish one had ever contributed to Diyarbekir's architectural heritage. Writing about the Behram Pasha mosque, he denied: "Nowadays whether in or on the building there is no single trace of persian and arab work," accusing anybody claiming "that Behram Pasha was an arab" of

¹⁴⁴⁶ Bedri Günkut, *Diyarbekir Tarihi* (Diyarbakır: Diyarbekir Halkevi, 1937), p.26.

¹⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.27.

¹⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.45.

“fabricating this from scratch.” The author then explored the architectural history of the Great Mosque, an Orthodox church which was converted to a mosque following the Muslim capture of Diyarbekir in 639 AD. He attacked Ottoman historians, observers, and travelers such as Evliya Çelebi for noting that the minaret had been a bell tower, concluding, “In short, no matter how one interprets this, it is not likely but absolutely certain that this mosque was built by the Turks.”¹⁴⁴⁹ Although Günkut simply ignored the Syrian Orthodox and Chaldean churches and Jewish synagogues of Diyarbekir, his depiction of the Armenian heritage was most radical: “Above all, I can state with absolute certainty that nowhere in the entire city there is even a single trace of armenianness to be found.”¹⁴⁵⁰

After skipping six centuries of Ottoman history, Günkut leaped straight to the first decades of the twentieth century. His historical portrayal of the Young Turk era of violence is most striking. In a region in which more than 100,000 Armenians were destroyed, this author pioneered the denial of the genocide: “In the Great War, this region was saved from Russian invasions and Armenian massacres and arson.” With the Sheikh Said rebellion only a decade past, Günkut’s narrative on the 1925 violence was more elaborate. The Kurdish insurgency was almost exclusively attributed to conspiracies from outside: Sheikh Said was not part of the Kurdish intelligentsia or elite but “an extremely ignorant fanatic... who became the tool of foreigners... with several other uncultured vagabonds.” The narrative then took a turn towards disinformation as Günkut argued that the Kurds had “committed bloodcurdling atrocious acts in Lice and Silvan,” where they had purportedly “monstrously dismembered young Turkish patriots.”¹⁴⁵¹ In this remarkable reversal of the historical account, all violence in Diyarbekir had been committed by Armenians and Kurds against Turks. Misrepresentation could only be called so if there was a body of knowledge to counteract it. Whatever counternarratives were being produced in Syria in Armenian, Kurdish, or Arabic, the regime did not allow them to compete for consumption by the population of Diyarbekir. Especially when it came to the violence, the dictatorship held hegemony over memory politics and debates about the past.

The canon of official literature was as much about dictating the past as projecting the future. Early in the book, Günkut prognosticated about Diyarbekir, “Every traitor should now that Diyarbekir city, every molecule of which came into being from the flesh and bones of pure Turks, and its soil, which was watered by the very clean blood of the Turks, will always

¹⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.122, 133-5, 141.

¹⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.156. This discourse of total denial of anything Armenian was reproduced in Kemalist texts on the districts of Diyarbekir as well. One author wrote that Armenian existence in Ergani “had not had the slightest significance.” Muhtar Körükçü, “Ergani’nin Zülküf Dağı,” in: *Karacadağ*, vol.VII, no.85-86 (December/January 1945-1946).

¹⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp.144-5.

remain Turkish just like all other cities of the Turks.”¹⁴⁵² More than a hundred pages later the message was repeated. Not only was it certain that there were “not hundreds but thousands of documents in the city proving that Diyarbekir is a Turkish city”, but these “documents” would serve to “illustrate that, just as it has been the case so far, from now on Diyarbekir will always remain a Turkish city *at all points in time*.”¹⁴⁵³ The transcendentalism in this future vision was as explicit as it was exclusionary. At a time when Armenians and Syrians were being expelled to Syria at rapid pace, this narrative of the nation, created and perpetuated in Ankara, acted to shape politics: there was no place anymore for non-Turkish cultures in Diyarbekir. As minorities were being driven out of the country, they were literally being driven out of history and memory as well.

A final dimension of the magnum opus, *The History of Diyarbekir*, was its narrative of the Diyarbekir economy. Although that had been multi-ethnic for centuries, now even the economy was whitewashed as always having been “Turkish”. The disappearance of silk weavers, miners, carpenters, blacksmiths, jewellers, and many other craftsmen was explained as follows:

Once upon a time, especially before the Great War, these crafts had developed to a high level. The recession that had struck all countries also made itself felt here. As in all Turkish cities, during the political crisis that continued briefly after the war, the locals here too were preoccupied with the struggle for Turkish independence, as a result of which the crafts stagnated even further. But the National War and revolutions that our Great Leader Atatürk created gave birth to the growth of various crafts in Diyarbekir. Nowadays, the aforementioned crafts are developing beyond the pre-war level.¹⁴⁵⁴

In this account, the crafts, devoid of agency, had declined during the war due to unknown forces, and most of all, the anonymous craftsmen had disappeared. Not surprisingly, nowhere in this narrative is there a reference to the CUP’s devastating policies of “Turkification” of the economy by violent expropriation of Christians.

Another propagandist, Hasan Reşit Tankut, offered an answer to this enigma: “The Turks were the first people to find mines and bring them into production.” According to him, these first Turks, “of a beautiful race... with light skins, eyes, and hair”, had brought these crafts from Central Asia to the Diyarbekir region in 5000 BC.¹⁴⁵⁵ According to Tankut, Qitirbil, one of the villages on the Diyarbekir plain where the genocidal killings were initiated

¹⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, pp.37-45.

¹⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp.158-9, emphasis added.

¹⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.17.

¹⁴⁵⁵ Hasan Reşit Tankut, *Diyarbakır adı üzerinde toponomik bir tetkik* (Ankara: Ulus Basımevi, 1937), p.3.

in 1915, was Turkish “from days immemorial... because in that region minerals were plenty and the Turks were skillful miners... When these miner Turks came to this region they named it after the nearby copper mines.”¹⁴⁵⁶ It is most likely that this myth of mining captured in Tankut’s and Günkut’s narratives contributed to the production of a new discourse on the very name “Diyarbakir” in the mid-1930s (see below).

There was nothing hyperbolic or paradoxical to the authors that in these theories, “Turks” had founded Diyarbakir in an ancient past, but still had to conquer it at a later time; “Turks” had founded a “superior civilization” there, but still had to “civilize” the city in the 1930s. Constructing the myths and memories of the nation did not meet much resistance from an intellectually and politically emasculated Diyarbakir. After all, the population now consisted of barely educated peasants, a few indifferent or self-serving elites, and acquiescent collaborators. Counternarratives were written in cities such as Paris, Cairo, Boston, Aleppo, Los Angeles. For two generations of local citizens and scholars growing up under the Young Turk regime in Diyarbakir, these Kemalist books represented the cornerstones of modern history. They were widely distributed and read by younger generations with no recollections of the times that were recorded and represented in the official histories. The books by the 1930s *école* of official historians still constitute the canon of Diyarbakir histories. They laid the foundation of a body of knowledge which generations of students would tap into.

