

**The Politics of Memory and Commemoration: Armenian Diasporic Reflections on 2015**

Paper submitted to *Nationalities Papers*

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## **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

The year 2015 marked the centenary of the Armenian Genocide, the destruction of the Ottoman Armenians by the Ottoman state. 2015 saw unprecedented focus on the tragedy, its legacies, and wider reflections about the complexities of historical memory and nationalist state projects. The Genocide did not end in itself - it was followed by a denialist project that continues to challenge and undermine the memories of the survivors and the claims of their descendants, both from the remnant communities in Turkey, and the multi-layered, widely dispersed Armenian diaspora. This denial, “the final stage of genocide” (Stanton 1996), both a foundation of the Turkish state and a cornerstone of its policy, extends to ever-more creative<sup>2</sup> and expansive international campaigns and efforts.

The centenary year of the Genocide witnessed an escalation in cultural production and both political and academic focus. This paper looks at some of the sites and spaces, physical and discursive, in which the centenary was marked. In particular it seeks to assess how the centenary has challenged and possibly altered the context within which we approach the genocide and its continuing legacies. The paper is positioned in the diasporic space - while recognising that this is fluid and embodies transnational sites between “homelands” in the form of Armenia<sup>3</sup> and Turkey,<sup>4</sup> and “host states” where diaspora communities have resided (at least) since the genocide, in effect their homes. The focus of the paper is the post-

Genocide diaspora, distinct from the more recently formed post-Soviet Diaspora. This article attempts to pick out some of the themes apparent in the discourse and in the activities of the last year, from the perspective of Armenian diaspora actors, and is based on the author's observations and participation in centenary events in the US, Lebanon, Turkey, Switzerland and the UK, as well as interviews with participants and organisers.

### **Between History and Memory**

Historians have pondered the recent "Memory boom" (Winter 2000) and "the age of commemoration" as famously espoused by the ground-breaking work of Pierre Nora, as a challenge to the authority of the historian in mediating and presenting the past. The memory turn since the 1980s is at least in part a response to the loss of reverence for History and instead a realisation that it is important to engage with histories, narratives and experiences to get a complete picture of the range and complexities of human experience. This turn was facilitated by the rise in the Academy of gender studies, postcolonial theory, postmodernism, identity politics, and the emancipatory epistemological projects influenced by the work of Foucault and Edward Said that exposed power structures in the construction of knowledge. In this way Memory emerged as a counter-narrative to History. Centralising the human experience, Memory is focussed on biography, oral history, psychoanalysis, giving voice to the silenced and marginalised, and is a challenge to the linear historic national narrative. Sites

of Memory are particularly important in undermining nationalist and oppressive state narratives, and victors' monolithic version of History - and creating a space for counter-knowledge. In Turkey, the nationalist version of history and the state's denial of the Armenian Genocide has been challenged and dismantled by a growing civil society movement and widening memory project centring around "coming to terms with the past" (*geçmişle hesaplaşma* or *geçmişle yüzleşme*) since the 2000s, which Duygu Gül Kaya (2015) deconstructs as "rewriting History through a therapeutic public discourse." Aybak (2016: 129) analyses this binary in the Turkish context, saying, "...while history is expressed through written texts .... memory lives through places and cultural symbols that evoke painful memories of the survivors. Memory is evoked by historical and emotional experiences within specific geopolitical settings and acts as the device of collective commemorations."

Commemoration by the state is a lively discussion subject in the arena of national identity. In the French Republican model for example, state-led commemorations of the Holocaust, the slave trade and the Armenian genocide are sometimes viewed with suspicion as "desperate attempt to gain votes, often at the cost of sacrificing Republican values" (Van de Mieroop 2016: 184). Whereas the assimilationist model like France sees these "community" interest commemorations as divisive and a threat to national unity, the multicultural models (E.g. of

the US and the UK, however discredited) view identity politics as an inclusive way of recognising and validating all constituencies of the populace, particularly minorities. Whereas some historians and politicians remain uncomfortable with the role of memorial politics, seeing it as fragmentary and retrospective, memory and commemoration can act as necessary vibrant and humane counter-sites to the disciplinary power of the state and its master-narratives in contemporary societies. Nora is somewhat troubled by the commemorative turn, saying that “the memorial model has triumphed over the historical model and ushered in a new, unpredictable and capricious use of the past... of moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned” (Nora 1989:12). Kistner considers this a shift from the “historical consciousness of the nation to a social consciousness” (Kistner 2010: 620), a crucial shift when one considers decolonising movements that seek to unearth the knowledge-power nexus, like *Rhodes Must Fall*<sup>5</sup> or *Why is My Curriculum White?*<sup>6</sup> Kistner (2010: 630) also considers the democratising aspect of the memory turn, allowing for a range of actors, stakeholders and leaders: “the discourses of commemoration, officially disseminated through the advocacy of educationists, journalists, broadcasters, diplomats, heritage consultants, national and international policy makers and philanthropists, strip the historian of his/her relative monopoly status in representing and interpreting the past.”

History, as espoused by the Turkish state, is a denialist one, which negates and silences the many Others in the story of the founding of the Republic from the Ottoman ashes. The silences are loudest when it comes to the Armenian genocide (and also, by extension, the genocide of Greeks, Assyrians, and other Christians of Anatolia).<sup>7</sup> This is a History that contradicts and erases the Ottoman state's own records, archives, testimonies<sup>8</sup> and an abundance of documentation and proof, rendering it a History that is simply a tool for the hegemonic state to reproduce itself through generations. This History has been challenged by the work of a rising number of academics, intellectuals and artists of Turkey in recent years. In this way we have seen cracks in "the concrete wall of denial,"<sup>9</sup> at least since the 2005 conference at Bilgi University on "Ottoman Armenians during the decline of the Empire," which also ushered in a period of discussion of the Armenian genocide in Turkey in the public sphere. That this is a complex and contentious terrain is clear, not least because of the layers of power and authority, reach and impact, contained within this discursive space. For example, Ayda Erbal (2015: 783-785) is not only critical of the "ever-adjusting dynamic of denial" role played by the intellectuals of Turkey's "old establishment" but also makes the damning claim that civil society actors involved in "building the discourse on the Armenian Genocide"<sup>10</sup> have actually established "more sophisticated discourses of genocide denial." Regardless of the sincerity or integrity of civil society actors and intellectuals in Turkey, and their complex negotiations with the state, it is now evident that any apparent "softening" has

come to an end, any “cracks” crudely plastered over by the state as it reasserts itself and its narrative, since 2015 squeezing further the space for dissent and difference, and punishing those that dare to challenge it.

Nonetheless, Memory, however suppressed and silenced, is alive in Turkey, and acts as a counter-narrative to (denialist) history. It is present in three broad inter-related domains. In the case of the remnant Armenian community in Istanbul, the denial of their history and therefore their identity is a form of continuous personal and existential violence. Irvin-Ericson, La Pointe and Laban Hinton (2013:9) in their say: “When genocide is denied, the dehumanizing mechanisms in place during the actual genocide are transferred forward in history, ensuring that the genocide continues into perpetuity, long after the physical killing has been done.” In the past few years there has been an academic focus on the Istanbul Armenian community that grapples with their highly complex position of being physical reminders/ remainders of a historic genocide that their state denies ever took place.<sup>11</sup> Aside from the Istanbul Armenian community, another challenge to state History in the past ten years has been the rise of the phenomenon of the Islamised Armenians – descendants of Armenians who were “taken in” by Turks and Kurds, who were converted to Islam and in some cases have apparently lived covertly in knowledge of their difference. Fethiye Cetin’s ground-breaking memoir, *Anneannem* (2004) paved the way for both public interest and

scholarship in this topic in recent years, positioned within the shared histories projects to unearth the hidden human legacies of state violence and silences (Kasbarian and Öktem 2014 and 2016). More broadly, state History in Turkey has been challenged by the memories (first hand or passed down through generations) of those who witnessed the genocide.<sup>12</sup> Ugur Umit Ungor (2014) through extensive oral history research<sup>13</sup> in Anatolia concludes that “the Turkish government is denying a genocide that its own population remembers.” Building on Aleida Assman’s (2010) three categories of collective memory – social, cultural and political, Ungor (2014: 149) masterfully demonstrates that “the Turkish handling of the memory of the Armenian genocide is characterised by a successful silencing of high-culture and written texts, but a failure of silencing the social and cultural memory of the perpetrator, bystander and victim communities.”

