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Reconstructing the Turkish Historiography on the Armenian Massacres and Deaths of 1915

Fatma Müge Göçek

“A Muezzin’s Summons to Prayer”

On a July night replete with peace and repose, a darkness descends to the ground;  
And to the sky at once rises a sound;  
It is the muezzin’s voice, summoning to prayer the Muslims all around,  
A sop a white minaret he calls, divine love within abound.

Blending into the shore’s breeze, they journey on together,  
And that penetrating voice, slowly ascends layer upon layer;  
Then into the world of eternity, it wanes and disappears  
All along with the sweetly caressing morning breeze.

Oh, that muezzin voice! Lost in far away lands...  
That prayer waives by the moment, but the feeling left inside immense;  
Yes, such a prayer, loaded with mystery and dependence,  
Rises at times and then, revere with sadness, fades into the distance.

Confessions of a sad and pule heart this prayer beholds,  
To me it appears sometimes as my weeping inner voice;  
Yes, such a voice, longing to leave all sadness in the winds’ embrace!...

And what’s done is done; right then all slowly unzips,  
Yes, in my heart arise and settle peace and repose,  
Happiness and relief till we inside, peace my whole existence envelops.  
Because he were for me tonight, for my sadness and sorrows...

This poem was written by Hraçya (Hrachia) Surenyan, also known as the poet Armen Dorian. Born in Sinope in 1892, Dorian first attended the Pangaltı Mekhitarist School and then the Sorbonne University in Paris. At the age of twenty-one, he composed exclusively in French to become one of the founders of the pantheist school of poetry. After his return to Istanbul in 1914, he died at the age of
narrative of the Turkish state, which explicitly denies the allegation that an Armenian genocide occurred;

3) The Post-Nationalist Critical Narrative found in works that are directly or indirectly critical of the nationalist master narrative but with a few exceptions do not focus specifically on the Armenian massacres. Their concern is much more with the silence in contemporary Turkish society pertaining to its history and resultant ethnoreligious composition.

Reading the events of 1915 within this framework can create a new space for a different Turkish interpretation, one that would ultimately recognize the depth of the Armenian tragedy.

The Ottoman Investigative Narrative on the Events of 1915

Works in this category are composed of the memoirs of Ottoman officials such as Said, Kamil, and Talat pashas, Mehmed Asaf, and Dr. Resid Bey, the investigative records of the postwar military tribunals that tried persons accused of perpetrating the massacres, the official reports prepared by the Ottoman state such as the one by Hüseyin Nazım Pasha, the petitions of groups associated with the postwar Ottoman government, the accounts of the Turkish negotiations of the Treaty of Lausanne, and the collections of documents published by the Turkish nation-state ostensibly from the Ottoman state and military archives to deny the genocide allegations. Each work is reviewed in detail in a larger book project, but here I shall merely outline the general patterns of meaning I discern in these publications that make up the Ottoman investigative narrative.

My reading of the works issued during the Ottoman period on the Armenian relocations and deaths reveals that two characteristics distinguish the Ottoman investigative narrative from others. First, since all of these works were originally written around the time of the events of 1915, they do not question the occurrence of the Armenian “massacres” (genocide was not a term then employed) but focus instead on the question of what happened and why. Later, however, as the temporal distance between the events and the scholarship increases, the events become distant memories and the narratives of both the Republican and post-nationalist periods concentrate more on the meanings that the events acquired rather than the events themselves.
Second, the Ottoman investigative narrative reveals a very strong tension between two world views. Some of the authors maintain a more traditional Ottoman imperial view and regard the existing structure of empire as just and the problems of the Armenian subjects within it as resolvable. They also blame the events of 1915 on both the errant Armenian subjects and corrupt Muslim officials. Other authors, however, display a more "proto-nationalist" state view and perceive the existing structure of the empire as inadequate and the position of the Armenian subjects within it as problematic. While they are not quite clear about how to deal with the situation, they give priority to the preservation of the state and its Muslim element over all other concerns and justify their actions accordingly.