Even during the first years of the Republic, the local Young Turk elites attempted to carve out a local niche for the national canon of books. In May 1926 the Diyarbakir Turkish Hearth proposed that the government establish a “national library” in the city. The chairman, Arif Mehmet, reported to the Ankara government that the Diyarbakir Turkish Hearth was “renowned for struggling for the erasure of traces of foreign cultures in Diyarbakir, which has historically and ethnographically been a completely Turkish city.” In order to continue this mission, the government was petitioned for support to establish a library for the Turkish “national and civilized existence.” This would in its turn “spread national sentiments and the principles of republicanism and populism.” In his letter, the chairman asked the government to send Turkish-language books on sociology, history, science, education, and literature.¹⁴⁵⁷ As discussed in the previous chapter, the Chairman of Section 1 of Diyarbakir’s People’s House (Language, History, Literature) was the mayor, former militia leader Müftüzâde Şeref Uluğ. At least two members of the Pirinççizade family were involved in the section on

¹⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.4-5.

¹⁴⁵⁷ *BCA*, 30.10.0.0/117.816.13, Chairman of the Diyarbakir Turkish Hearth Arif Mehmet to Interior Ministry, 4 May 1926.

Villages.¹⁴⁵⁸ In addition, during the Turkish Hearths conferences of the 1920s the representative for Diyarbekir was the former militia leader Pirinççizâde Sıdkı.¹⁴⁵⁹ These men were assigned to publish a local journal titled *Karacadağ*, which followed the Ankara-based journal *Ülkü* by translating the national Turkish narrative to local conditions.¹⁴⁶⁰ Ceding authority to the local génocidaires for writing local historiography naturally solidified the existing culture of denial and systemic exclusions in the construction of the “national” body of knowledge.

One of the major actions of these local Young Turks was to appropriate the very rich library established in 1764 by the Ottoman official Sarı Abdurrahman Pasha. This library was situated adjacent to the Great Mosque.¹⁴⁶¹ From the late 1920s on, the library became the object of nationalist politics by Culture Ministry officials as its then content of books in Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, and Persian was assessed for its usefulness and suitability as a resource for “Turkishness”. Eventually that would define its level of retention. To reflect this change, in 1932 the library was renamed National Library by local Young Turks and General



Photo 50: The new library in Diyarbekir (Birinci Genel Müfettişlik, 1939)

Cevat Şakir (Çobanlı) (1871-1938).¹⁴⁶² In this process it was reconstituted and filled with post-1928 books, journals, and newspapers. In 1939 the library was united with the People’s House library, now numbering a total of 7000 volumes, and placed under the aegis of Müftüzâde Şeref Uluğ. Two years later, the Party sent cultural inspector Kemal Güngör to evaluate the library’s old collection. Güngör found the old collection, which he

characterized as “invaluable”, stored in a depot in an uncatalogued, unread, unused and neglected state. He reported widespread negligence and made a list of the 5856 volumes.¹⁴⁶³ The fate of these two libraries in Diyarbekir symbolized the transition from Ottoman to Turkish, a cultural rupture engineered from above.

¹⁴⁵⁸ *BCA*, 490.01/984.814.2, Diyarbekir People’s House Director Çubukçu to RPP General Secretariat, 23 December 1935.

¹⁴⁵⁹ *Türk Ocakları 1928 Senesi Kurultayı Zabıtları* (Ankara: n.p., 1930), pp.2-3.

¹⁴⁶⁰ Both journals were published by the respective People’s Houses. *Ülkü* was published from 1933 to 1950, *Karacadağ* from 1933 to 1946.

¹⁴⁶¹ Günkut, *Diyarbakır Tarihi*, p.125.

¹⁴⁶² Usman Eti, *Diyarbakır* (Diyarbakır: Diyarbakır Matbaası, 1937), p.41. General Çobanlı had been put in charge of destroying the 1924 Nestorian ‘rebellion’, a military campaign which escalated into the wholesale destruction of Nestorian villages in the Hakkari region.

¹⁴⁶³ *BCA*, 490.01/1045.1015.2, People’s House Inspector Kemal Güngör to RPP General Secretariat, 26 December 1940.

The construction of new libraries did not suffice for consumption by the public. The Party continuously examined circulation, even in the smallest of the libraries. As one contemporary observer wrote,

The House libraries were also major cultural assets. This was particularly so once the change had been made from the Arabic to Latin script. Book collections in Arabic soon became antiquated. In provincial towns, that were often without any other library, the People's Houses made printed materials available to thousands of people. Books were selected and purchased by the Party's central offices. In 1943, 55,147 books were acquired and distributed by the RPP. And the House in Ankara alone managed to accumulate a library of 40,000 volumes over the years that the program had been in effect.¹⁴⁶⁴

In the summer of 1935, the Library and Publishing section of the Diyarbekir People's House was reported of boasting a library of almost 1000 books. According to the report "no less than 10 readers" could be found in the reading room every day.¹⁴⁶⁵ Annual evaluation reports sent directly to the Party summed up how many people had been reading the new canon: from 1 January 1935 to 15 December 1935 a total of 2580 people had visited the reading room and had read from the 1500 books the library possessed.¹⁴⁶⁶ The 1941 evaluation of the province's People's Houses was no less glowing: the province harbored five libraries (Diyarbekir, Silvan, Ergani, Lice, and Çermik), numbering a total of 22,000 books. But the Party monitored more than how many people were reading the approved, new literature. It also kept its eye on the old, prohibited literature. Not infrequent the reports were signed with the note: "There are no prohibited books in the library catalogue."¹⁴⁶⁷ Perhaps the most poignant illustration of Young Turk memory policies in Diyarbekir is represented in the last sentence of a report sent by the Director of the Ergani People's House, who reported to his superiors in Ankara, "It is a great honour to report that our library... does not contain any books written in foreign languages or in the old letters."¹⁴⁶⁸ Indeed, by the time World War II broke out, monolingualism had become an entrenched literary culture and a source of pride in modern Turkey. In 1942 the poet Cahit Sıtkı Tarancı, based in Diyarbekir, wrote to his friend in

¹⁴⁶⁴ Başgöz & Wilson, *Educational Problems in Turkey*, p.151. For numbers of books distributed see: *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi Halkevleri ve Halkodaları* (Ankara: Ulus, 1945), p.13.

¹⁴⁶⁵ *BCA*, 490.01/1005.880.3, People's House Inspector Alaettin Tekmen to RPP General Secretary Recep Peker, 28 August 1935.

¹⁴⁶⁶ *BCA*, 490.01/984.814.2, Diyarbekir People's House Director Çubukçu to RPP General Secretariat, 23 December 1935.