In the Armenian case, Memory of the Genocide has been an essential component of diasporic identity. Generations have grown up with their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents’ personal accounts of loss, displacement and of starting over - the memory of the genocide transmitted intergenerationally.<sup>14</sup> These memories are the human stories that accompany Armenian modern History, illustrating the mainstream historical narrative with personal experiences and stories from the past. Furthermore, the narrative of the genocide acts as a “fund of knowledge because of how central this story’s transmission has been for this

particular community” (Azarian-Ceccato 2010: 121). Thus the Armenian diasporic collective memory is one that annotates Armenian history and Armenian diasporic identity. The local, micro, family stories anchor the historical narrative. There is a rich trove of Armenian personal accounts and oral histories<sup>15</sup> that act as a complement to the wide range of historical evidence – from eyewitness accounts to archival records<sup>16</sup> which have informed the mainstream historiography of the Armenian genocide in the ensuing decades. Thus there is no gap between History and Memory in the Armenian case – they are intertwined.

In the past two decades in particular, with the third generation of post-genocide descendants at the helm, and the means and mechanisms of globalisation revolutionising activism, Armenian diasporic efforts have been concentrated on influencing at the level of high politics. These have focussed on education, raising awareness, combating denialism, political lobbying and working towards the official recognition of the genocide in their various home states. This political emphasis has arguably hindered the potential for multi-layered commemoration by communities, with personal and collective memor(ies) being more confined to the realms of the arts, the spiritual/ religious and the more intimate/ personal. The centenary was arguably a watershed moment that represented a culmination in the boon in cultural production, alongside an overwhelming validation of the genocide in scholarship. This paper makes the claim that the energy and synergy around these proliferating projects

and initiatives during the centenary year reinforced a merging of History and Memory that resulted in a subtle but profound shift in the representation and understanding of the Armenian genocide in the transnational public sphere.

### **Normalisation and Neo-Denialism**

Alongside a heightening of the annual commemorations at the community level, the centenary of the genocide was marked by a wide range of international and national events. These included high profile events led by the Republic of Armenia (E.g. a Global Forum against genocide in Yerevan on 22-23 April 2015 featuring prominent genocide scholars)<sup>17</sup> and by individual diasporans (E.g. 100 Lives),<sup>18</sup> a proliferation of academic conferences, publications, as well as lobbying and advocacy initiatives,<sup>19</sup> alongside unprecedented media focus. It is important to note that the commemorative activities were two-pronged in scope and outreach. On the one hand, they addressed international audiences; on the other, they were for internal consumption, i.e. a validating experience for the Armenian transnation,<sup>20</sup> whether at the level of the local, national or international.

The sheer volume of activities validating the Genocide would suggest that the centenary ushered in a new era of normalisation, conclusively shedding all vestiges of “controversy” in the public sphere. While this is true, it is only part of the picture. Alongside the normalisation

process, there is clearly evident also, a renewed mobilisation in the denialism project - from the Turkish state, its subsidiaries and supporters throughout the world. That these two opposing forces – normalisation and neo-denialism - co-exist is not remarkable: as social scientists we are familiar with the presence of opposing trends, sometimes creating and mirroring each other, sometimes mutually exclusive and preaching to clearly demarcated constituencies. Occasionally these worlds clash in unexpected ways and in unlikely spaces. One example of this is the response on social media to Aleen Keshishian, a well-known Hollywood celebrity manager, when she posted a picture of an April 24 memorial march in Los Angeles. The degree of venom unleashed on Instagram (over 14,000 responses in Turkish and English), was all the more worrying as the majority of comments were from pre-teen or teenage girls.<sup>21</sup>

Genocide denial has never been a majority position or a stronghold in the academy (Smith 2015; Mamigonian 2015) and serious historical research and historians (outside Turkey) have always validated the Armenian genocide.<sup>22</sup> However, the multi-thronged denialism of the Turkish state particularly since the 1970s has had some success in attaching a certain question mark over the genocide in the international public sphere.<sup>23</sup> The major impact of this on the Armenian diaspora, and a perverse characteristic that has subsequently marked it, is the obsessive pursuit of “the dream of finally and fully establishing the fact of their own death”

(Kazanjian 2011: 371). More broadly, as Theriault (2009), drawing from Charny (1992), has eloquently articulated, the denialist campaign has meant that the genocide itself has become a secondary concern - the need to combat denialism and prove genocide the “all-encompassing focus,” when in fact it is a “contrived focus, a diversion” from engaging with the effects of the genocide. This has undoubtedly influenced the nature and form of diaspora activism over the decades, responding, and therefore falling victim to the framework set by the denialism of the Turkish state. Theriault (2009:94) explains this: “... the effort of struggling against an extensive, well-funded, state-sponsored denial campaign is a tremendous drain on the victim community, combining resource depletion with the emotional costs of facing denigration and injustice through denial on a continuing basis.” Arguably therefore, Armenian diasporan activism, particularly with regard to international genocide recognition, has been a response to the denialist script propagated by the Turkish state, and has meant that the diaspora has been pre-occupied with the unedifying perceived need to “prove” their collective deaths to the world at large (Nichanian 2009).

The normalisation of the genocide as the telos of the critical mass of scholarship and cultural production that takes the genocide as a fact, offers the Armenian diaspora a fresh future trajectory. The normalisation signifies a shift from (so-called) “genocide” to Genocide. Genocide denial has been rendered untenable by rigorous documentation - respected

international scholarship in the past two decades has overwhelmingly validated the Armenian Genocide, and opened up new areas of exciting research. The evolution of this intellectual terrain is mapped out in detailed analysis by several of the texts that were published since 2014, including the widely acclaimed books by Ronald Grigor Suny (2015) and Fatma Müge Göçek (2014). As discussed by Kasbarian and Öktem (2016), instead of two opposing sides caught in an impasse, the scholarship today reflects theoretically-informed and nuanced positions, set within inclusive and dynamic intellectual frameworks, and marks a turning point in the study of the Armenian Genocide.