The central tension of the Ottoman investigative narrative emerges over the attribution of responsibility for the crimes. When reviewed chronologically, the memoirs of Ottoman officials reveal a transformation in the assumption of responsibility as the later ones, more and more imbued with proto-nationalist sentiments, shirk from the charge of perpetration of crimes against the Armenians. The tension over responsibility mounts especially as of the Ottoman defeat in World War I, when the Treaty of Sèvres between the Allied Powers and the Ottoman Empire makes the Armenian tragedy a reason not only to detach Ottoman lands having significant minority populations but also to establish an independent Armenian homeland extending into eastern Anatolia. During this period, the Ottoman state acknowledges what happened and publishes as supplements to the semi-official newspaper Tukşım-i Vekayî the proceedings of the Ottoman military tribunals that tried some of the perpetrators. Yet the advent and eventual victory of what became known as Turkish War of Independence nullified efforts of the Allied Powers to bring the perpetrators to justice. With the triumph of nationalism, the newspaper issues that contain the records and verdicts of the military tribunals begin to disappear, to such a degree that at present no complete set exists in any Turkish public library.

Soon after the suspension of the military tribunals, especially during the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish nation-state, the responsibility for the crimes gradually shifts from the perpetrators to the victims. The first Ottoman official report addressing the events of 1915 cites the seditionous activities of the Armenian revolutionary committees and the atrocities against the Turks (even though these occurred much later in the eastern provinces) as a way to justify the Armenian massacres and deaths. Significant in this shift is the strong connection between the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP, Young Turks), which rationalizes the Armenian tragedy as an unfortunate consequence of the need to protect the Ottoman state, and the Turkish nationalist movement, which gradually adopts this Unionist position as its own. The Ottoman state documents published by the Turkish nation-state repeat this same argument. And this argument in turn continues to subside in an even more essentialized and radicalized form during the subsequent Republican defensive narrative that begins to be articulated in the 1950s.

The intervening thirty years before the emergence of the Republic's defensive narrative are crucial in understanding the current stand of the Turkish nation-state in view of the fact that the connection between Ottoman and Turkish rule has never been extensively documented and studied. The Republican rhetoric dismissed, and still dismisses, any connection with the Committee of the Union and Progress, which lost the Ottoman Empire. Yet the works in this category, especially the military tribunal records, clearly demonstrate the strength of the connection between these two political entities in terms of the transfer of wealth, ideology, and personnel. Many of the organizers and perpetrators of the Armenian massacres escaped to Anatolia in order to evade Allied attempts to bring them to justice. Those perpetrators who evaded apprehension by the Allies as well as the silent participants in the massacres simply stayed in their locations and threw in their lot with the burgeoning nationalist movement. Once the oppositional struggle in Anatolia commenced and assumed the form of an independence movement that eventually triumphed in establishing the Turkish nation-state, the former perpetrators, some of whom now occupied significant positions in the nationalist camp and had become the patriotic citizens of a new country, could no longer be accused because there was no political entity left to indict them. The Allied Powers had retreated, the reigning sultan had been deposed, and the empire was now defunct.

The new nation-state and its leader, Mustafa Kemal, could not take a stand against the perpetrators who had become comrades in the struggle and who initially were needed in sustaining the new state. But Mustafa Kemal understood that it was essential to have his country recognized by the Western powers, which still took issue
with what occurred during the Unionist leadership, and was anxious to win credit for the establishment of a nation-state (actually built through the resources provided by the Committee of Union and Progress). He therefore eventually took a public stand against the Unionists, denied his CUP credentials, liquidated those Unionists who challenged his authority, and exalted his passage to Anatolia on May 19, 1919 as the starting point of the War of Independence leading to the Turkish nation-state and its international recognition in the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923.