¹⁴⁶⁷ *BCA*, 490.01/996.850.1, RPP General Secretariat to Fourth Bureau, 3 January 1941.

¹⁴⁶⁸ *BCA*, 490.01/1036.986.01, Ergani People's House Director Dr. Şevki Kılıççı to RPP General Secretariat, 8 February 1945.

Istanbul, “The People’s House here does not receive any other journal than *Ülkü*.”¹⁴⁶⁹ Young Turk cultural policies aimed to produce a continuous process of cultural homogenization.

The politics of memory consists of more than the production of narratives and maintenance of libraries. Constructing museums, holding public commemorations, and erecting sculptures were also part of the broad ambit of the regime’s practices of memorialization. The 1941 evaluation of the People’s House suggested the thousands of old books of Diyarbekir, now obsolete and useless due to the change of alphabet, be sent to the National Museum in Ankara. The regime was disinterested in having these books read, so perfectly legible cultural assets now became museum pieces.¹⁴⁷⁰ The suggestion was accepted and implemented a decade later, when a comprehensive reorganization of the People’s Houses libraries was carried out by the General Directorate of Old Works and Museums of the Ministry of National Education. The old books were collected in the national museum in the city and in Ankara.¹⁴⁷¹ Like all nation states, Young Turkey also engaged in large-scale commemorative events. The “great days” of the Republic were routinely commemorated in grandeur: 23 April (“National Independence Day”), 19 May (“Day of Atatürk”), 30 August (“Day of Victory”), 29 October (“Day of the Republic”). To this a special day was added for commemorating Atatürk’s special ties with Diyarbekir: on 5 April 1926 the Young Turks in city hall proclaimed the dictator “honorary compatriot” of Diyarbekir city in honor of Kemal’s 5 April 1917 visit to the city. From then on, 5 April would be celebrated in Diyarbekir as “Atatürk Day”.¹⁴⁷²

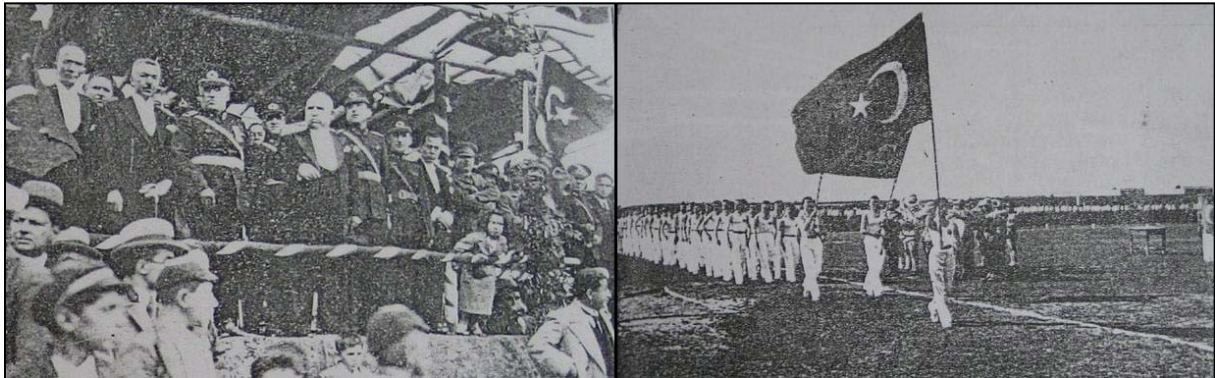


Photo 51: A nationalist procession in Diyarbekir in 1937 (Birinci Genel Müfettişlik, 1939)

¹⁴⁶⁹ Cahit Sıtkı Tarancı to Ziya Osman Saba, 19 February 1942, quoted in: Ziya Osman Saba, “Cahit’le Günlerimiz,” in: Cahit Sıtkı Tarancı, *Ziya’ya Mektuplar 1930-1946* (Istanbul: Varlık, 1957), p.98.

¹⁴⁷⁰ *BCA*, 490.01/996.850.1, RPP General Secretariat to Fourth Bureau, 3 January 1941.

¹⁴⁷¹ *BCA*, 490.01/1045.1015.2, Minister of National Education to RPP General Secretariat, 5 July 1951.

¹⁴⁷² Günkut, *Diyarbakir Tarihi*, pp.148-9.

Occasional commemorations were about specific historical events. In July 1943 the People's House hosted several lectures in Diyarbakir about the history of the Bosphorus. The lectures always finished with the words: "The straits are Turkish and will remain Turkish for eternity."¹⁴⁷³ To commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the "Lausanne victory" on 24 July 1943 a group of People's House members convened in the institution's garden. The chairman of the House, Dr. Bedri Noyan, then gave a long speech on the Sevres and Lausanne treaties, advocating the latter's "greatness as a victory." This speech was delivered "in a language that the people would understand really well" and was followed by an evening celebration.¹⁴⁷⁴ The evidence suggests that commemorations like this were not mere local initiatives of goodwill, but were often intended to keep local memory in line with what politicians in Ankara were propagating.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was the central focus of public manifestations of memory. Sculptures of him spread across the country in a matter of years and well before his death adorned every main square in the country. Diyarbakir was no exception. In the case of memorializing Atatürk too, bottom-up initiatives that fit into the strategic framework of the decision makers in the the political center were undertaken. In March 1935, the local Young Turk elite in Diyarbakir, under the auspices of mayor Müftüzâde Şeref Uluğ, proposed the erection of a statue of Kemal Atatürk in the main square of Diyarbakir. They pointed out their willingness to spend 20,000 TL on this statue but could not decide whether "the statue should represent General Mustafa Kemal Pasha who saved Diyarbakir from a Russian invasion during the Great War, or the revolutionary Atatürk." They also asked "which one among the Turkish artists comes highly recommended."¹⁴⁷⁵ The Party did not make its disciples wait long for a one-line answer: "It is appropriate to be constructed as the revolutionary Atatürk."¹⁴⁷⁶ The locals now went to work. Sketches were drawn, the statue's location in the city was discussed, and a sculptor by the name of Arif Hikmet was recruited for the job. Finally the Diyarbakir elite decided on having the statue erected on a "large and modern sculpture square" at the entrance of Diyarbakir's Mountain Gate, at that time the object of "urban modernization". Since nothing was too good for Mustafa Kemal, financial obstacles were dismissed and 25,000 TL was allotted for the project, scheduled for completion in the spring of 1936.¹⁴⁷⁷ The project was finished and a large Atatürk sculpture arose on the left

¹⁴⁷³ *Diyarbakir*, 21 July 1943.

¹⁴⁷⁴ *Diyarbakir*, 30 July 1943.

¹⁴⁷⁵ *BCA*, 490.01/2013.9.1, Diyarbakir Mayor to RPP General Secretary Recep Peker, 28 March 1935.