Nonetheless, the Turkish state continues its denialist policies, albeit in more subtle and refined ways.<sup>24</sup> Termed “denial light” (Goshgarian 2014), i.e. more nuanced forms of denial, this is evident in the “common pain” thesis in President Erdogan’s “apology” of 2014 which “removes the agency from the act of killing by pretending that the cause of deaths and sufferings was the natural outcome of a great catastrophe: the instigation of the Ottoman Empire” (Aybak 2016: 134). As Kasbarian and Öktem (2016: 93) have examined, the “more refined” state discourse became a “denialism based on relativization and deflection,..on the insistence of “shared suffering” while failing to accept significant power asymmetries.. the result (being) the denial of responsibility, and the circumvention, or rather effacement, of the crime.” Erdogan’s “common pain” statement is in fact a logical continuation and a clever

employment of the anti-History commemorative approach. If the past is merely a matter of perspective, then all memories and narratives are (equally) valid and all commemorations on the same moral ground. In this respect, Memory as a counter-narrative to History is open to misuse as it can relativize history. The “memory turn” can be exploited and manipulated by the “oppressors” as well as the “oppressed,” the perpetrators as well as the victims, the strong as well as the weak – it can be a tool to spread lies rather than uncover the truth. That is why, as discussed in the earlier section, Memory needs to be underpinned by History based on scrupulous scholarship, as in the case of the Armenian genocide. Sometimes this approach is far from subtle - the Turkish government’s decision to move the Gallipoli commemoration to 24 April in the year of the centenary was not just a blatant attempt to undermine the genocide centenary but also an attempt to “reframe history” (Aybak 2016: 136) and a “deliberate act of rebranding the denialist strategy.”

At the same time, tried and tested strategies of denial are thriving. At the Global Forum against genocide in Yerevan on 22-23 April 2015 scholars discussed comparative cases. Perpetrating regimes in Rwanda, Cambodia and so on, can draw on the example of the Turkish state in the international arena and at home, with policies designed to “create doubt, among a public that has little or no information to begin with... The goal is to create the notion that there are two sides to the “controversy” and that there should be an open debate

between both sides.” (Smith 2016: 104) Aside from the structural power disparity between the reductive “two sides” framework, this approach again promotes that the idea that the past is merely a question of perspective. This objective is to obfuscate, thereby belittling and casting aspersions on any challenge to the master narrative. A fuzzy position rather than a principled one is then adopted by misguided third parties in a misinformed desire not to seem “biased.”

Denial is also persistent in diluted or subterfuge forms in the public sphere. Sometimes it is not necessarily denial as such but indifference or ignorance, which has the same effect regardless. The review of Ronald G. Suny’s book *They can Live in the Desert but Nowhere else: A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton University Press, 2015), in the leading British periodical, the *London Review of Books*<sup>25</sup> (LRB, 4 June 2015) for example, drew criticism for its almost complete lack of engagement with the text, and its side-lining of the issues discussed.<sup>26</sup> Instead, the reviewer, Edward Luttwak mentioned a list of denialist scholars who support what appeared to be an unsubstantiated claim that what happened to the Armenians was not a genocide because the Ottoman authorities “were not fully exterminationist”, and that forced conversions and deportations (alongside widespread murder) somehow mitigate exterminationist intent. A complaint letter that this author wrote and co-ordinated (signed by nine well-known UK and European academics active in this

field) was met with a tepid response from the LRB saying that the piece had been inaccurately billed as a review, side-stepping the concerns we had raised. The LRB did not publish the letter.

### **From Victimhood to Agency**

Normalisation has been achieved by a number of distinct discursive and conceptual approaches evident in the wider discourse. There include: a global reframing of the genocide as an issue of historical justice along the lines of shared humanity; a comparative contextualisation, linking it to more recent genocides; its relevance and resonance for the present day situation (particularly in the Middle East); as part of an emancipatory and epistemological project to expose the nexus between truth, power and knowledge construction; as part of a moral preventative project to remember victims and raise awareness about comparable contemporary situations. We see these overlapping positionings evident in much of the literature, discourse and analyses produced in the past year, by politicians, civil society actors and media alike.

The speech of the Armenian president, Serzh Sargsyan on the centenary was a masterful expounding of this reframing and contextualisation, set in the wider context of the

importance of commemoration, not just for the past but of the sake of the present and future.

As such, it is worth quoting some of the more salient points:

*Unfortunately, April left a black trace in the history of not only the Armenian people, but humankind as whole. April is also the month in which the perpetration of the Holocaust, and crimes of genocide in Rwanda and Cambodia commenced. We stand here today, in the very month of April, in Tsitsernakaberd — the Armenian Genocide Memorial, to proclaim: May there never again be a need to erect a memorial to commemorate new disgraceful chapters of history anywhere in the world! May there be no more need for a new Tsitsernakaberd, Yad Vashem, Killing Fields, and Gisozi!....*

*The goal of our policy, anchored in memory and responsibility, is to form effective mechanisms for preventing future crimes against humanity. As Pope Francis justly said, “concealing or denying evil is like allowing a wound to keep bleeding without bandaging it.” The wound is bleeding, because there is too much neutrality, silence, and denial around the world, and there is still too little humanity.*

*We shall not forget that for centuries humanism and benevolence have been the engine that led the formation of international human rights mechanisms. Moral aspirations and universal values were what inspired Henry Dunant to lay the ground for creation of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Moral values and the horrifying reality of the Armenian Genocide were what urged Raphael Lemkin to coin the term “genocide,” which would*

*unfortunately have to be used over and over again. As a matter of fact, when Lemkin was asked what genocide was, he answered that it was what happened to the Armenians.*

*As we speak, there are still too many instances of denying universal values and contorting history, which pave the way to the recurrence of these crimes: we can all see the situation in the Middle East....*

*Around the world, conscience and probity are withstanding the cruel, but retreating machine of the Armenian Genocide denial. Conscience and probity are the antipodes of denial.*

*Recognition of the Genocide is not the world's tribute to the Armenian people and our martyrs. Recognition of the Genocide is the triumph of human conscience and justice over intolerance and hatred.*

*The Armenian people will always remain standing by the side of those who suffered from crimes against humanity. The unyielding international struggle against crimes of genocide will remain an integral part of our foreign policy.”<sup>27</sup>*

It is important to note is that the president of Armenia is a divisive figure both in the diaspora and at home. Since 2010 there has been the emergence of a new wave of civic activism in Armenia, supported by diaspora activists<sup>28</sup> who accuse the government broadly of being undemocratic, corrupt, failing to uphold the law, pandering to oligarchs, and more widely failing to address the everyday needs of Armenian citizens.<sup>29</sup> By presenting himself as the

voice of the Armenian people (past, present and future) the president employed genocide commemoration activities as a means of garnering (both international and domestic) legitimacy for himself and his regime. Thus we see genocide commemoration and recognition as a unifying tool employed by the state to dispel challenges and criticism both within and without.<sup>30</sup> By aligning himself with international statesmen and spiritual leaders like the Pope, the President and his government were rehabilitated as the voice of the oppressed, the moral conscience of the world. It would appear that for a brief historical moment the president was able to transcend the realities of his government's record under the unifying symbol of the genocide and its accompanying narrative.

As the speech above alludes, the Pope's intervention in the centenary debate was perhaps the most significant. Pope Francis, as a respected and popular global leader garnered unparalleled international attention for his moral voice, the first Pope to speak with uncompromising authority and clarity on the Armenian genocide, a subject with which he has long been familiar. For worldwide Armenians (10% of whom are Catholic) the Pope's stance was received with an almost incredulous and overwhelmed gratitude and seen as a huge boost to the Armenian cause.<sup>31</sup> Predictably, the Pope's statement was met with fury and retaliation by the Turkish state, which recalled its envoy to the Vatican, and claimed that the Pope had been brainwashed by the "rich and powerful" Armenian community in Argentina.<sup>32</sup> One of

the central myths of the Turkish state is the existence of a huge, wealthy, united, powerful Armenian diaspora, seeking vengeance on Turkey (with no engagement as to why “vengeance” might even be sought). While there is clearly a mobilised and influential Armenians diaspora political lobby in Washington and to a lesser extent Europe, this image has taken on preposterous proportions, given the size of the Armenian communities, their heterogeneity and disparities within – and all the more ridiculous when viewed in relation to a strong (and strategically crucial NATO ally) regional power. And yet it is a constant refrain, and a central tenet of denialist propaganda and state narrative built on the tried and tested principle that a lie told often enough is believed, in a wider post-truth culture.