The treaties of Sèvres and Lausanne also become important historical landmarks in the discussion of the Armenian deaths and massacres of 1915 because the former confirms and the latter ignores them. Even though it initially could have been possible to have equity and also preserve the basic aspirations on both sides through reforms, this unfortunately did not happen due to a number of factors, including the conflicting viewpoints among the Ottoman officials about the necessity, applicability, or sustainability of such reforms, frequent diplomatic intervention by the Western powers about the execution of the reforms, as well as the impatience of the Armenians. While the reforms strove for the security of life, family, and property, the eventual polarization of the two groups strengthened, on both sides, the positions of those initially fringe groups that advocated the creation of separate independent nation-states. In the Treaty of Sèvres, the Armenian massacres helped establish the conditions for an Armenian homeland reaching into Anatolia. Even though for the Armenians the Sèvres treaty was a certificate of "rebirth" that accorded them a political entity that they could call their own, one that would establish their own country, the Muslim Turks interpreted the same treaty as a death sentence that guaranteed their disappearance as a political entity.

As a result of these different interpretations, the two communities took different courses of action. The Armenians relied on and cooperated with the Allied Powers to attain their promised homeland and to bring to justice the perpetrators of the massacres. For their part, the Muslims of Anatolia, who now began to define themselves with a new, once radical, identity, that of "Turk," which had not been embraced by the Ottomans because of its exclusivity and limited scope, started to fight against the same Allied Powers and the Armenians.

The Turkish War of Independence culminated in victory largely because of Allied withdrawal of support for the Armenian cause. This success was predicated, however, on the injustice that the Unionists committed against the Armenian people in the name of a proto-nationalist ideal. First, they physically removed the Armenians from their homeland and eventually settled in their stead Muslim refugees (muhajirs) both from the Balkans and the Russian Empire. In doing this, they irreversibly altered the population composition of Anatolia. Second, the Unionists decimated the Armenian population through the massacres, traumatized and dispersed them in such a manner that it made it virtually impossible for them to reunite against the Turks as a coherent political and military entity. And finally, the Unionists capitalized on the property and goods left behind by the deported Armenians and utilized these resources to mobilize and finance an army and a populace that were supportive of the nationalist cause.

When the Unionists emerged victorious in the subsequent War of Independence under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, they started to justify their anti-Armenian measures as a tragic but necessary move for the preservation of the Turkish state. Contrary to the Sèvres treaty, which awarded the Armenians a homeland and was tantamount to a death warrant on the Ottoman Empire, the subsequent Lausanne treaty signed by the Turkish nationalists guaranteed them a new state and a homeland. That very homeland was established in significant measure at the expense of a projected homeland the Allied Powers had set aside for the Armenians. In signing the Lausanne treaty, the Allied Powers allowed their immediate interests to take precedence over their pledges to the Armenians. The Armenians themselves were sapped of the strength required to realize their claims. As a consequence, the Lausanne treaty now brought political death to the Armenians.

Hence, the Sèvres and Lausanne treaties offer totally contradictory solutions to the Armenians and the Turks, also reflected in the subsequent narratives that the two sides formulate. Discussion of the Sèvres treaty psychologically unnerve the Turkish nation-state and brought back memories of the insecurity and impending doom, felt before and during the War of Independence. The Lausanne treaty, on the other hand, was for the Turkish nation-state one of birth, celebration, and joyousness. It was a reminder of the pride and glory
felt when Turkish envoys went to the very Europe that had shamed the Turks through frequent political intervention and the ultimate shame of occupation of their core lands after World War I, a shame experienced for the first time in their six-hundred-year history. This was then linked with the increasingly nationalist contention that the Turks were the only people who could claim possession of this last vestige of the Ottoman Empire as their own. As the victorious Turks signed the Lausanne treaty, they finally declared as theirs what they now imagined had been their national homeland since the beginning of time.

Yet the Armenians had exactly the opposite experience. The contemplation of the same Sévres treaty kindled hope and joy among the Armenians, brought back memories of when they almost gained a homeland of their own on lands they had inhabited from time immemorial. This treaty took them back to an era when they had flourished financially and intellectually, when they had produced a new generation educated with the European ideals of freedom and liberty. They stood to inherit a homeland where they could create a brand new, advanced, civilized nation-state, one that would have brought back their proud ancient civilization that had been a cradle of Christianity. The Lausanne treaty produced the opposite effect on the Armenians, however, as it reminded them of the final destruction of their dreams of that ideal homeland where they could have brought out the best in their culture and civilization and created a collective future for their sons and daughters. The possibility of such a homeland is categorically denied by the Turks who instead established for themselves the nation-state desired by the Armenians. The Turks succeeded at the expense of the Armenians, with the wealth that had been confiscated from them and from the energy sapped out of the lives of the Armenian children who instead of growing to flourish in their homeland were tragically destroyed.