¹⁴⁷⁶ *BCA*, 490.01/2013.9.1, RPP General Secretary Recep Peker to Diyarbakir Municipality, 8 June 1935.

¹⁴⁷⁷ *Diyarbakire Bir Bakış* (Diyarbakir: Diyarbakir Basımevi, 1935), pp.4-5.

side of the boulevard leading from the Mountain Gate to the barracks. Symbolically, Atatürk the omniscient was overseeing all entry into and exit from the city.¹⁴⁷⁸ In the provincial towns of Diyarbakir the procedure seems to have been more top-down. The erection of the Atatürk statue in Ergani, for example, was directly ordered by Atatürk's loyal Interior Minister Şükrü Kaya.¹⁴⁷⁹

Toponymical changes

Though geography and memory are two seemingly unrelated phenomena, in nationalist thought they are closely linked. Nation-formation processes entail the nationalization of territory, co-occurring with the changing of place-names.¹⁴⁸⁰ The attack on non-Turkish memory implied as a necessary accompaniment an attack on the memory of the space in which the non-Turkish peoples lived. To the Young Turks, non-Turkish place-names were constant obnoxious reminders of the region's diverse past (and present) and therefore needed to be tackled through large-scale Turkification of place-names. Enforcing new place-names would symbolically express Turkish nationalism in the face of the existing vista of multi-ethnic diversity. Both the Committee of Union and Progress and the Republican People's Party attempted to Turkify the political landscape of Turkey by forcibly changing place-names. What seemed like (and has been studied as) an isolated and relatively innocent undertaking was an inextricable part of the broader, long-term campaign to "Turkify" every corner of the eastern provinces.¹⁴⁸¹

When the British diplomat Mark Sykes traveled through Diyarbakir before World War I he noted that "the whole country between Palu and Diarbekir is singularly poor in nomenclature, mountains, rivers, torrents, and even villages being equally unconnected with any definite designation. One bunch of villages will have one name, and the people, whether Christian or Moslem, dwelling therein are known by that name, even as are the rivers passing the villages, the valleys in which they lie, and the mountains which overlook them."¹⁴⁸² This would change. During World War I, the CUP issued orders for place-names of provinces, cities, towns, villages, rivers, forests, and mountains "that have no relation with Turkishness to be changed," excising specifically Armenian, Greek, and Bulgarian names and appending a

¹⁴⁷⁸ Konyar, *Diyarbakir Tarihi*, p.266.

¹⁴⁷⁹ *BCA*, 490.01/2013.9.1, Interior Minister Şükrü Kaya to Diyarbakir Vice-Governor Kâzım Demirer, 26 July 1937.

¹⁴⁸⁰ See e.g.: Saul B. Cohen & Nurit Kliot, "Place-Names in Israel's Ideological Struggle over the Administered Territories," in: *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol.82, no.4 (1992), pp.653-80.

¹⁴⁸¹ Kerem Öktem, "The Nation's Imprint: Demographic Engineering and the Change of Toponyms in Republican Turkey," in: *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, no.7 (2008), at: <http://www.ejts.org/document2243.html>

¹⁴⁸² Mark Sykes, *The Caliphs' Last Heritage: A Short History of the Turkish Empire* (London: n.p., 1915), p.363.

list of acceptable names with the order.¹⁴⁸³ All throughout the war detailed reports came pouring in from the provinces on the local state of affairs regarding toponymics. When the renaming campaign caused considerable confusion for the army, it was suspended and postponed to the end of the war, even though the collection of information continued.¹⁴⁸⁴ However, the Turkification of place-names was not a strictly top-down affair. The CUP's Turkish Hearths frequently took the initiative to have village and neighbourhood names changed, even during the deportation and destruction of those communities after whom the villages were named. Thus, during and after the killing and deportation of local Armenians, physical traces that reminded of the Armenians were often effaced.¹⁴⁸⁵ Destruction of the community was immediately followed by the destruction of their memory.

In this campaign too, there are continuities to be found between the first and the second Young Turk era. During the Independence War, furious parliamentarians persistently launched thunderous verbal demands for place-names to be changed. As one fulminated, "As someone living in this country I refuse to carry the name of a nation that has wanted to attack our honour, existence, and presence like dogs."¹⁴⁸⁶ Although in principle these types of motions were endorsed by all, the government considered it unwise to act impulsively in the heat of the war and generally shelved their execution until after the war. Postponement did not mean cancellation: from the 1920s place-names were changed systematically, starting with some of the most conspicuous examples of Armenian, Greek, and Bulgarian symbolism.¹⁴⁸⁷ But the campaign did not only affect Christian place-names. With the promulgation of the Republic the political climate in Turkey was so conducive to silencing minorities that non-Turkish Muslim cultures too were silenced and relegated to invisibility in the public sphere. Thus, the term 'Lazistan', named after the ethnic Laz of the eastern Black Sea region, disappeared from maps and public discourse. Nationalist journals published articles arguing that

in no part of Anatolia there is a place called Kurdistan. Anatolia is only Anatolia, Anatolia is a strictly a Turkish land. Anatolia is a unitary body and no fragment can be separated. Kurdistan is a fabricated, imagined part in the map of Anatolia. Naming a part of Anatolia after this name is a threat to the unity of Anatolia.¹⁴⁸⁸

¹⁴⁸³ *BOA*, İUM 48/28, document 1, Talaat to Elaziz province, 12 January 1916.

¹⁴⁸⁴ *BOA*, İUM 48/28, document 37.

¹⁴⁸⁵ Necdet Sakaoğlu, *Kuruluşundan günümüze kadar "çeşm-i cihan" Amasra: coğrafî, içtimâî ve turistik özellikleri ile 35 asırlık tarihi ve tarih eserleri* (Istanbul: Latin, 1966), pp.186-7.

¹⁴⁸⁶ *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Zabıt Ceridesi*, vol.11, period 1, p.100.

¹⁴⁸⁷ Murat Koraltürk, "Milliyetçi bir refleks: Yer adlarının Türkleştirilmesi," in: *Toplumsal Tarih*, vol.19, no.117 (2003), pp.98-99.

¹⁴⁸⁸ A.M. (Ziyaeddin Fahri Fındıkoğlu), "Aym İzleri," in: *Anadolu Mecmuası*, vol.9-11 (May 1925), pp.390-1.

Although the Kurdish-nationalist intelligentsia had protested against this form of toponymical erasure ever since the CUP had initiated it, the regime insisted and stretched the term “Anatolia” all the way to Turkey’s eastern borders.¹⁴⁸⁹ This campaign had international ramifications as well. When the regime discovered that *Der Grosse Weltatlas* contained the terms “Kurdistan” and “Armenia” within Turkish national borders¹⁴⁹⁰ it had all copies of the German-language atlas confiscated and destroyed, and further entry of the book into Turkey prohibited.¹⁴⁹¹ For the same reason the French map *L’asie mineure*, published by Girard et Barrère, and the *Atlas Mondial* published by Jean Dolfus, were prohibited and ordered destroyed.¹⁴⁹² The message was clear: drawing maps of the future or the past was unacceptable, and the renaming campaign was to continue until the very last hamlet.