The Pope’s message:<sup>33</sup> “It is necessary, and indeed a duty, to honor their memory, for whenever memory fades, it means that evil allows wounds to fester. Concealing or denying evil is like allowing a wound to keep bleeding without bandaging it!”<sup>34</sup> also shone a light on the states which recognised the genocide and the ones that did not – escalating the public debate about acknowledgement. Roger W. Smith (2016: 101) contextualises the significance of the Armenian genocide saying, “Denial of this genocide is the most extensive and prolonged denial of genocide by a state, aided and abetted by other governments out of expediency.” The concern is that denial gives the message to contemporary perpetrators in comparable cases that they can get away with it, as long as their state machinery is powerful

enough. In the case of the UN and other such international agents, the responsibility to remember genocides is about the present and future as well, to guard and protect the fragile peace. With the Holocaust as the central memory, the UN commemorative discourse collapses time by referring to past and present atrocities in the same breath, drawing a continuous line and comparative perspective between distinct cases like the Holocaust, Rwanda, Darfur. This has the aim and effect of narrating “this work of mourning as a globally inclusive venture” and “in the process, the exclusivity of a remembered past... to a particular state is diminished while its learning potential for wider audiences is emphasised.” (Skillington 2013: 508)

Crucial to this reframing is a renewed engagement with the victims of genocide, and a desire to create a space where they can retrospectively “speak” or at least be “heard.” Marc Nichanian (2009) has written definitively about the problems associated with speaking on behalf of victims, silenced voices and those erased from history, and how this itself can be an act of violence. The question of whether the most subaltern of subalterns can speak - to paraphrase Gayatri Spivak’s famous question (1994) – is highly contentious and complex. Nonetheless, the shift towards memory studies, history from below and from the margins, and projects grounded in critical and feminist studies have indeed made such a forum possible.<sup>35</sup> As Jo Laycock (2015: 13) analyses, ethnographic and memory based studies have helped in

“reframing Armenians as individuals and historical actors rather than simply as undifferentiated passive victims.” This is a crucial shift as it rebalances the tendency to reduce all Armenian experience to victimhood, and inextricably tied to the genocide.

Within this space that is being shaped, there are inevitably residual and new complexities concerning power, agency and representation. One issue is that the space is often situated under the umbrella of Turkey “coming to terms with the past,” and as such the Armenian genocide is just one theme among many, thereby running a risk of being diluted, reduced or sidelined. While Armenian diasporan academics are certainly supportive of democratising movements within the liberal Turkish transnational civil sphere, there was also uneasiness expressed by some. This centred on the question of who is setting the agenda and framing the issues. Some are troubled by what they see as Turkish/ Kurdish narratives dominating the stage,<sup>36</sup> with Armenian voices hardly present – (unintentionally) replicating the historic binary and power structure,<sup>37</sup> as well as reflecting the historically subaltern position that Armenians hold in modern Turkey. Many of my interviewees were also uncomfortable about their inclusion in programmes as a “token Armenian” voice in a staged and pre-determined narrative. Some were more explicit about what they interpreted as an instrumental takeover of the genocide discussion by the Turkish/ Kurdish liberal sphere, with Armenian perspectives being crowded out.<sup>38</sup> Others have also identified and exposed this undercurrent, on display

perhaps most clearly in the intellectual and academic space. Ayda Erbal (2015: 785) has criticised Turkish civil society actors in this field for among other things, “denying or ignoring the power asymmetry between themselves and their interlocutors both in Turkey and the diasporas” and for “behaving in total majority entitlement as owners of the playfield.”

Burcu Gursel (2015: 793) talking about the decade since 2005 says, “Records on live encounters... between Turkish and Armenian intellectuals, whether from Turkey or outside, testify to the assumption on the part of Turkish intellectuals that they will continue to dictate the terms, timing, and style of debate...” This feeling was shared by several Armenian diasporans in my interviews, uncomfortable with what they interpret is the setting of the parameters, the staging of the interaction, and the controlling of the ensuing narrative by Turks or Kurds. Several even said they had turned down invitations to participate in centenary panel discussions and other events due to feeling instrumentalised and sidelined.

It would seem that the broadened engagement with the genocide as part of a wider intellectual endeavour by a wide range of actors runs the risk of reducing the subject to one of academic industry, and marginalising (or indeed ignoring) the experiences of both the victims and their descendants – who are mostly absent from the discussion. Situating the genocide discussion in the sphere and under the control of a Turkish/ Kurdish intellectual project can deprive it of its own voice and agency. In effect therefore, the Armenian experience risks

being defined by the Turkish experience (again). This is a painful and highly charged subject, which cannot yet be discussed openly for fear of undoing years of good work, good will and solidarity on post-nationalist grounds. It also challenges Armenians to be aware of their internalisation of a subaltern consciousness. Nonetheless, it would seem that the centenary brought about or exposed a new dynamic, and the need for ever cautious and sensitive attention and stocktaking by those who are constructing the political projects and the discourse on the ground. Although there are overlapping sites and spaces within which the genocide is engaged with, the need for vigilance regarding power and agency is constant.

When analysing the media coverage of the centenary year we also see an emphasis on the personal. This is primarily through an approach of using personal memories and life stories to graft on to a wider narrative. The approach of humanising the political in order to make it accessible has become embedded in the popular media. For example, in the UK we saw the initiative from the broadsheet *Guardian* that focussed on documenting the Lives of survivors<sup>39</sup> and their descendants as a means of writing forthright political pieces. At the other end of the political spectrum, the tabloid *Daily Mail* ran huge features on the Kardashians' family story,<sup>40</sup> as well as extensive coverage of their visit to Armenia in early April.<sup>41</sup> Much has been made of the Kardashian visit to Armenia and their commitment to the memory of the genocide and its recognition, but whatever we might think of the clan, as the

most (in)famous Armenians in the world they have a huge impact. At the very least, the Kardashians, due to their huge popular fanbase, drew the attention of millions who were previously uninformed about this issue.<sup>42</sup>

The trope of drawing from personal stories, memoirs and oral history has always been popular in the Armenian literature scene, and has proliferated in other languages since the 1980s, with the publication of many biographies, novels, and other art forms, based on family epics spanning the past 100 years. This approach has taken on a new urgency as genocide survivors are almost all passed on, though their testimonies remain. With rare exceptions the memoirs of survivors were translated into other languages decades after the genocide, and in most cases left the grandchildren's generation to publish for a wider audience. This more recent literary genre of either biographical works, or drawing from biographies as inspiration for novels and other literary forms, reached wider audiences as works were either written or translated into English. Notable recent publications that draw from archives and personal stories passed down through the generations<sup>43</sup> include Peter Balakian's *Black Dog of Fate*, Fethiye Çetin's *Anneannem*, certain novels of Elif Shafak and Chris Bohjalian among others, as well as a new edition of the seminal *The 40 days of Musa Dagh* by Franz Werfel.<sup>44</sup> This popular genre overlaps with the academic emphasis on humanising/ personifying the political, thereby appealing to a common humanity.