Both of these narratives contain much sorrow, for each has been constructed at the expense of those who lost their lives. Many scholars have noted how Western imperialism aggravated this suffering. I would argue that the role of another social actor, that of nationalism, needs to be emphasized time and again in contextualizing the Turkish and Armenian narratives. I contend that nationalism caused the Armenians and the Turks to polarize and challenge each others’ existence, instilled in them the idea that they each had a primordial right to create a homeland filled with compatriots in pursuit of the same dreams, and decreed that these ideals could only be accomplished by them alone and to the exclusion of others.

Even though I find it morally unproductive to discuss who suffered more—because I think that posing the degree of human suffering to establish rights only increases the tendency to cause more suffering—let me note that nationalism caused much more physical, social, and psychological damage and eventual death to Armenians than to Turks. Because the CUP members, who espoused the concept of an imagined community of Turks, had the support of the state machinery to actualize their goals, they were able to impose death and destruction on the Armenians, who ironically and tragically were also members of the same state.

Let me now turn to the question of why it has been so difficult to sustain scholarly analyses of the tragic events of 1915. I would identify the transition from the political form of an empire to that of the nation-state as the main cause. During this transition, there briefly existed two concurrent narratives, one formulated by the same officials of the Ottoman Empire who still attempted to interpret the events swirling around them within an imperial framework, and the other by select groups, like some CUP members, who formulated a new exclusionary nationalist framework and forcefully strove to shape events by any means necessary to achieve their envisioned homeland. Their ideology also produced a new sense of empowerment and entitlement, preyed on deep-felt resentment among the populace, and enabled them to follow their objectives with intense zeal.

From the standpoint of the present, I think it is unfortunate that the latter nationalist vision prevailed. While both Armenians and Muslims of the Ottoman Empire had coexisted in relative peace in an imperial system that did not treat them equally, this inequality had been part and parcel of the social system for so long that most groups that challenged this inequality did so within the imperial framework. But the concepts of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution helped spark an alternate vision of society, that of nationalism, and an alternate political structure, the nation-state. The Ottoman Empire became one of the many testing grounds of both this nationalist outlook and the political structure it sought to create. This test brought with it a strong sense of empowerment and entitlement to transform everything in order to realize a so promising and
so liberating alternate vision. It came to appear almost natural to exclude, remove, or destroy anything or anybody not fitting into this construct. The world had to fight and suffer through two very bloody world wars in the twentieth century to comprehend clearly the destructiveness embedded in this way of thinking.

How were these two concurrent narratives during the transition from Ottoman Empire to Turkish nation-state reconciled to produce the Republican narrative? The emergence of a Turkish "nation-state" on the ashes of the Ottoman Empire precluded discussion of any claims of the homeland. The Turks now identified as their own. It was no accident that Mustafa Kemal declared, and the Turks constantly reiterate, that there is not "a hand-span of the soil of the motherland" to be relinquished. What Mustafa Kemal had forcefully articulated was shared by those who had no qualms then or have none now "to fight for the motherland until the last drop of blood." The willingness of people to sacrifice themselves for a vision demonstrates both the ideological strength of nationalism and its incredibly destructive power. As those willing to chance self-destruction have no intention of taking that risk alone, they beckon their compatriots to join them, and they define a target, a clearly specified group of human beings who differ from them according to their own definition, to annihilate in the process.

This nationalist tone dominates the Republican defensive narrative. In this regard, a significant historical occurrence has colored the Republican narrative. After the Armenian massacres and deaths in 1915, the period of Russian and Allied occupation of parts of the central Ottoman lands, both directly and also through the Greeks, was marked by massacres committed by Armenian armed groups.

These groups were joined by their coreligionists who had become polarized by atrocities committed against their people, so they sided with the occupying forces, took up arms, and perpetrated new atrocities against the Muslim Turkish populace in some locations. Armenian massacres of Turks in the eastern provinces in 1918 are central to the Republican narrative.