The non-Turkish names were changed into various Turkish ones, including the names of leading Young Turks. Several places were renamed after Talaat (“Talatpaşa”) and Mustafa Kemal (“Kemalpaşa” and “Mustafakemalpaşa”). In addition to renaming, leading Young Turks were imprinted on the landscape when constructions were named after them. One example was the concrete bridge over the Euphrates, constructed in 1932. On the order of Mustafa Kemal, on completion the bridge was named after Prime Minister İsmet İnönü.¹⁴⁹³ The train station of Surek near Erzincan was named Cebesoy (after Ali Fuat Cebesoy),¹⁴⁹⁴ and the town of Saray in Van province was changed into Kâzımpaşa (after one of the four generals named Kâzım).¹⁴⁹⁵ Right after the 1938 massacre of Dersim the town of Pulus was renamed Fevziçakmak, after Chief of Staff General Fevzi Çakmak, key person responsible for the killings.¹⁴⁹⁶ From the 1930s on, the Turkification became more categorical and systematic. The 1936 Law for Provincial Rule stipulated in its first article that within the borders of the Turkish Republic all place-names were to be changed into Turkish ones.¹⁴⁹⁷ Thus the name “Elaziz” was felt to be too Arabic and changed into “Elazığ”.¹⁴⁹⁸ The same was in store for the border town of Reyhaniye, “Turkified” into Reyhanlı immediately after the Turkish

¹⁴⁸⁹ Mehmet Bayrak (ed.), *Kürtler ve Ulusal-Demokratik Mücadeleleri: Gizli Belgeler - Araştırmalar - Notlar* (Ankara: Özge, 1993), p.497.

¹⁴⁹⁰ *Der Grosse Weltatlas: Bearbeitet und mit der Hand gestochen in der kartographischen Anstalt des Bibliographischen Instituts, mit Bemerkungen zu den Karten von Dr. Edgar Lehmann und einem Register mit etwa 80.000 Namen. 6., vermehrte und verbesserte Auflage* (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut AG, 1939).

¹⁴⁹¹ *BCA*, 030.18.01.02/88.83.20, Prime Ministry decree, 3 September 1939.

¹⁴⁹² *BCA*, 030.18.01.02/90.31.7, Prime Ministry decree, 3 April 1940; 030.18.01.02/123.70.2, Prime Ministry decree, 4 September 1950.

¹⁴⁹³ *BCA*, 030.10/155.90.8, General İzzettin Çalışlar to Prime Minister İsmet İnönü, 5 October 1932.

¹⁴⁹⁴ *BCA*, 030.11.1.0/173.2.6, Interior Ministry decree, undated.

¹⁴⁹⁵ *BCA*, 030.18.1.02/26.13.10, Council of Ministers decree, 2 March 1932.

¹⁴⁹⁶ *BCA*, 030.11.1.0/87.52.20, Interior Ministry decree, 10 June 1939.

¹⁴⁹⁷ *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Zabıt Ceridesi*, vol.12, period V, session 1 (1936), p.14.

¹⁴⁹⁸ *BCA*, 030.18.1.02/80.100.14, Council of Ministers decree, 10 December 1937.

annexation of 1939.¹⁴⁹⁹ Mapavri in the eastern Black Sea region was regarded to be too Laz-sounding and was changed into Çaybaşı.¹⁵⁰⁰ Armenian names bore the brunt of the renaming fervor. When the regime found out that the name of Bingöl's provincial capital, Çabakçur, meant "cold water" in Armenian, it was changed into Bingöl.¹⁵⁰¹

It was clear that the eastern half of Turkey, with its thousands of Armenian, Syriac, Kurdish and Arab villages, was more affected by these nationalist memory politics. Compared to the western provinces, more names were changed in the eastern provinces than in any other region, as shown in Table 4:

Table 4: Toponymical changes in the eastern provinces by 1967

	Number of villages	Names changed	Percentage
Adıyaman	354	220	65
Ağrı	564	362	65
Antep	596	284	48
Bingöl	319	247	80
Bitlis	278	229	86
Diyarbakır	698	461	68
Elazığ	595	396	68
Erzincan	580	352	63
Erzurum	1054	650	63
Gümüşhane	508	342	68
Hakkari	147	111	80
Kars	790	401	52
Malatya	512	219	44
Mardin	726	652	91
Muş	381	286	77
Siirt	515	420	84
Trabzon	566	401	72
Tunceli	453	288	68
Urfa	710	394	57
Van	580	426	75

Source: Zeyrek, 2006.

In the eastern provinces, 7,141 village names were changed out of a total of 10,926, averaging up to 69%. For the western provinces, this number was only 21%.¹⁵⁰² In a province like Mardin, almost all place names were changed into Turkish ones. All other place-names were deemed sufficiently Turkish and remained unchanged.

¹⁴⁹⁹ *BCA*, 030.11.1.0/161.11.6, Interior Ministry decree, 2 June 1943.

¹⁵⁰⁰ *BCA*, 030.11.1.0/104.9.1, Interior Ministry decree, 20 January 1944.

¹⁵⁰¹ *BCA*, 030.11.1.0/107.85.14, Interior Ministry decree, 13 December 1944.

¹⁵⁰² Şerafettin Zeyrek, "Türkiye'de Köy Adlarını Değiştirme Politikası," in: *Çukurova Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, vol.1, no.31 (2006), pp.86-95.

As with the other eastern provinces, Diyarbekir was thoroughly affected by the changing of place names. In an effort to cut off ties to the Ottoman past and de-Islamize it, the name of the province and the city was changed from Diyarbekir to Diyarbakır. As we saw in Chapter 6, the discourse legitimizing this change was formulated by authors such as Bedri Günkut and Hasan Reşit Tankut, but the final decision was made by the highest authority. During his tour of the northern Diyarbekir region, on 17 November 1937 Atatürk ordered one of his clerks to wire Ankara and ask, “Are there any studies of the etymology of the name Diyarbekir? In reality, this city needs to be known as Diyarbakır, which means land of copper, and from now on it will be known by this name. The Turkish Language Society and the Turkish Historical Society are ordered to collaborate and conduct historical and linguistic research on this matter.” Whereas *Diyarbekir* (“The Land of Bekir” after the first caliph Abū Bakr) symbolized the Islamic past, *Diyarbakır* (“bakır” is Turkish for copper) would from then on symbolize its secular Turkish future. The morning after Atatürk’s order, a committee of Young Turk intellectuals convened and discussed the Leader’s proposal. Although a few hardliners proposed changing the name into the more Turkish-sounding *Bakireli*, soon consensus was reached over the issue that Atatürk’s proposal should be considered. Thus, the committee agreed on providing the pseudo-academic support for his thesis and the change became reality.¹⁵⁰³ The final order was signed on 2 December 1937 by Mustafa Kemal, Celal Bayar, Kâzım Özalp, Şükrü Kaya, and others. From 10 December 1937 on, *Diyarbekir* was officially known as *Diyarbakır*.¹⁵⁰⁴