## **Contextualising Communities - Sites and Tropes of Memory and Commemoration**

How we remember and construct the past is also very much about the present, and reflects current struggles and preoccupations. In 2014 much of the world was already in a spirit of commemoration, with the centennial of the First World War.<sup>45</sup> This included a new creative focus on the Middle East experience of the war.<sup>46</sup> How states, nations and communities reflect upon the one hundred year old Armenian Genocide mirrors their own situated political realities. These are rarely unified voices – the various agents of commemoration are inevitably polyphonic in their interpretative and mediatory roles, reflective of their wider community and national context.

For diasporan actors, remembering the dead and bearing witness to the tragedy that befell them, is intrinsically also about the diaspora which has its birthing moment in this Genocide. The genocide is the defining characteristic of the communities who are stakeholders in its memorialisation. So the centenary was potentially an opportunity not just to reflect on the past, but to articulate the present and also to envision a future, as communities and as a transnation. It was an opportunity to move from victim to actor, from the subaltern to the agent, as reflected upon by one of my interviewees:

*“The genocide has always been part of my life. I was fortunate in being brought up by two grandmothers who were survivors and the genocide was always present....It is only the generation after mine that is growing with an increasing sense of rootedness. The genocide is ever present in my life, every day. The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary is a landmark I guess, a point to stop and take stock, to see how far we have come in 100 years and how much more needs to be done to get closure, achieve a fair treatment of a historical subject. It is only now that a critical historiography is emerging and is at last being taken seriously. It is also a point to think about my grandparents” experiences, my parents who are the generation who had no childhood – the generation that built and rebuilt, and to think about my generation too, the fortunate one.”*

*Diasporan Academic, London, October 2015 interview*

The commemorations grounded the Genocide as the point of origin for citizens of Armenian origin in their home countries, making it more visible and part of the national story, whether recognised officially by their government or not. At my own university for example one (now former) student launched an online campaign for the UK to recognise the genocide<sup>47</sup> - a social media campaign that proved effective in terms of awareness raising among British university students. A programme of centenary events took place in every Armenian community, both instigated and led by the traditional leaders like the churches; the Armenian

embassies; the various quasi-political groups; but also by a multitude of other groups and individual initiatives.<sup>48</sup> This level of energy expounded on the anniversary was unprecedented and it would be true to say, somewhat unexpected. Many of these activities adopted the approaches and modes outlined in the previous section, particularly the reframing of the genocide in a wider, comparative context.

Despite widespread emigration, Lebanon remains home to a significant Armenian community,<sup>49</sup> and Armenians of all three Christian traditions are officially recognised and included in the Lebanese sectarian state system. Some of them still live in Burj Hamoud, where the refugee camps remained almost unchanged for decades, often referred to as “Lebanon’s Little Armenia.” Lebanon remains a beloved home in the Armenian diasporic imagination, a place where Armenians were able to find sanctuary, regroup and rebuild post-genocide (Migliorino 2008), and maintains a special status in the transnation. Here the genocide centenary was contextualised as part of the wider catastrophe of the Great Famine of 1915-18 when half the 400,000 population of Mount Lebanon were wiped out,<sup>50</sup> weaving together the national Lebanese narrative with the Armenian experience. This trope of grafting a national/ community story onto the wider national/state narrative was apparent throughout the centenary and a useful approach inviting wider comparison and empathy.<sup>51</sup> Stories of tragedy, when recounted by the victims or their descendants are potentially stories of

resistance and resilience. Lebanon is also home to the most famous resistance movement, the Musa Dagh Armenians,<sup>52</sup> who are today the inhabitants of Anjar, in the Bekaa Valley.

Incidentally, April 24 is the one event that all the different and divided actors in the Lebanese Armenian community unite for,<sup>53</sup> reflecting again the sacred nature of the genocide for the Armenian transnation.

Lebanon's memorialisation of the Great Famine of 1915-18 through art, culture and media<sup>54</sup> extended to public interest in the stories of the arrival of the Armenian genocide survivors.

2015 marked a distinct effort to universalise the Armenian tragedy in Lebanon – drawing on the commonalities with the wider Lebanese experience, of the death from starvation and disease of at least a third of the population, during the First World War. This resulted in the genocide being interpreted and presented with a new confidence as a Lebanese and an Arab issue. Armenian Lebanese MP Hagop Pakradounian in his speech on the day said, “Arab people have lived under oppression and injustice... Four centuries of occupation and the filling of Christians and Muslims in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq... make the cause of the genocide an Arab-Armenian one.”<sup>55</sup> His sentiments were echoed by politicians across the board in solidarity with Armenians.

April 24th was declared a public holiday in the country for the first time in 2015, and most political parties and religious leaders spoke out in support of its wider acknowledgement. However this was not universally the case. Some Sunni groups were vocal in their condemnation of this move, and also in their views that it was not genocide but that in fact the Armenians were themselves perpetrators of genocide. They retaliated against the government's decision to close schools for the day denouncing it as a tactical move to curry favour with the Armenian populace. This resulted in demonstrations, mostly in Sidon and Tripoli,<sup>56</sup> where Turkish flags were raised over schools and buildings. Al-Jamaa al-Islamiya swathed its mosques with Turkish flags and pictures of the Turkish President. This turn of events has continued in 2016, and extends to the world of social media where people can be even more outspoken in their support for the perpetrators, even calling for a repeat massacre – “this time in Burj Hamoud”(Tashjian 2016B). This is one example of how the Armenian genocide is used as a political tool in the contested sectarian narratives of Lebanon. The commemoration of the centenary in Lebanon reflected the realities of the Armenian community there, their apparent security and longevity, alongside an underlying precariousness that can erupt at any moment. The commemorations and discourse were reflective of the highly politicised sectarian nature of the state and society in Lebanon, which extends to its Armenian constituents.

## **New Spaces and Old Sites**

A crucial aspect of genocide commemoration is the possibility of plotting a different future trajectory. In the past decade we have seen the carving out of a new and radical space led by Turkish and Armenian activists situated in transnational civil society, constructing new avenues and identities. Joint commemoration events in 2015 revealed the space that has been painstakingly prised open and needs to be protected and defended (Kasbarian and Öktem 2014). In this alternative site, it is possible for nationalist binaries to be transgressed, for Armenians, Turks, Kurds and others to stand together, and to mourn together.

Intrinsic to these safe spaces and circles of trust, lies also the possibility of a real encounter with Turkey for diasporan Armenians, whether in short trips to see ancestral lands, to work with the civil society organisations that have sprung up relating to these issues or to contribute to projects to restore Armenian churches like Surp (Saint) Giragos, the sixteenth-century Armenian Apostolic Cathedral in Diyarbakır, the biggest Armenian church in the Middle East, which has lain in ruin for decades.<sup>57</sup> Anny Bakalian and Zeynep Turan (2015) have written poignantly about a kind of modern day pilgrimage to Turkey through organised bespoke tours - and what a transformative experience this is for the participants. This encounter with ancestral lands is both a memory site but also a real living place whose inhabitants offer meaningful and challenging encounters.