The other defensive element on which the Republican narrative has capitalized was provided by the murders of Turkish diplomats around the world in the late 1970s into the 1980s by the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA). This attempt to draw attention to the Armenian Genocide, when combined with the Turkish nationalist rhetoric, polarized Turkish public opinion not only against ASALA and Armenian claims but unfairly also against all Armenians. The only liability of these diplomats was that they were representatives of the Republic of Turkey. They had no direct connection to the Armenian deaths of 1915 other than being officials of the Turkish nation-state founded on what could have been the Armenian homeland. I think that these murders demonstrate the harmful effect that nationalism had on the Armenians themselves. The violence presented Republican Turkey with the opportunity to include, in a nationalist move, the avenging of these deaths in its narrative. The murderers only strengthened the Republican resolve to resist the Armenian claims and further strengthened the resolve to continue a total denial of the organized Armenian massacres of 1915.

The Republican Defensive Narrative on the Events of 1915

The works in this category emerge largely as clusters of analyses within the nationalist paradigm. Two works in 1955 that comprehensively cover the previous material on the Armenians are then selectively drawn on by the second cluster of works written with direct or indirect state support in the 1970s and 1980s in reaction to the ASALA murders. The third cluster since the 1990s either reproduces the same arguments that were made in the 1970s and 1980s or attempts to offer a new perspective while remaining within the nationalist paradigm. Among these perspectives are efforts to provide oral histories of Turkish survivors of Armenian massacres in the east, to locate the Armenian Question within Western diplomatic history, or to identify and exclude from Turkish politics everyone of minority origin. Two recent works must be cited separately. The first emerges out of an Islamist critique of the secular Republican thesis, but fails to escape the nationalist paradigm with the exception of two articles which inadvertently provide new historical information on the failure of the Ottoman state in undertaking reforms. The other work provides a psychoanalytical approach to the contemporary trauma of the Armenians but does so at their expense and without bringing in the role of the Turks.

The Republican nationalist narrative on the Armenian deaths of 1915 traces the origins of the tragedy to the intervention of the Western powers in the affairs of the Ottoman Empire and justifies the Armenian relocations and subsequent massacres as the result of the sub-
versive acts of the Armenian revolutionary committees. This narrative does not recognize, on one hand, the significance of the preexisting structural divide in Ottoman society among the social and ethno-religious groups and its institutionalized Muslim superiority and, on the other hand, the fact that Turkish nationalism was one of the many nationalisms that emerged and was no more just than any other but just happened to triumph at the expense of all others.

This non-recognition cloaked by a Turkish nationalism identifying the preservation of the Turkish state at all costs has led the Republican state to assign the entire moral responsibility for the Armenian massacres and deaths to everyone other than the actual perpetrators. As a consequence of this non-recognition, in the Republican narrative the Armenian victims themselves have tragically and ironically emerged alongside the guilty Western powers as the main culprits. Any feeble attempt to assign blame to the Turkish perpetrators is immediately dismissed in this narrative with the defense that what happened was an unfortunate but necessary act for the preservation of the "state."

If one reviews these works chronologically to depict patterns of meaning, no significant studies on the Armenian deaths and massacres appear until the two works by Esat Üns and Y. G. Çark in 1953, and when they appear they do so with declarations of loyalty to the Turkish nation-state at every opportunity. There is then another gap until 1976 when the scholarship that does appear is even more strongly dominated by Turkish nationalism. Its authors not only pledge allegiance to the Turkish nation-state as loyal citizens, but also employ historical knowledge selectively to preserve Turkish state interests at all costs, including that of critical scholarship. These two significant chronological gaps in the scholarship on the Armenian massacres and deaths of 1915 warrant further examination.