Together with this, names of streets and neighbourhoods were changed from those of Ottoman sultans into Young Turk politicians and military officers. Mail addressed to the old names was not delivered and sent back, causing dysfunctions, delays, and confusion even in official communications, and travellers often got lost and had to resort to the gendarmerie or locals for support. We have seen how many of the Diyarbekir villages, became objects of renaming: Kabiye became Bağıvar, Aynetu became Güvercinlik, Karakilise became Dökmetaş, Matrani became Kuşlukbağı, Şemami became Yenievler, Qitirbil became Eğlence, and countless others. Regional names denoting tribes or tribal confederations such as Botan, Pervari or Mutki were purely Turkish names, according to the new doctrine.¹⁵⁰⁵ To the town of Ergani the term “Maden” (Turkish for “mine”) was added to stress its industrial function:

¹⁵⁰³ “Diyarbakır adı üzerine çalışmalar”, in: *Türk Dili*, no.29/30 (June 1938), pp.69-87.

¹⁵⁰⁴ *BCA*, 030.18.01.02/80.99.17, Council of Ministers decree, 10 December 1937; *Resmî Gazete*, no.3789, 18 December 1937, Cabinet decree no.7789.

¹⁵⁰⁵ For a list of villages in Diyarbekir province including renamed ones, see the 1973 almanac: *Diyarbakır İl Yıllığı* (Ankara: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti İçişleri Bakanlığı Diyarbakır Valiliği, 1973), pp.71-116.

Ergani Maden.¹⁵⁰⁶ Even the name of the Tigris (“Dicle”) was Turkified: according to official texts the name emanated from the “Akkadian Turks” who had given the river this name. Those who did not believe this were urged to look it up “in the first volume of the Great History Book that the Turkish Historical Association had published.”¹⁵⁰⁷ Geography was thus stripped of its Ottoman, Armenian, and Kurdish connotations. Mardin province was thoroughly “de-Arabized” through renaming: all names including the term “Tel” (Arabic for “hill”) were changed into either its Turkish equivalent (“Tepe”) or another name was made up.¹⁵⁰⁸ Regime propagandists wrote that the name “Mardin” itself was not, as Syriac authors had written, a Syrian Aramaic word, but “a name and land that has been Turkish and of the Turks all throughout history.”¹⁵⁰⁹

Within years the onomastics of the eastern provinces changed, and it continued to change. At least on paper the map had become unrecognizable. The government rationalized it through nationalism and normality: since the constitution decreed that the official language was Turkish, it seemed logical for the regime to assume that villagers had the right to understand what the name of their village meant. Naturally, the constitution had ignored the fact that millions of people did not speak Turkish. Many villagers in the East used to know why their village was named in a certain way and now did not anymore. The question was not so much that place-names were changing, but that the state was imposing this on a population who had never asked for any such thing. Though in time the population found ways to cope with the renaming phenomenon, for example by using the old names among themselves and the new names when dealing with government employees, it never quite understood why the government had changed all those names. It did not empathize with the Young Turks’ obsession with the Turkishness of the names. After all, what was in a name? No matter how ambitious this campaign was, continuing deep into the 1980s, it did not produce the results the Kemalists had hoped for. The more the state pushed for Turkish names to be adopted, the more the tightly knit, rich local cultures persisted in using the ‘old’ or ‘real’ names, up to today. This aspect of nation formation was not as effective in the short term as expected.

¹⁵⁰⁶ *BCA*, 030.10/8.1111.6, TBMM decree, 4 February 1926.

¹⁵⁰⁷ Bedri Günkut, *Diyarbakır Tarihi* (Diyarbakır: Diyarbakır Halkevi, 1937), pp.6-7.

¹⁵⁰⁸ *BCA*, 030.11.1.0/190.6.2, Interior Ministry decree, 3 March 1947; *BCA*, 030.18.1.01/20.38.13, Council of Ministers decree, 7 June 1931.

¹⁵⁰⁹ Hasan Reşit Tankut, *Diyarbakır adı üzerinde toponomik bir tetkik* (Ankara: Ulus Basımevi, 1937), p.13.

Discussion

This chapter has discussed the politics of memory pursued by the Young Turks during their single-party dictatorship. In meting out a new identity for the country, they also needed to mete out a new memory for it. During the 1920s and especially the 1930s the Young Turk treatment of the past ranged from the organization of oblivion regarding the traumatic past to the construction of an official narrative that included heroic and eternalized images of the nation. All throughout the country, but particularly for the eastern provinces, orders were given to write new local histories. These official textbooks, nationalist canons, and city histories not only imposed broad silences on critical historical issues, they also banished all ethnic minorities from (regional) history. However, memory is obdurate and the narratives which locals kept in their minds diverged considerably from the narratives they were fed by the official books. Anybody who wanted to learn about the history of Diyarbekir in 1950 had at least two bodies of knowledge at his or her disposal: the libraries constructed by the Young Turkist regimes, and the oral tradition nested in extended families in the city and the countryside. These two corpora of information continued to coexist for years and decades, but from the 1960s on the latter came under duress from urbanization and increasing levels of education among the uneducated strata of eastern peasants. Nowadays private memory coexists and at times openly clashes with official public memory. What will come of this collision and competition between loci of memories remains to be seen, but it seems that the oral tradition and its social memory is being documented at a rapid pace after a period of fading away.