The burgeoning trend among small sections of the diaspora to visit Turkey extended to the small numbers of Armenian diasporans, individuals or organised new groups like Project 2015<sup>58</sup> or led by diaspora institutions like the Armenian General Benevolent Union,<sup>59</sup> who chose to spend April 24<sup>th</sup> 2015 in Turkey. They joined local Armenian activists like Nor Zartonk (New Renaissance),<sup>60</sup> a social movement that highlights the plight of Armenians in Turkey, amidst a wider platform of human rights and social justice issues.<sup>61</sup> Commemorating in the face of state denial is a political act and an act of defiance, most poignantly experienced in that week in Turkey, when Armenians, Turks, Kurds and others came together in solidarity to remember, but also to symbolise a different present and a future, poignantly articulated by Heghnar Watenpaugh (2015) at Taksim Square at the ceremony:

*“We are here today with Armenians from around the world and citizens of many nationalities who have travelled to stand against denial. We are here today with citizens of Turkey who are standing with us in our quest for redress and restitution.*

*I am here today with my children....because I want them to embrace the land of their ancestors. I want for them a world in which we can stand together with dignity, equality, and justice for all the people of this land, and for all people around the world.*

*Friends, let's begin again, and like my great-grandmother, let's climb our mountain together.*

*Let us hear the bells ringing, urging us on. Let us work together for justice."*

The act of standing in the centre of Istanbul, where Armenian intellectuals and leaders were rounded up one hundred year ago, was a powerful experience. Its meaningful nature was twofold – the embodiment of physical resistance and survival, and solidarity with a host of others. That the nature of this experience was symbolic resistance rather than a direct challenge or any change to the nationalist state narrative does not detract from its significance. In a polarized world of “resistance” to leaders and policies which are anathema to half their electorates, the act of protest and the claiming of physical and verbal space has taken on new urgency. This power of simply being present, was the focus of my interviewees who took part in these events, vividly conveyed in these two extracts:

*“We are alive -- the genocide did not finish us. We were able to stand in the heart of Istanbul, at Taksim Square, and demand recognition of the Genocide by Turkey... Even as we pay tribute to the victims and honour their lives, and continue to demand justice and recognition, the centenary for us was not a “dark event”, but a reaffirmation of life.”*

*Diasporan leader, London, Email interview, October 2015*

*“Seeing Armenians, Turks, Kurds, Greeks, all together, marking the event with respect and solemnity and especially solidarity is an experience I will never forget. Hearing and then seeing the thousands of marching HDP supporters led by Nor Zartonk was an especially powerful moment for me – seeing young, educated Turkish Armenians and their supporters carrying banners “Menk Hos Enk” meant everything. I picked a discarded Nor Zartonk banner with these words and it is hanging in a frame in my office. Perhaps there is hope.”*

*Diasporan Scholar, London, Email interview, October 2015*

This moment of solidarity is more poignant still given the deteriorating political and human rights situation in Turkey since. Many of the same Turkish and Kurdish activists and academics situated in this new and precarious space, have been intimidated, threatened, dismissed from their jobs, and jailed as “terrorists” following their criticism of the government’s violence against the Kurds.<sup>62</sup> The failed coup against the government in July 2016 led to subsequent waves of purges of state employees, many from the education sector. What we are witnessing is the narrowing of any space for dissent in the Turkish public sphere, and a government that has repeatedly shown its lack of hesitation to crush any opposition. The climate since the centenary commemorations of April 2015 is one of escalating fear and insecurity – it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that the centenary programme would be difficult to envisage in the present environment in Turkey.

In 2015, diaspora communities throughout the world put on unprecedented scale and series of events to commemorate and to call for recognition of the genocide.<sup>63</sup> In Los Angeles, home to a significant Armenian population, 100,000 people took part in a six mile march to the Turkish embassy.<sup>64</sup> In Europe the lights were switched off at the Eiffel tower and the Coliseum in memory of the victims. Alongside organising an extensive array of cultural, political and social events in their home communities, significant numbers of diasporans made the journey to Armenia for the impressive commemorations programme.<sup>65</sup> It would be accurate to say that the Armenian Republic took on the leading international role in the genocide commemorations, both setting and influencing the agenda. This was sometimes resented by diaspora communities<sup>66</sup> who saw the genocide as being more “their” issue than the Armenian state’s, given that it is their birthing moment and arguably, their defining experience. Yerevan was the site of a wide range of commemorative activity and articulation, led by leaders and influencers across a very broad church - from celebrities to human rights activists to world leaders. This eclectic and creative mix of actors and initiatives also demonstrated in full glory the multi-faceted Armenian diaspora. Among the musical events alone, were an impromptu concert by Kanye West (husband of Kim Kardashian), concerts by French Armenian legend Charles Aznavour and the Armenian American rock band System of a Down. The latter are well-known for their political activism, and played a powerful set that

seemed to embody the tensions and struggles of Armenians, past and present, that one interviewee summed up lyrically:

*“For a moment at least all the contradictions between an angry hard rock band of diasporans raised in Los Angeles and a weary post-Soviet republic dissolved. It was a night that the youngsters on the square will remember for the rest of their lives, a night when all the endless fractures and contradictions of being Armenian today were eclipsed. As so much of the best rock music is, this was rock as political activism, and anyone who had doubted the appropriateness of a rock concert on the eve of a genocide centenary saw their doubts similarly eclipsed. As if someone had really wanted to rain on the Armenian party, the driving rain that had only intensified as the concert went on, suddenly ceased shortly after SOAD left the stage. They did so after the various band members had hugged each other, and after a demonstrative group hug that seemed to sum up SOAD’s message last night: “We have shit to deal with. But we’ve got this nation and we’ve got this republic. Let’s get to work...”*

*Online personal account, British academic, April 25, 2015(shared with permission from the author)*

## **Diasporan Divergences, Debates and Dilemmas**

The centenary revealed a vast array of stakeholders in the field of genocide commemoration.

Most obviously, this included the Armenian Republic and the diaspora, the latter comprised of distinct communities, each with their own national narratives relating to their home states.

Whereas much of the focus was on Istanbul and Yerevan, the centenary also showed how permanent living in diaspora is for Armenians, while having an enduring sense of connection and historical origin. The widespread public emergence of third and fourth generation

Armenians of different backgrounds, epitomised in the so-called “A List diaspora,”<sup>67</sup>

revealed a heterogeneous imagined community unified by the common thread of genocide.

The centenary also showcased a strong and uncompromising stance on combatting denial of the genocide, as well as its internationalisation. A coalition of influential Armenian and non-

Armenian high profile actors, building on the groundwork that has been done by academics, activists and artists, were crucial to the shift in the representation of the Armenian genocide

as a niche subject to one of international relevance and resonance. Indeed some actors like the

Clooneys and the Kardashians, with their own distinct brand, added an unexpected glamour

to genocide recognition and commemoration. The unparalleled potential of celebrity meant

that the centenary received unprecedented amounts of media attention. The extensive activity,

together with a coherent narrative espoused by respected international leaders meant that the

genocide was literally making the headlines one hundred years later.<sup>68</sup> Although it is difficult

to ascertain where public opinion now sits, the fact that international media of all political leanings covered the centenary with a relatively unified position must suggest a shift –in mainstreaming the genocide, in shedding the vestiges of controversy and in raising public awareness.

The question remains however as to whether the centenary had substance as well as style.

What real impact did the heightened “visibility”<sup>69</sup> of the genocide, the memories of lost and shattered lives, in the public domain have? In terms of material gains, more countries have recognised the genocide in the run up to and since the centenary. This undoubtedly validates their Armenian constituents and as such can be considered a symbolic success, however politically motivated such moves usually are. However there is no real change in Turkey, and despite calls for restorative justice and reparations by some diaspora actors, this remains a lost cause in material terms. In a context of a country sliding towards authoritarianism, where human rights and liberal values are being eroded, the 2015 commemorative programme, even in what was a staunchly denialist environment, now feel ironically like the final remnants of freedom of speech and expression.