Why were there no works during the first thirty years of the Turkish Republic on the important social and moral issue of the Armenian massacres? I think the first thirty-year gap after the foundation of the Turkish Republic in relation to an event that was so crucial and central to the period immediately preceding it was caused by several factors. In addition to the general trauma and devastation of the war years that everyone in Turkey must have wanted to put aside, it is likely that the close link between the Unionist leadership, which not only funded the War of Independence but in large measure also staffed it, and the connection of the same leadership to the Armenian deaths, prompted the founders of the Turkish nation-state to employ a nationalist Republican rhetoric to silence discussion of the Armenian issue.

Another reason was that by 1926 Mustafa Kemal had effectively eliminated those CUP leaders he regarded as a potential threat to his rule. The only ones who managed to survive were those who declared and proved their personal loyalty to the person of Mustafa Kemal by turning against their former comrades. Some Unionists who were labeled as particularly dangerous were executed following the 1926 trials to expose and punish those implicated in an assassination attempt against Kemal. Although there was insufficient evidence, Kemal first accused all those who criticized his regime and then, with the help of those Unionists who had declared their personal allegiance to him, had them executed. Others had to go into voluntary exile to survive and were unable to return to Turkey until after Mustafa Kemal's death in 1938, and still others who remained in Turkey did so at the risk of their lives and survived so long as they retired from political life and maintained strict silence. The series of the traumatic social reforms the young Turkish Republic underwent during Kemal's reign within the format of single-party rule also precluded public discussion of significant social and historical issues. The subsequent promulgation of the laws regarding treason against the Turkish state and against the person of Mustafa Kemal rendered any discussion of the events that countered the official version subversive as well.

After Mustafa Kemal's death, the same political framework prevailed during the rule of his successor and close friend, Ismet İnönü. Even though some opponents of Kemal were now able to return to Turkey, they maintained their silence and self-censorship in tacit support of the existing regime. Both the Kemal and İnönü periods were also marked by strong Turkish nationalism in terms of religion and ethnicity, whereby the Turkish Muslim citizens, like their Ottoman Muslim predecessors, were ascendant and all other social groups were either co-opted, marginalized, or silenced.

The transition to the multi-party system in 1948, after twenty-five years of the single-party system, and the subsequent sweeping elec-
not more devastating force, that of nationalism. Yet the Republican
defensive narrative also makes no reference to the effect of Turkish
nationalism, because this narrative is itself a product of the same
nationalism and therefore lacks a critical distance from it.

The French Revolution and the social transformations it envisioned
altered the expectations of all social groups, including those of the
Ottoman Muslims. The frustrations of the Muslims created the social
group of Young Turks and their Muslim followers who assumed
power in 1908 and ultimately carried out the massacres of 1915.
The frustrations, in turn, of the Ottoman minorities first generated
demands for reform and, upon their failure and also upon increased
Muslim aggression, escalated the communal support for Armenian
revolutionary activities and ultimately the taking up of arms against
the Muslim elements. While both the Ottoman Muslims and the mi-
norities nurtured nationalist visions, the Turkish actualization of these
objectives occurred at the expense of the others.

Since the Muslims had the support of the Ottoman state and the
advantage of a social structure that protected their privileged posi-
tion, they eventually triumphed over the minorities. Their victory
was couched within the ideology of nationalism that conditioned all
actions undertaken in the name of the imagined community and for
the sake of the nation-state. This ideology enabled the nationalists
within the Ottoman state first to justify the Armenian massacres and
then to join the Turkish independence movement to create such an
imagined community. The emergent Turkish nation-state in turn dis-
claimed its Ottoman past and the massacres in which its leaders had
been implicated. The Republican scholars themselves who started
to research the Armenian massacres on behalf of the Turkish state
absorbed its inherent nationalism. As a consequence, they could only
identify as the culprits of the Armenian tragedy the two “others” of
Turkish nationalism, namely the Western powers and the Ottoman
Armenians themselves.

Their interpretations of the actions of these two “others” were so
colored by Turkish nationalism that they refused to see the destruct-
tiveness of the Ottoman Turks. Hence, they defended their view of
the events and not only dismissed the claims of massacres but even
argued that the Turks were the victims rather than the perpetrators.
Only within the current post-nationalist phase has it become pos-
sible to have a more critical and self-reflective reading in a new
are translated from the original Armenian to the Turkish language. Another interesting recent work is a memoir by a Turkish author who recounts how his childhood memories of the Armenians in his neighborhood disappeared with their relocation.