The significance of the Young Turk hegemony in memory politics is difficult to assess. Although the eastern provinces were a peasant society where illiteracy figures were as high as 80 %, the official texts were not only the *first* ones the population would read, they were often the *only* ones available to the population. The organization of a hegemonic canon through exclusion and inclusion aimed at the formation of a *closed circuit of knowledge*. This act precluded the possibilities of a participatory memory and identity formation in the eastern provinces. The regime warded off both external penetration and internal criticism of their belief system by banning and destroying texts on a scale perhaps only matched by the Soviet dictatorship. “Turkishness” was measured by the level of exposure to that body of knowledge. For example, subsequent studies of cities and regions were to quote the “classics” of Young Turk historiography in order to be “scientific” enough to be allowed to be published. The regime did not realize that its blunt-instrument memory policies would foster a cultural

impoverishment for the population of Turkey. Up to today, the number of Turks who can read texts written in the Ottoman language (i.e. published before 1928) is limited to historians, theologians, and hobbyists, and is therefore negligible. The regime had refuted Henry Ford's famous adagium that "history is bunk": history was paramount in the construction of a national memory and a national identity. The "historical myopia" they produced not only had consequences for the hundreds of thousands of Ottoman-language books that now languish in antiquarian bookstores across the country, but also for the image of history in society. Nowadays, Turkey's historical culture is relatively thin and shallow. The lack of photographic documentation only aggravates the textual scarcity problem to the extent that few people nowadays can actually imagine Ottoman society. For them, the past is a different country.¹⁵¹⁰

To vindicate their claim that the eastern provinces had eternally been Turkish, the Young Turks left a formidable imprint of memory in the region. From large cities to small towns, across the geography of the eastern provinces place names bear the names of Young Turk officers, politicians, brigands, many of whom were implicated in the destruction of Ottoman Armenians. In Diyarbakir, buildings such as Ziya Gökalp High School, the Cahit Sıtkı Tarancı Museum, and other highly visible monuments celebrating prominent Young Turks eclipse the decrepitude of the Armenian church Surp Giragos, the Cemilpaşazâde mansion, and the Pirinçizâde flour factory – silent voices of the violence. The most powerful symbol of the multifaceted silences imposed on the mass violence of the Young Turk era must be the strongly fortified citadel in the north-eastern corner of Diyarbakir city. Many urbanites and neighboring peasants revere this ancient redoubt as one of the most important historical monuments of their country. The stronghold – what remains of it – stands on a small elevation overlooking a meander in the Tigris river. It is impressive if only because of its position: both the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic built their state apparatus in the compound to instill a long-lasting deference. Anyone who comes here, enticed by one or another historical narrative, is at least vaguely familiar with Diyarbakir's record of violence, and assumes history to be dormant within these dark, crumbling walls. The compound shelters the governorship, the provincial court, and most notably the infamous Diyarbakir prison. The latter building might be considered as the single most evocative landmark of mass violence in Diyarbakir: in it, Bulgarian revolutionaries were incarcerated in the late nineteenth century,

¹⁵¹⁰ The racial and historical theories reviewed in this chapter should not be waved away as typical interwar nationalist myth-making whose influence waned after the Young Turks lost power. Their legacy continues to inspire younger generations of Turks. During a recent conference on the history of Diyarbakir, one scholar suggested that the name "Siverek" (a local town) was possibly of Armenian etymological background. The man was brought up short and severely censured by the panel chair for having brought that up. Tarihte Siverek Sempozyumu, Siverek, Diyarbakir, 13-14 October 2001.

Armenian elites were tortured and murdered in 1915, Sheikh Said and his men were sentenced and executed in 1925, various left-wing activists and Kurdish nationalists were kept and subjected to torture during the junta regime following the 1980 military coup, and PKK members were tortured and frequently killed in the 1990s. Up to the year 2000 it housed the security forces of the Turkish war machine including gendarmerie intelligence operatives and special counter-guerrilla militias. This sad account of Diyarbekir's central prison reflects the city's century of violence, during which none of the violence was ever mentioned in any way at any of the sites. In the summer of 2007, the area had been cleared of security forces and was being converted by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism to an open-air "Atatürk Museum". The future of the past remains silent.¹⁵¹¹

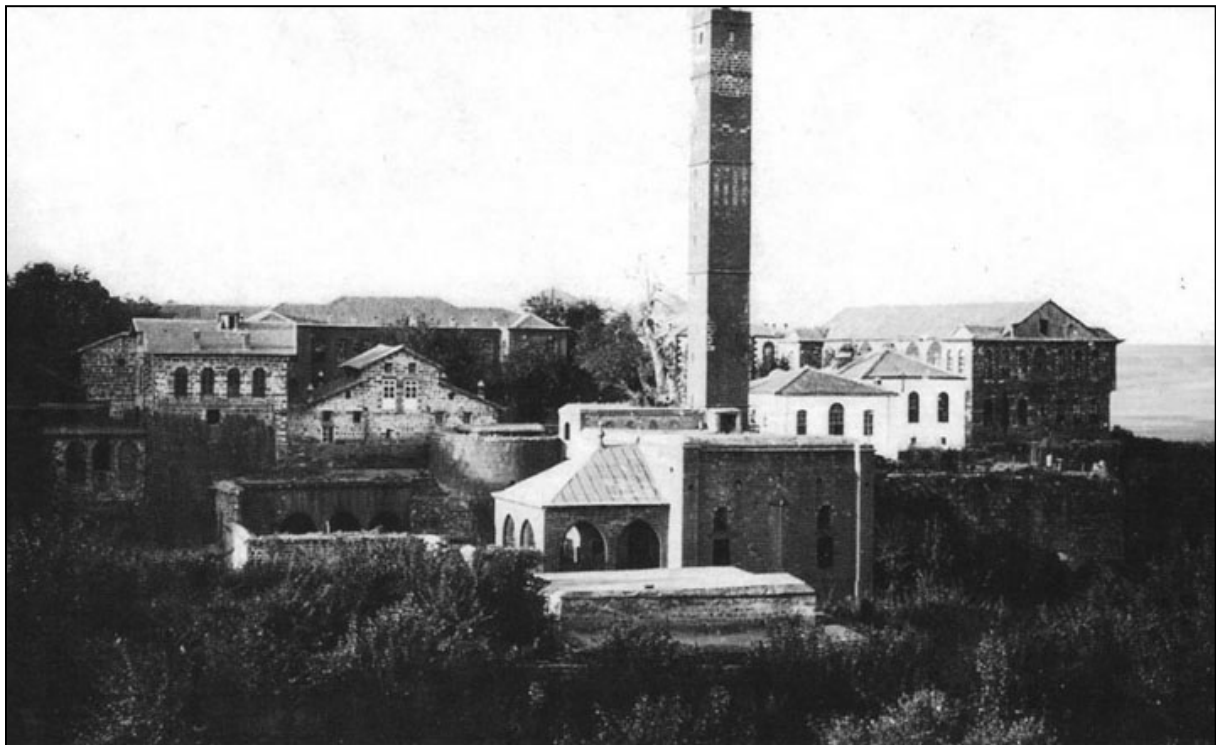


Photo 52: Diyarbekir's citadel with prison on the left (Republican Archivs)

The Turkish Republic's memory politics towards the Armenian genocide was and is characterized by denial. But, not unlike the genocide itself, this too was part of a larger campaign, namely to exorcise all violence from the memory of society. This imposition of collective amnesia on Turkish society was a double-edged sword. It is still unclear why the Young Turks never commemorated the massive tragedy of their expulsion from the Balkans

¹⁵¹¹ For a theoretical argument on memory and architecture see: Robert Bevan, *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), pp.7-60.

but chose to move on and look towards the future. Here too, silences were imposed on society: no sane Turk living in the 1930s would have dared to call Mustafa Kemal a refugee, which, technically, he was. There is little nostalgic tourism to the lost territories, and Turkish nationalism in principle excludes territories beyond the borders of the Republic. The Turkish treatment of the past became problematic after two developments: on the one hand, the intensification and globalization of Armenian attempts to draw international attention to and memorialize the genocide after the 1960s, and on the other hand, the upsurge of the practice and study of memory roughly in the same era. Both developments deeply polarized the positions and sharpened the tools and mechanisms of official state denial: the narratives became more sophisticated, the image control campaigns better organized, and the domestic surveillance of dissent more aggressive. But why do many Turks share the official viewpoint of the Turkish government?