More broadly, the centenary has been a moment for diasporans to pause, to remember, to honour memories and histories, but also to question the centrality of the genocide to their

collective identity. There is a sense that recognition and restitution by the Turkish state will never be a serious prospect, and that diasporans have to make their own trajectories to put to rest this tragic past. The options include reaching out to the Armenian state, to most diasporans a distant and foreign land, or a renewed agency in owning and exercising layered identities. The poignancy and urgency of genocide recognition is waning after the centenary; and with that come fears about the future of the diaspora itself:

*“Many Armenians will remember where they were on 24 April 2015 for years to come. It is one of those defining moments in our lives – we had hyped up the 100th anniversary so much; we imbued it with tremendous symbolism. I am glad I was in Istanbul on that memorable day. But the 101<sup>st</sup>, 102<sup>nd</sup> and the 103<sup>rd</sup> anniversaries will come and go, and “pull” of the genocide will weaken as a defining characteristic of who we are as Armenians. What will replace it?”*

*Diasporan leader, email interview, October 2015*

The centenary revealed a multi-layered diaspora with a number of centres and nodes, experiences and perspectives. Panossian (2015), in the run up to the centenary, wrote that “the strength of the Armenian people lies in its decentralisation” and described the Diaspora as “the entity that sustained Armenian culture, learning and identity for centuries” in contrast to a “23 year old brave but problematic state.” The western diaspora has always had to negotiate its complex relationship with the Armenian state, their “step-homeland” (Kasbarian

2016B). The fact that the diaspora's roots lie in Ottoman (now Turkish) lands means that the Republic cannot assume the support of western Armenian communities. Genocide recognition and relations with Turkey have in the past been a point of contention between the two entities.

The commemorations were an impetus for many diasporans, individually and collectively, to reflect upon wider questions about who has the responsibility and authority to represent and mediate the collective past and present. Questions of "who speaks" for a transnation are perennial - Armenian state leaders, spiritual leaders, and diaspora institutions have sought to "speak" on behalf of others, not least the dead. The centenary was a rare occasion when they all "spoke" in relative harmony. It was also a watershed moment in critically engaging with the genocide's centrality in shaping the Armenian diaspora going forward. Aslanian (2015) has written eloquently about the problems of "too much memory" for Armenians, the limitations and struggles it perpetuates. Diasporans, as descendants of genocide survivors, know the weight of having to deal with a painful and complicated personal and national history, sometimes with ambivalence and resentment. Gourevitch (2014) speaking of the Rwandan case has said that "memory can feel like an affliction, and the greater imperative has often been to learn how to forget enough for long enough to live in the present."<sup>70</sup> In time perhaps, the centenary might be seen as a turning point for the Armenian diaspora - a

fortress of commemoration, underpinned by international validation – but also a celebration of survival and resilience, and ultimately, a perhaps a release from the burden of history.

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks to colleagues who read and heard earlier versions of this paper, especially to Kerem Öktem and Jo Laycock for stimulating and helpful discussions. I am very grateful to one anonymous reviewer for excellent feedback and guidance, from which the final paper has benefited greatly.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. On 20 April 2016, the US based Turkish Institute of Progress (<http://turkishprogress.org/>) hired a plane to emblazon the Manhattan skies with denialist propaganda and nationalist slogans. (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3552070/Pro-Turkish-skywriters-scribble-slogans-New-York.html>)

<sup>3</sup> See Kasbarian 2016B for a discussion of the Republic of Armenia as a “step-homeland” for the western diaspora.

<sup>4</sup> See Bakalian and Turan 2015 for a discussion of Turkey as ancestral homeland in contemporary encounters by Armenian diasporans.

<sup>5</sup> #RhodesMustFall

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/why-is-my-curriculum-white/>

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the “unremembering” of the Assyrian and Greek genocides in the Ottoman Empire, see Hannibal Travis 2013

<sup>8</sup> The massacres were discussed openly in a series of military tribunals and court between 1919 and 1921 in Istanbul. The evidence was presented in courts-martial and guilty verdicts handed down, confirming the mass scale state-sponsored policy of extermination. The Atatürk post-war government, however, balked at carrying out the sentences and the tribunals were closed under pressure from the Nationalists.

<sup>9</sup> Cengiz Aktar, quoted in Gayane Abrahamyan 2011

<sup>10</sup> Bilgin Ayata 2015 argues for the neglected role that parts of Kurdish civil society have played in confronting the Armenian Genocide, where “reconciliation initiatives are strongly shaped by the violence and injustice to which they were subjected by the state.” This is by no means a uniform development, crucially centering on how Kurdish actors position themselves as active and complicit perpetrators of the genocide, but at least offers an alternative reading to “reconciliation”.

<sup>11</sup> See, among others, Ekmekcioglu, 2016, Suciyan 2016, Tchilingirian 2016 Kasbarian 2016A, Anahit, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> For a micro-study of this phenomenon, see Zerrin Ozlem Biner 2010

<sup>13</sup> Other notable oral histories on this theme are Altınay, Ayşe Gül, and Fethiye Çetin. 2011. and Neyzi, Leyla, and Hranush Kharatyan-Araqelyan. 2010.

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<sup>14</sup> On the use of narrative in “communities of memories” and as a “memorial for victims and survivors” see Azarian-Ceccato 2010

<sup>15</sup> See for example, Miller, Donald E. and Lorna Touryan Miller 1993

<sup>16</sup> For a comprehensive set of primary eyewitness accounts see Sarafian 2004

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/item/2015/04/23/gf\\_nogenocide/](http://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/item/2015/04/23/gf_nogenocide/)

<sup>18</sup> 100 LIVES is an initiative led by Vartan Gregorian, Ruben Vardanyan and Noubar Afeyan (<https://auroraprize.com/en/about>).

<sup>19</sup> Including high profile celebrities like George Clooney who has also been a champion of 100 Lives and the Aurora Prize. His wife the Human rights barrister Amal Clooney is a long-term advocate for the recognition of the genocide, along with her colleague Geoffrey Robertson QC, author of *An Inconvenient Genocide: Who Now Remembers the Armenians?* (Biteback Publishing, 2016)

<sup>20</sup> Tololyan (2010, 36) defines the “Armenian transnation” as consisting of “the Republic; the unrecognized, secessionist, de facto state of Karabagh; and the diaspora communities, variously territorialized, sedentary and mobile, whose population outnumbered the homeland’s.”

<sup>21</sup> <https://kittroyer.wordpress.com/2016/05/07/instahate/> My thanks to Patrick Malone for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>22</sup> The Turkish state over the century has co-opted some western academics, paid for the denialist position to be propagated through various think tanks and outfits sometimes attached to universities, and supported directly and indirectly historians willing to take a denialist position for personal gain

<sup>23</sup> The denialist campaign and its effects have been analyzed extensively. See for example Hovannisian 1986; Roger W. Smith 1991; Cheterian 2014; Gocek 2014.

<sup>24</sup> For analyses of different arguments used by genocide deniers see, amongst others, Richard Hovannisian 1999.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n11/edward-luttwak/sins-of-the-three-pashas>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n12/letters>

<sup>27</sup> The full speech is available at <http://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2015/04/24/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-Genocide-April-24/>

<sup>28</sup> See for example the Facebook activist group, Stop Corruption in Armenia

<sup>29</sup> See for example Ishkanian 2015

<sup>30</sup> Zhamakochyan (2016) discusses how the threat of war over Karabakh is used to silence critical and opposition forces within the republic, under the banner of “national unity”

<sup>31</sup> Despite causing a diplomatic furore with Turkey, Pope Francis reiterated his words when visiting Yerevan in June 2016. See for example,

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/24/pope-francis-denounces-armenian-genocide-during-visit-to-yerevan>

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<sup>32</sup> Among extensive media coverage, see

[http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/14/world/americas/stung-by-popes-remarks-on-armenian-genocide-turkish-minister-insults-argentina.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/14/world/americas/stung-by-popes-remarks-on-armenian-genocide-turkish-minister-insults-argentina.html?_r=0)

<sup>33</sup> The Pope's visit to Armenia on 23-25 June 2016 sent an even clearer message. In his public statements and mass he used the word genocide unequivocally and wrote this at the memorial site: "Memory should never be watered-down or forgotten" and "memory is the source of peace and the future." See, among extensive international media coverage,

[http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/26/world/europe/pope-francis-to-armenians-seek-peace-but-never-forget-genocide.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/26/world/europe/pope-francis-to-armenians-seek-peace-but-never-forget-genocide.html?_r=0)

Turkey's response was to denounce the Pope as having a "crusades mentality".