The most significant factor that unites the works in this category is that none is written to defend a particular thesis or is supported for publication, in one capacity or another, by the Turkish state. They are also not colored by the Turkish nationalism that pervades the official narrative discussed in the preceding section but assume instead a post-nationalist stance. As such, these works are the products of the emerging civil society in contemporary Turkey. They are, as stated, divided into three broad categories: those specifically on the Armenian issue; those penned on various aspects of Turkish history that indirectly illuminate and contextualize the Armenian massacres and deaths within Turkish history at large; and those that are literary works, mostly novels, by Turkish-Armenian writers that are being translated into Turkish after a silence of more than seven decades.

The most significant dimension of the post-nationalist critical narrative that begins to emerge in Turkey is its willingness to recognize Turkish society, not as an imagined community of nationalist compatriots of Turks, but rather as a cultural mosaic that includes many diverse groups, such as Kurds and Alevis, as well as the much atrophied former minority groups such as Armenians, Greeks, and Jews. Turkish society at large is now involved in an exploration of these ethno-religious and social groups through the literature and historical narrative of these groups. Some societal segments have started to engage further in critical self-reflection. Islamists have begun to challenge the dominant secular nationalist writing of history through publications of many memoirs that highlight the agency of religion in Turkish history. Liberal Turkish intellectuals have, on their part, taken on the challenge of critical self-reflection about what constitutes and ought to constitute Turkish identity. These groups are willing to move beyond the narrow bounds of the nationalist cloak that places the blame for all actions on others, on imagined and fabricated threats. Some are also ready to recognize how Turkish nationalism caused great pain and suffering to the Armenians. If these evolving groups transform into a movement associated with human rights, and if they are able to overcome the resistance of the nationalist
elements embedded in society and especially in the military, then
the depth of the Armenian calamity of 1915 would be recognized in
contemporary Turkey.

Conclusion

Why are the world in general and Turkey in particular still not
fully able to make the transition from the nationalist phase to a post-
nationalist one? I believe the problem originates in the periodization
of the War of Independence. It is extremely significant that the cur-
rent Turkish nationalist rhetoric identifies the passage of Mustafa
Kemal from Istanbul to Anatolia on May 19, 1919 as the starting
point of the nationalist struggle that culminated in the establishment
of the Turkish nation-state. This dating dismisses entirely the signifi-
cance of the preceding historical events and interprets the national-
ist movement as a spontaneous development predicated solely on
the agency of a single person, Mustafa Kemal.

I would argue that discussion and recognition of the Armenian
massacres and deaths of 1915 in particular, and demystification of
nationalism that still cloaks contemporary Turkey in general, can
only take place through the adoption of an alternate periodization.
The emergence of Turkish nationalism as a significant historical force
needs to be traced as far back as 1839 when the Ottoman state offi-
cially recognized the need to undertake the first in a series of politi-
cal and social reforms. These Tanzimat reforms, initiated in 1839
and then continued in 1856 and 1876, all mark the unsuccessful
attempts to incorporate the Ottoman minorities into the empire's struc-
ture on equal terms. It is my thesis that they also give rise to the first
stage of “nascent nationalism” within the Ottoman Empire.

The suppression of the counterrevolution of traditionalist elements
around Sultan Abdul-Hamid by the Action Army on April 25, 1909
signals the beginning of the second stage of “proto-nationalism.” It
is then that the CUP military officials take control of the emerging
political structure in the name of state and nation. These officials
assume formal control of the Ottoman Empire in a coup d’etat in
January 1913, thereby reaching the apex of the proto-nationalist
stage. It is during this pernicious period of proto-nationalism, be-
tween 1913 and 1918, that the atrocities against the Armenians are
committed and justified in the name of the new imagined state and
nation. The ebb of this proto-nationalist phase comes with the es-
cape of the CUP leaders to Germany in November 1918 after the
defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I.