Three partly overlapping explanations can be offered to this problem. First, the hegemony and imposition of the official Turkish memory to Turkish society has been thorough in the long term. As argued in this chapter, since 1923 the genocide has been ignored under strict censorship, giving birth to several generations of Turks incognizant of any reliable knowledge about 1915. It was in the Young Turk era, most specifically in the 1930s, when the seeds of “Turkish denial” were sown. For many Turks this is often an “honest” denial borne out of genuine ignorance. The aforementioned “closed circuit of knowledge” creates in Turkish minds (i.e. people educated in Turkish state schools and consuming post-1928 Turkish texts) a frame of reference which does not include the mass violence of that era. Second, besides ‘genuine ignorance’, obstacles to autodidacticism have played a role. In the interbellum the dictatorship silenced historians, refused entry of foreign books into the country, and systematically censored, removed and destroyed a large corpus of existing texts about the deportations from libraries. Finally, the number of Turks that can speak, read, or write Armenian can probably be counted on the fingers of one hand. Most Turks have never met Armenians and heard their stories, partly because in large cities the various ethnic groups keep to themselves and the Turkish-Syrian border remains very rigid. These three processes cause normal Turks to lapse into cognitive dissonance when confronted with the history of the mass violence.

Ernest Renan famously wrote that nations are bound together not by what they choose to remember, but by what they choose to forget.¹⁵¹² Denial is a vector of this process of

¹⁵¹² Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?,” in Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny, *Becoming National: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.41-55, especially pp.52-54.

forgetting.¹⁵¹³ The memory of the Armenian genocide is a case in point: being Turkish consists of denying and “forgetting” the genocide, and being Armenian includes forgetting realities and nuances such as centuries of Turkish-Armenian coexistence, and ‘good Turks’ who rescued Armenians and resisted the genocide.¹⁵¹⁴ Thus, in essence, the Armenian-Turkish conflict can be interpreted as a conflict of memory: Armenians wish to remember a history that Turks would like to forget. This would not have been a problem if memory was not a core component of identity. Therefore, loss of memory entails a loss of identity, something fundamentally problematic for many people.¹⁵¹⁵ Since these constructed memories are a primal component of group identity, both Armenians and Turks experience any deviation from that memory as a direct attack on their very identity. Turks who express a sincere, agnostic interest in history are accused of having a dubious (read: Armenian) ethnic background. Then, according to the paradigm of nationalism, any deviation from the official memory automatically implies a deviation from the identity, which in its turn disturbs social closure in the group. A conflict of absolutely exclusive memories has expanded to a conflict of absolutely exclusive identities. The “revenge of memory” appeared in the 1980s when Kurdish and Armenian nationalists began committing acts of political violence against their historical enemy, “the Turks”. The Turkish wall of silence precluded traumatized survivor communities from really coping with the violence. During the Nagorno-Karabakh war the Armenian army sang songs about the remote Sason region, whereas Kurdish PKK members memorialized the violence committed against their own tribal enemies. This resembled the fate of Ottoman Muslims in the 1910s: traumatized refugees took revenge years later on a population not identical but associated with their tormentors. The violence also propelled a process of social closure: intra-ethnic conflicts (intra-Kurdish or intra-Armenian) were forgotten to the benefit of a supposedly unitary memory and identity.

The Young Turks assumed that society, and mankind itself, is completely malleable, that no crumbs of memories remain after shock and trauma, and that people will forget. They themselves had tried to bury the unpleasant memories that would come to haunt Turkey decades later. They could not have known at the time that their policies were based on

¹⁵¹³ For two comparative studies on denials of history see: Tony Taylor, *Denial: History Betrayed* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2009); Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (Oxford: Polity, 2001). See also: Mirko Grmek, “Un memoricide,” in: *Le Figaro*, 19 December 1991.

¹⁵¹⁴ For two studies of the instrumentalization of the memory of the Armenian genocide see: Natasha May Azarian, “The Seeds of Memory: Narrative Renditions of the Armenian Genocide Across Generations” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2007); Robert Owen Krikorian, “The Re-appropriation of the Past: History and Politics in Soviet Armenia, 1988-1991” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 2003).

¹⁵¹⁵ This may be even more so for those thousands of Armenian converts living in Eastern Anatolia as Turks, Arabs or Kurds, as well as for Armenian-Turkish mixed marriages. For hints of identity-related questions see: Fethiye Çetin, *Anneannem* (Istanbul: Metis, 2004).

sociological miscalculations. The memory of the violence in Eastern Turkey exists explicitly in the absence of grandparents or entire segments of many Kurdish families, not to mention the entire Ottoman Armenian community. Physically it exists in the many mass graves in the region, of which recently one was discovered by Kurdish villagers in the southeast of Mardin province. When diaspora Armenians called for forensic research, the grave was promptly effaced by the Turkish army and gendarme forces.¹⁵¹⁶ The international dimension in this scandal was unmistakable. According to one specialist, the “explosion” or “revenge” of memory after World War II created a new moral standard, which he calls a “neo-Enlightenment morality” or “public morality” in international relations.¹⁵¹⁷ But in the formation of this transnational “universal global memory”, of which the Holocaust has become a core constituent, diametrically opposed nationalist memories are competing for inclusion of their own version of historical events in this canon. Whereas Armenian lobbyists deem the memory of the genocide a qualified candidate for incorporation, Turkish lobbyists and the Turkish government are crampedly trying to fend off any memorialization of the genocide. Denial by states other than the perpetrator society is generally motivated by immediate inter-state strategic concerns. Whereas Turkish state officials travel to Yad Vashem and pay homage to the memory of the Shoah, Iranian state officials fly to Yerevan and do so for the Armenian genocide. The level of tolerance the totalitarian Syrian regime accorded Armenians to commemorate the genocide in the desert was directly commensurate with Turkish threats to that regime for supporting the Kurdish nationalists. In international politics too, memory and power were and are much more closely related than memory and ethics.

¹⁵¹⁶ Ayşe Günaysu, “Toplu mezar Ermeni ve Süryanilere ait,” in: *Özgür Gündem*, 7 November 2006.

¹⁵¹⁷ Elazar Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), p.XXVIII.