<sup>34</sup> The full text of the Pope's speech on 12 April 2015 is available here:

<http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2015/04/13/full-text-pope-franciss-message-to-armenians/#.VS6fC-fI8uE.facebook>

<sup>35</sup> Ekmekçioğlu 2015 is a groundbreaking historical work on Armenians, and in particular Armenian feminists, in post-genocidal Turkey.

<sup>36</sup> For a broader discussion of Turkish "domination" in this field see Theriault 2009.

<sup>37</sup> This claim is based on lengthy confidential and difficult discussions with Armenian diasporan academics (mostly women) at a number of conferences in 2014-15.

<sup>38</sup> This is not a new or a unique dynamic – Armenians have had the fear that if the Genocide is being discussed in a specific context, then it is being diluted, with (different) contexts seen as a mechanism to sideline. Similar "fears" have existed for the study of the Holocaust.

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/24/armenian-genocide-survivors-stories-my-dreams-cannot-mourn>

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2939622/Keeping-Kardashians-circa-1900-Kim-s-ancestors-heeded-prophet-s-warning-looming-slaughter-escape-rural-Armenia-new-life-U-S.html>

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3054518/We-recognized-soon-Kim-Kardashian-takes-Twitter-mark-100th-anniversary-Armenian-genocide-1-5million-people-massacred.html>

<sup>42</sup> Covered extensively by international media, e.g. <http://uk.businessinsider.com/kardashians-trip-to-armenia-2015-4>

<sup>43</sup> It should not be assumed that all these publications were received uncritically by Armenians worldwide. In many cases, they have been divisive, revealing the many cracks and fractures within the diaspora and between diaspora elites that compete for representing the "master narrative" of the Armenian experience. The memoir *There was and there was not* by Meline Toumani (2014) which was published to international acclaim, received a negative reception from some diaspora outlets and created diaspora-wide discussion and controversy.

<sup>44</sup> Franz Werfel, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, Verba Mundi, reissued in 2012

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<sup>45</sup> There is a vast literature on how the memory of the First World War is historicised, E.g. Winter 2016

<sup>46</sup> This included the publication of important texts on the Middle East, among the most notable being, Fawaz 2014, Watenpaugh 2015, Rogan 2015, Kieser, Öktem and Reinkowski, 2015; as well as a ground-breaking documentary from Al Jazeera, World War One Through Arab Eyes (<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/specialseries/2014/11/world-war-one-through-arab-eyes-20141114133936678600.html>)

<sup>47</sup> <http://recogniseag.uk>

<sup>48</sup> In the UK, see e.g., [http://www.accc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/AGCCC\\_events\\_timetable.pdf](http://www.accc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/AGCCC_events_timetable.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> The *Daily Star* Lebanese daily reported that there were 230,000 people of Armenian origin in Lebanon (24 April 2015), though this figure seems inflated compared to estimates from Armenian Lebanese leaders which put it at a more likely 175,000. However, the means of identifying who is Armenian vary and would explain the disparity in figures (which extends to every community in Lebanon, where a census has not been conducted since 1932, for political reasons). There are also now said to be at least 15,000 Armenian refugees from Syria currently being looked after by their Armenian brethren in Lebanon.

<sup>50</sup> The Great Famine was a result of the combination of a severe drought and locust plague, and a wartime blockade, causing deaths from starvation and from the widespread outbreak of diseases. It is difficult to ascertain the number of total mortalities. The historian George Antonius estimates 350,000 deaths in Greater Syria. (Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, New York: Capricorn Books, 1965), 241. See for example Tanielian 2014.

<sup>51</sup> Another common trope in the Arab world is the comparison of the Palestinian and Armenian experience of displacement. E.g. Tashjian 2016A

<sup>52</sup> Their dramatic story inspired Franz Werfel's award-winning novel, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Armenian community leader in Beirut, October 2015

<sup>54</sup> See for example, Ghazal 2015

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in "Armenians mark genocide centennial" *The Daily Star*, 25 April 2015

<sup>56</sup> "Top Tripoli sheikh denies Armenian Genocide", 24 April 2015  
<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/NewsReports/565172-top-tripoli-sheikh-denies-armenian-genocide>

<sup>57</sup> Armenians from all over the world made the pilgrimage to St. Giragos Church on **October 22, 2011**, to attend the consecration of the restored church. It was renovated by the Surp Giragos Armenian Foundation (diasporan based), with the support of the local Kurdish-controlled municipality of the Sur district (at the time). This was led by Abdullah Demirtaş, the district mayor, from the (majority Kurdish) **Peace and Democracy Party (BDP)**, a

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visionary and progressive leader who continues to be targeted by the Turkish state. St. Giragos was heavily damaged during clashes between Turkish forces and the Kurdish Worker's party in February 2016. On 26 March 2016 the Turkish government expropriated St. Giragos, along with other buildings in Diyarbakir. See e.g.,

<http://armenianweekly.com/2016/03/28/breaking-expropriated-properties-in-diyarbakir/>

<sup>58</sup> Project 2015 has been a two-year-long effort to organize members of the Armenian diaspora and others committed to human rights and genocide prevention in the US, Europe, and the Middle East to travel to Turkey to join this centennial commemoration.

<http://www.armenianproject2015.org/about-armenian-project-2015/>

<sup>59</sup> See <http://agbueurope.org/events/24th-of-april-2015-commemoration-of-the-armenian-genocide-in-istanbul/>

<sup>60</sup> [http://www.norzartonk.org/en/?page\\_id=2](http://www.norzartonk.org/en/?page_id=2)

<sup>61</sup> Nor Zartonk was founded before the assassination of Hrant Dink, the leading newspaper editor and Armenian public intellectual in Turkey, but was galvanized by his murder in January 2007. It is now considered an important (although controversial, and often divisive among the local community) voice for Armenians in Turkey. For these nuances see Barsoumian 2015.

<sup>62</sup> The petition by Academics for Peace is available here: <http://m.bianet.org/english/human-rights/170978-academics-we-will-not-be-a-party-to-this-crime> For an analysis see Owen 2016.

<sup>63</sup> The most significant of these worldwide activities are documented in the News section of the website, <http://armeniangenocide100.org/en/newsfeed>

<sup>64</sup> See for example, <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-armenian-genocide-march-los-angeles-20150424-story.html>

<sup>65</sup> See e.g. <http://armeniangenocide100.org/en/commemoration/>; <http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/news.php>

<sup>66</sup> Personal communications by diaspora and community leaders in the UK, Cyprus, US and Lebanon.

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/22/cher-kardashian-agassi-armenias-a-list-diaspora-genocide>

<sup>68</sup> Many newspapers opened their archives and reprinted their coverage of the genocide as it was taking place.

<sup>69</sup> I am grateful to Talar Chahinian for initiating a discussion on “visibility” at the Society of Armenian Studies (SAS) meeting at the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) convention in Denver in November 2015.

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