The third stage of “official nationalism” commences, not on May
19, 1919 when Mustafa Kemal initiates the Turkish War of Indepen-
dence, but rather on May 15, 1919 with the Allied-backed Greek
occupation of Smyrna. It is then that many Turkish Muslim groups
begin to mobilize throughout Anatolia with the arms, military per-
sonnel, and financial capital that the leadership of the Committee of
Union and Progress had stored there for a possible future resistance
movement. This third stage reaches its pinnacle not, as the Republi-
can state argues, at the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne or the
establishment of the Republic of Turkey, but rather with the Greek-
Turkish population exchange of 1923-24. That exchange marks the
final mass deportation of surviving Ottoman Armenians from Anatolia
with the goal of achieving the imagined Turkish Muslim nation. This
highpoint of nationalism is sustained until 1983, in spite of repeated
political attempts in 1924 with the Progressive Republican Party and
in 1946 with the Democrat Party to sever the connection between
the military, which assumed the guardianship of Turkish national-
ism, and the transforming nation-state. I believe that the demise of
the third stage of “official nationalism” commences with the estab-
ishment of political organizations that seek support, not from the
Turkish nation-state, but rather from the emergent civil society, as
witnessed in the creation in 1983 of the Motherland Party, the emerg-
ence of the New Democracy movement in 1995, and the formation of
the liberal Islamist party in 2001. These all attempt to withstand the
state- and military-centered Turkish nationalism with differing
degrees of success.

Turkey is currently at a turning point. I contend that the third stage,
that of “official nationalism,” is slowly coming to an end. The first
sparks of the fourth stage, that of “post-nationalism,” are in the mak-
ing by a new generation that has come of age not during the founda-
tion of the Republic but rather during its contestation and critique
by the currents of opposition. This new generation will determine what
becomes of these post-nationalist sparks. If it fails to sever the con-
nection between the Turkish military and the nation-state, “official
nationalism” will probably sustain itself for a time longer. If, how-
ever, it does break this connection and also supports, strives for, and
achieves the integration of the Republic of Turkey into the Euro-
pean Union, this would open the way to the post-nationalist period in Turkey. The Armenian massacres and deaths of 1915 may be fi-
nally, formally, and officially acknowledged and find a place in Turk-
ish historiography if and when contemporary Turkey enters that post-
nationalist stage.

Notes
1. Ferhat Haiism, Yeniden cócuk olurum, var olurum ( sticking from Armenian Language) (Istanbul: Cumhuriyet, 1982, p. 164) [translation mine].
9. See Hüneryin Nazım Paşa, Namek olmasa tabii (History of the Armenian Inci-
cidents) ([Ankara: Prime Minister’s Press, 1994). Erdoğan Cengiz, ed., Ermeni Komiteledirminin sız ve hikayeleri [The Action and Revolutionary Move-
10. See National Congress of Turkey, The Tırene-Armenian Question: The Turkish Point of View (Constantinople: Société Anonyme de Papeterie d’Impression, 1919).
12. See Prime Ministry Directorate General of Press and Information, Documents (Ankara: Prime Ministry Press, 1989); Prime Ministry Directorate of State Ar-
chives, Osmanlı bıcreatedAtların Osmanlı’nın Dosyaları [Armenian in Ottoman Docu-
13. The Turkish term is “bir karşı taraf,”[15]
the Reform Edict of 1856), pp. 183-92. and by Mesar Şonaz, “Ermeni hakları reformlarının uygulanması (1895-1907)” (The Application of the Reforms Concerning the Armenians (1895-1897)), pp. 93-104, demonstrate how unsuccessful the Ottoman state was in carrying out the promised reforms in the eastern provinces.  
23. Refer to note 14 for a full citation of these works.  
28. Türk Tarıım Vakfı, 75 yıldır tebaa-yanı yatırılamadığı [From Subject to Citizen in 75 Years] (Istanbul: History Foundation, 1999).  
32. See, for instance, the works cited in notes 2 through 5 above. Hayqep Mınanr, Alın, nezvurun mch? Azatın Orx, Xiyavun həkkərə, Yervant Sunnələşmiş, Balıqçi səydli: Krıkıç Zorub, Həyat, olduğra xafi.  